

00-08-13a

Let's continue our worship this morning by turning in the Word of God to Ezekiel chapter 19. Ezekiel chapter 19. You recall that in our Genesis study we are in the midst of Jacob's oracle, his blessing on his sons, and we're looking specifically at Judah, the fourth son.

We've already seen Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. And if you keep your place there in Ezekiel 19, I want to just quickly review what Jacob says about Judah. He says, Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise.

This is Genesis 49:8. Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies. Your father's children shall bow down before you. So this is a picture of leadership, rulership.

The last time we saw the sons of Jacob bowing down it was in the vision of Joseph. Judah is a lion's whelp from the prey of my son you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion who shall rouse him.

The scepter shall not depart from Judah nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh comes and to him shall be the obedience of the people. Binding his donkey to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washed his garments in wine and his clothes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine and his teeth whiter than milk.

Very vivid imagery in these five verses about Judah. And we find much of that imagery rehearsed in a much later oracle delivered by Ezekiel. This is, you remember the time of the major prophets at the time when the northern kingdom of Israel is attacked and eventually taken into captivity by the Assyrians.

Judah narrowly escapes that invasion but later falls prey to the Babylonians who take them captive and that's the setting for Daniel and his three friends. Here in chapter 19 this is a lamentation for the rulers of Israel. Those rulers were supposed to come from the tribe of Judah.

There was such great promise that the scepter would always be with Judah and yet here God tells Ezekiel, take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel and say, what is your mother? A lioness. She lay down among the lions, among the young lions. She nourished her cubs.

She brought up one of her cubs and he became a young lion. He learned to catch prey and he devoured men. The nations also heard of him he was trapped in their pit and they brought him with chains to the land of Egypt.

Obvious reference to the time of bondage of the children of Israel in Egypt. When she saw that she waited that her hope was lost she took another of her cubs and made him a young lion. He roved among the lions and became a young lion.

He learned to catch prey. He devoured men. He knew their desolate places and laid waste their cities.

The land with its fullness was desolated by the noise of his roaring. Then the nations set against him from the provinces on every side and spread their net over him. He was trapped in their pit.

They put him in the cage with chains and brought him to the king of Babylon. They brought him in nets that his voice should no longer be heard on the mountains of Israel. Your mother was like a vine in your bloodline planted by the waters fruitful and full of branches.

Because of many waters she had strong branches for scepters of rulers. She towered in stature above the thick branches and was seen in her height amidst the dense foliage. But she was plucked up in fury.

She was cast down to the ground and the east wind dried her fruit. Her strong branches were broken and withered. The fire consumed them.

Now she is planted in the wilderness in a dry and thirsty land. Fire has come out from a rod of her branches and devoured her fruit so that she has no strong branch, a scepter for ruling. This is a lamentation and has become a lamentation." We can see strong echoes of Jacob's words.

It's clear that that oracle was in the mind of Ezekiel or certainly in the mind of God when he put these words in Ezekiel's mouth to deliver to Judah, to the southern kingdom who had suffered the same fate as the northern kingdom. Why? Because of disobedience, because of apathy, indifference, becoming settled in their ways, gradually absorbing the ways of the surrounding Canaanites that they were supposed to drive out and remain separate from. I guess I ended that sentence with a preposition, from which they should have remained separate.

Great promise, great potential, a great prediction for Judah in those days of the wilderness. Early years when Judah himself was alive. A great promise of blessing and prosperity and rulership.

The rulership that would have initially gone to Reuben devolves from him and passed Simeon and Levi to Judah, the fourth son of Leah. And it is true that the lion of the tribe of Judah is going to be the ultimate fulfillment of that oracle. But just because that potential is there and just because that prediction is there doesn't mean that it's going to hold true in every case.

In the same way that God made a covenant with Abraham marked by the sign of circumcision, to not participate in the covenant is an option. To become complacent, to become indifferent, to become occupied with other things and miss the opportunity,

miss the significance, is a possibility. And the same is true for us.

We have a Christianity that is taught today in churches that is more of a cultural Christianity than a spiritual Christianity. It is an environment. It is a social circle.

