

Day 170 - MONDAY: June 5th

Numbers 23

Numbers 23:1-30 NKJV

Then Balaam said to Balak, "Build seven altars for me here, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams." And Balak did just as Balaam had spoken, and Balak and Balaam offered a bull and a ram on each altar. Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stand by your burnt offering, and I will go; perhaps the LORD will come to meet me, and whatever He shows me I will tell you." So he went to a desolate height. And God met Balaam, and he said to Him, "I have prepared the seven altars, and I have offered on each altar a bull and a ram." Then the LORD put a word in Balaam's mouth, and said, "Return to Balak, and thus you shall speak." So he returned to him, and there he was, standing by his burnt offering, he and all the princes of Moab. And he took up his oracle and said: "Balak the king of Moab has brought me from Aram, From the mountains of the east. 'Come, curse Jacob for me, And come, denounce Israel!' "How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? And how shall I denounce whom the LORD has not denounced? For from the top of the rocks I see him, And from the hills I behold him; There! A people dwelling alone, Not reckoning itself among the nations. "Who can count the dust of Jacob, Or number one-fourth of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, And let my end be like his!" Then Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, and look, you have blessed them bountifully!" So he answered and said, "Must I not take heed to speak what the LORD has put in my mouth?" Then Balak said to him, "Please come with me to another place from which you may see them; you shall see only the outer part of them, and

shall not see them all; curse them for me from there." So he brought him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar. And he said to Balak, "Stand here by your burnt offering while I meet the LORD over there." Then the LORD met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, and said, "Go back to Balak, and thus you shall speak." So he came to him, and there he was, standing by his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab were with him. And Balak said to him, "What has the LORD spoken?" Then he took up his oracle and said: "Rise up, Balak, and hear! Listen to me, son of Zippor! "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? Behold, I have received a command to bless; He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it. "He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, Nor has He seen wickedness in Israel. The LORD his God is with him, And the shout of a King is among them. God brings them out of Egypt; He has strength like a wild ox. "For there is no sorcery against Jacob, Nor any divination against Israel. It now must be said of Jacob And of Israel, 'Oh, what God has done!' Look, a people rises like a lioness, And lifts itself up like a lion; It shall not lie down until it devours the prey, And drinks the blood of the slain." Then Balak said to Balaam, "Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all!" So Balaam answered and said to Balak, "Did I not tell you, saying, 'All that the LORD speaks, that I must do'?" Then Balak said to Balaam, "Please come, I will take you to another place; perhaps it will please God that you may curse them for me from there." So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, that overlooks the wasteland. Then Balaam said to Balak, "Build for me here seven altars, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams." And Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bull and a ram on every altar.

Daily Deep Dive:

Here is the UCG reading plan for this chapter: “Balak and Balaam look down on the children of Israel from a high vantage point, a "high place" for the worship of Baal (verses 38–41), a location supposedly imbued with spiritual power. At Balaam's request, Balak builds seven new altars in this high place just for Balaam to sacrifice upon. Balaam sacrifices seven bulls and seven rams. False religion often counterfeits elements of true worship but in a superstitious way, its practitioners wrongly believing that God is primarily interested in rituals. Yet God is preparing a people who will one day be His children ruling in His Kingdom. Rituals such as animal sacrifices are not what He is really after—rather, the purpose behind them is what is important. For instance, animal sacrifices teach obedience and look to the need for the sacrifice of Christ. In many places in the Scriptures, we see this plainly stated: "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (Hebrews 10:8; compare Matthew 12:17; Hosea 6:6; Psalm 40:6; Psalm 51:16). There is, of course, no power in rituals or locations themselves—a fact that was lost on the ancient Baal worshipers.

Balaam, supposedly the greatest prophet of the time drawing from the "power" of Baal's high place, is still unable to curse Israel (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 4, chap. 6, sec. 2). Balaam cannot curse the children of Israel because the true God will not allow it. In fact, whenever Balaam prophesies, God has him pronounce blessing after blessing on Israel. Incidentally, seven prophecies of Balaam are recorded in all, each introduced with the words "he took up his oracle and said" (Numbers 23:7, Numbers 23:18; Numbers 24:3, Numbers 23:15, Numbers 23:20–21, Numbers 23:23). The blessings for Israel are so sublime that Balaam ends up uttering a prayer after the first one: "Let *me* die the death of the righteous, and let *my* end be like *his!*" (23:10). Balak is flabbergasted: "You didn't curse them, you blessed them!" (compare verse 11). The petition of Balaam, however, who is still bent on Israel's destruction, will not be granted.

Balak, undeterred, tries again. He takes Balaam to the top of Pisgah in the field of Zophim, as if going to another place will have some influence on God. They go through the seven-altar ritual again, and the result is the same (verses 14–16). This time Balaam explains to Balak that God is not like a human being who changes his mind in a fickle

manner and whose word is not good (verse 19; compare Malachi 3:6). He goes on to proclaim how God viewed His people: "He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, nor has He seen wickedness in Israel" (Numbers 23:21). Yet with all that the children of Israel have done, how can this be true? It may be that God was comparing Israel to the pagan nations around them, since Israel was not yet involved in human sacrifice and the like. But perhaps more likely is the fact that God's forgiveness and His plan are perfect. God prophesies of Israel, "For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jeremiah 31:34). And "God calls those things which be not as though they were" (Romans 4:17, King James Version)—which in this case would mean He sees Israel's redemption as essentially a "done deal" because He is able to bring it to pass.

Balaam is forced to admit that none of their "hocus-pocus" can work against the children of Israel (Numbers 23:23).

And Balak realizes he has gotten in deeper than he wanted:

"If you can't curse them, at least don't bless them," he pleads (compare verse 25). By this, he might even have been saying, "I'll pay you to just keep your mouth shut!"

Nevertheless, he is prepared to simply try a better location."

[END]

Verse 9 – John Gill’s commentary states: “this certainly respects their dwelling in the land of Canaan, where they dwelt a separate people from all others, distinguished by their language, religion, laws, customs, and manner of living, being different both in their clothing, and in their food, from other people; nor had they dealings, nor did they company with those of other nations; see Est_3:8 "or shall dwell safely", or securely, not so much because of the situation of their country, but because of the protection of the Almighty; see Deu_33:28.” It continues: “as belonging to them, shall not be made of any account by them, but be despised and reproached for their religion chiefly; nor reckon themselves of them, nor mix with them; so the Targum of Jerusalem,"they shall not be mixed;"or, as Jonathan,"they shall not be led in the laws of the people;"and though they are now scattered among the people and nations of the world, yet they are not mixed with them, nor reckoned to be a part of them; nor do they reckon themselves to be of them, but are a separate distinct people from them.”

Adam Clarke’s commentary adds: “They shall ever be preserved as a distinct nation. This prophecy has been

literally fulfilled through a period of 3300 years to the present day. This is truly astonishing.”