

OUR GOD IS SOVEREIGN NUMBERS 22:36 – 23:12

INTRODUCTION

In Numbers 22 and 23, we have the popular story – of Balaam and his donkey. The event took place during the journey of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land. At this point, they had conquered several kings and had come to camp near Moab, poised to take possession of the Promised Land.

Fearing the strength of the Israelites, Balak - the pagan king of Moab sent for Balaam to come to Moab and curse the Israelites to save him and his people from the Israelites who had conquered cities and nations stronger than Moab, v1-6.

The king of Moab recognized God's power in Balaam – to bless and to curse. But God told Balaam that he has chosen Israel as a blessed nation and warned him neither to go to Moab nor to curse Israel, v12. Balaam told the king of Moab about this. The king – Balak, however persisted in his request to Balaam.

Thus, after a second delegation came to Balaam from Balak, and with a better offer proposed by Balak, Balaam sought God's permission to go to Moab. God seems to agree with this plan. Balaam however told them that no matter how much or what they give him; he will speak and do only what the Lord commands, v18, But even with the 'permission' God 'gave' him, it later became apparent that God was displeased thereby, putting his life in great jeopardy.

As Balaam rode on his donkey toward Moab, an angel of the Lord blocked his way three times. God interrupted and thwarted Balaam's plan by stopping his donkey from proceeding. God revealed Himself to a lowly animal to keep Balaam in His plan. Balaam had hoped to change the mind of God or cause a change of circumstances to be able to curse the Israelites and collect the reward that Balak promised him!

BALAK MEETS BALAAM

Balak receives news that Balaam was approaching and he went out to meet him instead of sending a delegate as before. Balak did so personally to Balaam as a way of honoring him. He then urged Balaam to begin the job of cursing Israel as a matter of urgency.

Balaam did not only employ flattery and bribery to persuade Balaam, but an implied threat to Balaam if Balak does not get what he wanted. Balak considered God as being weak-willed thinking that God can change His will by persisting to press Him to curse Israel. But to his disappointment, Balaam refused and said he could only say what God instructs him to say.

Balak therefore moved from one spot to the other, making one sacrifice after another, as though the quality and quantity of his offerings can manipulate God. God cannot be impressed or change His mind with such. For the sake of getting the Israel cursed, Balak – a pagan king was willing to join together with Balaam to offer sacrifices to God and whatever "god" that will get him what he wanted. He didn't know the God of the Israelites. He didn't know that God would not tolerate it if His children (or any other) embrace any other gods or incorporate any of their religious practices instead of worshipping Him alone. Balak therefore did not grasp how offensive his worship (as in the sacrifice he offered) was to the God of Israel. He tried to get God's attention and truly, He got it, but not in the way he wanted.

BALAK'S DISAPPOINTMENT

God came to meet Balaam at the barren height he had gone – and there, God put a message in Balaam’s mouth. When he returned to Balak (who was eagerly awaiting the cursing of Israel), Balaam uttered an oracle of praise and blessings upon the Israelites – instead of cursing them! Balaam even wished he were one of the Israelites too! He even went ahead to wish that his end (death) will be like theirs (the righteous)!

Balak, disappointed and furious, sparked to Balaam. In his anger, he confronted Balaam and asked why he did that to which Balaam responded, “ - must I not take care to speak what the Lord puts in my mouth?” Numbers 23:12.

The story is a powerful celebration of the certainty of Israel’s success. Her triumphant progress to the land of promise could not be halted or even hindered by the most strategic enemies. God’s control is such that the worst they can do turns to a positive good in Israel’s favor.

In spite of Balaam working against God, the curse never took place because. God worked through an unwilling man – Balaam – to do and say only what God permitted.

What are we to learn and apply from this story? Like Paul said in 1Cor 10:11, all these things happened to them as an example, and were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.

APPLICATIONS

1. God can use anyone or thing He chooses to speak and provide guidance to his people. He does not necessarily use the most favored sources or people. In the whole story, God’s guidance came Balaam through the mouth of an animal, a lowly donkey. We also see God using Balaam to bless the Israelite while cursing the Moabites.

The problem we have today is that we have our choices of sources from which to hear God. We listen only to those people who think like we do, who belong to our social circles, or speak same language and act like us. As a result, we miss what God is saying to us, to the Church and nations. We refuse to obey God because He is not using our own favored instruments! Even in the present pandemic, God is speaking. He is calling for repentance and a commitment to Him. The source is not what matters but the message!

Note that God will not only use other people and things. He can use you too, despite your weaknesses (if you are available). If God can use Balaam and a donkey, it means that God can use you to bless others, to make known His mind and will and order people back to Him despite your failings. He used Balaam just as He used Cyrus to release the Israelites from captivity to go back to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple. Are you available for God’s use?

2. God will not break His promises. No matter what Balak offers, there is no way that Balaam or any other prophet can manipulate Him so that He will abandon His people, to whom He has eternally committed Himself in the form of a covenant by the blood of Jesus Christ! As a covenant child, what God has promised you will come to pass. No man, no witches or wizards, no terrorists or pandemic can stop it. Are there promises of God that you are looking forward to their fulfillment in life or family? Cheer up, for all the promises of God in Him *are* Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us, 2Corinthians 1:20.