It is a sphere of activities. It is a way of participating in enjoyable pursuits. People can have a complete life that revolves around their church and yet it does not revolve around the promise and the potential of God, which is inner transformation, to be conformed to the image of Christ, to reflect the glory of God, to recover the image of God that was lost in the garden.

Inner transformation, not external occupation. This is why it is so subtle and why it is so hard to identify because none of the things that you look at necessarily fall into the category of sin. What's wrong with great fellowship? What's wrong with suppers and outings and activities at a church? You think of the larger churches that have ministry opportunities where people will gather together and get on a bus and go to a particular place, sometimes even go out of town, go to Mexico or go to South America, in some cases even go abroad, go overseas to Czechoslovakia or Romania or other formerly Iron Curtain countries.

But very often, especially here in the South and in Texas, you find mission trips going down to Mexico and so forth. Nothing wrong with that. It's a wonderful thing.

Go down and build churches. I can't tell you how many people I have known from a wide variety of churches that go and participate in these things. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with those and those can be a good thing and can be a great expression and application of the Word of God and can be the fruit of a productive spiritual life.

However, they can also be a substitute for a healthy, productive spiritual life. It can be instead of rather than because of growth and production. And this is a question that we cannot look at other people and answer for them.

We can only look at ourselves and answer it for ourselves. There is great promise. There is great potential because of the work of Christ on the cross.

There is a tremendous opportunity each and every day to seize and lay hold of the grace of God and be transformed by it and bear eternal fruit. But there is also a very high probability that we will miss it. Most believers miss it and that is a scriptural truth.

Most believers miss the potential that God has placed before them in every age and every dispensation. Think of Jesus' picture of the wide way and the broad gate that leads to destruction and the hordes of people that are on it. He said narrow is the way and straight is the gate that leads to life and few there be that find it.

He was not talking about salvation. He was talking about that eternal life in the sense of

quality, in the sense of abundance, in the sense of productivity and fruitfulness. You can be the vine of Judah and be withered and consumed by fire.

It doesn't mean that you were never saved. It means that your opportunity as a people, as the people of God, the people with the greatest potential, with the most space devoted to them in Jacob's oracle, you can still fail. And that is the reminder for us.

Do we want to be a fruitful vine laden with grapes or do we want to be the dry and blasted vine whose grapes turn to raisins and who is ultimately consumed by fire? That is the fate of the generation in Judah that Ezekiel speaks of here in chapter 19. And he purposely harks back and plays upon that great promise that we are studying this morning in Genesis chapter 49. You'll notice there are allusions to so many of the elements that we have seen, not only the lion and the lioness which was the unconquerable wild beast, the king of beasts even in that day.

I understand today there are virtually no lions in the Palestine area, but they used to be very abundant and now they are very few. It used to also be a very fertile land and only in the last generation has Israel begun to recover the fruitfulness through irrigation and other things to reclaim. The soil is great, but they lacked water.

They lacked cultivation and lacked the means of transport and so forth, but that infrastructure is being rebuilt and Israel is once again becoming a very fertile land for agriculture. But why did this change in chapter 19 of Ezekiel? They once had strong branches, in verse 11, for scepters of rulers towered in stature above the thick branches seen in her height amidst the dense foliage. Speaking of the rest of Israel, Judah was the prominent tribe, Israel was the prominent nation, but she was plucked up in fury, cast down to the ground and the east wind dried her fruit.

You know why the Bible so often talks about the east wind? Where has the east wind come from? If you look at a map of the Middle East there, where does the east wind that blows across Israel come from? It comes across that great desert just past the plain on the far side of the Jordan, the east side of the Jordan. After that you get this huge desert and you have to go for hundreds of miles before you finally get over to the Euphrates and some place where there is water. And so the wind that has traveled across that desert has lost all of its moisture.

It's an extremely dry, hot, arid wind and it, you know, you have these, you know, you have these, you know, foods that all the water is taken out of. What's that called? Dehydrated. It dehydrates everything that comes across, that it comes across.

It sucks the moisture right out of it. So that dry east wind comes and hits the branches and even though they were strong branches and the highest ones, they're broken and withered, the fire consumed them. Now she is planted in the wilderness in a dry and thirsty land.

And in verse 14, fire has come out from a rod of her branches. And this is not only applicable in Ezekiel's day, but also in the future. What was the message of John the Baptist that we studied in Luke and the message of the gospel that was preached by Jesus and by his disciples, the gospel of the kingdom? The Lord has come.

His winnowing fan is in his hand. He is going to thresh. He is going to separate the wheat from the chaff.

He's going to gather the wheat into his barn. He's going to burn the chaff with fire. John said, I'm baptizing you with water, but the one that comes after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Two choices. Do you want the baptism of the Holy Spirit or do you want the baptism of fire? The spirit, pictured in many cases in the word of God as oil, the anointing oil, the water that gushes forth from within that enables us to be fruitful. Do you want to be well-watered or do you want to be dry? That's the choice.

This fire that has come out from a rod of her branches, the fire of judgment, that rod of rulership is a foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus Christ, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the branch, the shoot from the stump of Jesse. He will come and judge his own tribe, his own people, and devour her fruit so that there is no strong branch, there is no scepter for ruling. And that actually was fulfilled in the first generation of Israel after Jesus came where the nation was utterly destroyed and overrun.

The Jews were scattered. There is no longer a throne in Israel. It had not been even before the time of Christ, ever since the Babylonian captivity when they came back to the land.

The Maccabees briefly tried to reestablish some sort of autonomy, but it failed. They were ruled by the Greeks, ruled by the Romans, scattered, no nation for nearly 2,000 years. Only in our lifetime has there been autonomy for Israel in the land and their recovery in the sense that God gives them back the land is yet future.

But this is a lamentation and has become a lamentation. So if there is one thing, if we fall asleep and don't get any of the rest of our study this morning, one thing ought to be clear. Just like Judah, we have incredible potential as believers, but it is up to us whether that potential is fulfilled.

It is not God's failure. It's not a lack of provision. It's not a lack of opportunity.

It's not a lack of grace. If we are unfruitful, if we do not avail ourselves of what God has placed before us in terms of our calling, our resources, our opportunity, we have no one but ourselves to blame. And we will suffer the same fate as Judah did in this generation of Ezekiel 19.

We will be consumed. The fire of judgment will burn the wood, the hay, and the stubble, and we will be left with very, very little. We'll return to that theme a little bit later, but let's return now to Genesis chapter 49.

We want to explore a little more fully. Jacob's oracle concentrates on Judah. Judah is really the high point.

He gets the most coverage, if you will, of any of the sons of Jacob. And also one of the greatest cruxes of interpretation in the whole Old Testament is contained in this oracle. One of the passages that scholars and students of the Word have spent more time trying to figure out, with perhaps less success, is contained here.

We've already talked about the fact that Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise. It's a play on his name. If you go back to his birth, the first reference to blessing from God that Leah makes, her first three sons, she tied her name back to trying to gain her husband's favor.

And when Judah was born, she finally realized that that wasn't the point, and she said, now I will praise the Lord. And so his name, Yehuda, in Hebrew, which you would spell Y-E-H-U-D-A, or A-H perhaps, means praise. And so Jacob plays on his name in verse 8 when he says, you are he whom your brothers shall praise.

Your hand is on the neck of your enemies, your father's children bow down before you. And you would think, well, this means prominence perhaps within the nation, but by the hand on the neck of the enemies, as we saw last time, this also implies rulership and dominance among the peoples, among the nations, as well as within Israel. But then in verse 9, and this is where we resume this morning, we have the image of a lion.

He says, Judah is a lion's whelp. And there are actually two different words for lion that are used here. Both of them are fascinating.

We want to take a look at them. First of all, we have the word Ari, which is A-R-I. And I've mentioned before that there are two A's in Hebrew.

Well, this is the good A, the Aleph, which is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and then Resh, which is R, and then Y, or Yod. So A-R-Y, Ari, in some formations it's Ari-Yeh, which has an E-H on the end of it. Ari-Yeh is one of the words for lion.

The second word that we have here is Labih, which is L-A-B-I-Y-E-H. Both of these words often take a feminine case and are bound with feminine verbs. The reason for this is that the lioness is the one that was most frequently seen roaming about.