As the sovereign God that He is, He can use your potential enemy to bless you and work for your progress. Remember that Balaam is not an Israelite and honestly, did not have any real intention to bless Israel. Given the opportunity, he would have loved to work

for Moab and not the Israelites (in which case he is enemy). Yet it was from his mouth that blessings were poured on the Israelites.

3. God is sovereign and is in complete control. He does what He wants, and what He says, He does. No one can thwart His purposes and promises. Those who oppose Him will perish. Those who trust in Him will be saved. The God of Israel is God alone. He is not like the man-made “gods” which can be manipulated to give them what we want. Men must bow down to God and be His servants.

Things may look a bit difficult and even discouraging now, but He will accomplish His perfect plan in your life as history unfolds. In the end He will do it for His own honor and glory. It doesn't mean that as His child, you just sit and watch! No! His perfect plan for orchestrating His glory throughout history has, and will continue, to include us. In his infinite knowledge, He chooses to use us in bringing about His kingdom on earth. Our participation will have eternal value only if we have a relationship with Him. The question therefore is, “Do you have a relationship with God through Christ and are you allowing Him to work in your life?” If you have this living relationship, then His will shall be done in you and through you.

4. We need to be sensitive and open to God's direction and let Him lead us. He is the sovereign God and Lord of the universe. His ways and hand in our lives are best and without error. Every child of God needs to be spiritually sensitive like Balaam's donkey. When you are spiritually sensitive, you will be misunderstood just as the donkey's action was misunderstood. Being that sensitive to God's spirit is perplexing and frustrating to the world. In fact, we may be ridiculed or even beaten, just like Balaam beat his donkey. Yet God's **desire is that we become so sensitive and obedient to His voice and ways so that we don't move until He tells us to, and to move only the distance and direction He directs.** People who are not spiritually sensitive to God don't understand what is going on and will often be used by Satan in an attempt to thwart the plan of God.

5. Being close to God and being used by Him is not enough. In the story, Balaam got closer and closer to the truth. He even speaks some of the most beautiful words of prophecy we could ever hope to read. And yet in spite of all this, we know that Balaam never comes to faith. He, like Balak, perished because of his sin. It is not enough to be close to God. It is not even enough to speak words of truth about God. Balaam spoke the words but never really trusted in the God of Israel. As a result, he perished as one of the great tragedies of the Old Testament. When covetousness made him almost sold out to Balak, and the sovereign Lord overruled the effort, causing Balaam to “bless” instead of “curse,” the hireling prophet suggested another plan. He told the Moabites that if only they could seduce the Israelites (using the Moabites women) into immorality, the Israelites could be corrupted internally and God himself would destroy them! And so, the children of Israel were seduced to commit fornication by the women of Moab. As a consequence, some twenty-four thousand of them were slain (Numbers 25). Balaam himself was finally killed in battle with Israel (Numbers 31:8) – when he took sides with idolaters to fight Israel.

Dear friend, are you at the moment a child of God? Do you consider yourself close to God and in His service in one way or the other? It is good and commendable if you are. But are you growing in your relationship and walk with the Lord or are you just satisfied that God is using you? God does not want you to be close only but to draw closer and

closer into an intimate relationship with Him. He wants you to grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, 2Peter 3:18. And when you are close and being used by God, it gives you the opportunity to do so.

Are you a communicant; Sunday school, Bible study, youth, men's, women's, home cell or prayer cell leader? Have you responded to the words of salvation, which you have read and taught? It does not matter how close you have gotten to salvation if you have not received Jesus Christ by faith, the One of whom Balaam spoke, but in Whom he never trusted. You can do so today! Yes, you can be different and better than Balaam who got so close to God and ended a cast away. To avoid this, you need to discipline yourself so that when you have been close to God and have been used to bless other people, you will not be cast away in the end, 1Cor. 9:27. God is sovereign, but He will pardon our carelessness and failure to grow into maturity in Him.

CONCLUSION

The Almighty God alone is sovereign. He made the universe and is in control of it – including the affairs of men. Man can only do what He permits and nothing more. He knows our heart, just like he knew Balaam's heart. God sometimes allows us to go our own way as if He is following our will. But even in such a case, He always thwarts our plans or corrects us at the right time in line with His will for our lives. When God moves in a manner like this, He uses each situation as a teachable moment. Sometimes God blocks the way as He did to Balaam leaving us with the option of lying or kneeling before Him, seeking His face, and waiting upon Him. God always wants us to assume lowly so that we will be receptive to Him and be able to see His hand at work. In order to do this, we must have a relationship with Him.

Be certain of your relationship with God and your eternal destiny. Just as God alone is sovereign, so Jesus alone is the only way to have a relationship with God. Believe that Jesus is Lord; that He died for our sins; that He laid in the grave for three days; and that God the Father raised Jesus from the dead.

Turn to him today, confessing and repenting from your sins. Invite him into your life and surrender yourself to him wholly. Then learn to live for Christ henceforth.

Prayer.

~ Vicar

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