It's the lionesses of a pride that go out and hunt the prey. The old daddy lion sits back and rests under the shade of the tree. The lionesses go out and do the hunting and capturing in most cases.

They are also the ones who would be encountered if you happened to get near their young unwittingly. And in their protective maternal instincts, they would attack. They go out and attack and provide food for their cubs.

So they are the active and the more visible and prominent members of that particular animal family. But the two words are used here and the image is that from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He has conquered.

He's already talked about his hand on the neck of the enemies. So now he's gone up on the prey, has eaten his fill, so to speak. He bows down, he lies down as a lion.

And as a lion, who will rouse him? This lying down, when he bows down, this is a word that is also found over in Numbers 24 in connection with a lion. In fact, you might keep your place here and turn over to Numbers 24. It's one of the very important fascinating passages in the account of the wilderness wanderings because this is Balaam's oracle.

Remember, Balak wants to hire Balaam to come and curse Israel and you have the donkey talking and so forth. In chapter 24, verse 3, he takes up his oracle and says, this is the utterance of Balaam, the son of Beor, the utterance of the man whose eyes are open, the utterance of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, who falls down with his eyes wide open. By the way, this is a little bit aside, but one of the questions about Balaam is a lot of times they say, well, he was some sort of a pagan guy and he was kind of like the witch of Endor where he was completely unaware of God or the things of God.

He was a rank unbeliever, but God used him in this case, sort of came upon him and prophesied through him, but he wasn't saved, he wasn't aware of the true God until this occasion and of course he later on dies kind of a bad death. But let's turn back to find out where Balaam comes from in chapter 22 of Numbers. When the children of Israel moved and camped in the plains of Moab on the side of the Jordan across from Jericho, you know where Moab is.

If you think about the holy land there, Palestine or Israel, you've got the Sea of Galilee up in the north, you've got the River Jordan heading due south, and then you have the Dead Sea. Well, to the east of the Dead Sea is the land of Moab. Just to the north of that is the land of Ammon.

You remember where Moab and Ammon came from. That was Lot when he departed from Sodom and everything was destroyed and his daughters got all upset that there weren't any eligible men anymore and so they got their father drunk with wine and they had relations with him and each of them got pregnant and two sons were born, Moab and Ammon. So the Moabites and the Ammonites are cousins to the Israelites because Lot was Abram's nephew.

So they're a related people. They're from the same general line through Abraham's forebears. But they're on the other side of the Jordan and so this is where they've come now, up from Egypt.

Now Balak the son of Zippor saw that all Israel, what they had done to the Amorites, and they've just defeated Sihon the king of the Amorites and they've just defeated Og king of Bashan. And so they say, wow, we're going to be rolled up under this steamroller of these people. And so Moab was exceedingly afraid of the people because there were so many and Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel.

This was a promise of God. You remember we looked at this last week that when the lion, once he's eaten his prey and he sits down, who is going to go rouse him? And we looked over in Exodus 23-27 and Exodus 15-16 and Deuteronomy 2-25 where God promised that he would put the fear and dread of them on the people that were in their path. Well, that's exactly what happens to Moab.

But you've got to give Balak some credit. Rather than just quaking in his boots and trying to get out of the way, he tries to take some kind of action. He says, well, I've seen what happened to Og and Sihon when they tried to oppose Israel militarily, so I'm going to try a different strategy.

I'll put a hex on them. I'll spook them. I'll get a voodoo thing going on them and that'll wreck them.

Maybe some disease or some plague will strike if I get them cursed. So he says, how can I go about this? Well, there's a man named Balaam that has a reputation. Who he blesses, they're blessed, and who he curses, they're cursed.

So Moab, in verse 4, they go to the elders of Midian. Midian is down south of Moab. Remember, Ammon is on the north, Midian is on the south.

So Moab says to Midian, now this company will lick up everything around us as an ox licks up the grass of the field. Balak, the son of Zippor, was king of the Moabites at that time, so he sends messengers to Balaam, the son of Baor, at Pathor, which is near the river in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying, look, a people has come from Egypt. See, they cover the face of the earth and are settling next to me.

Therefore, please come at once, curse this people for me, for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed. So the elders of Moab depart, and this is what they're going to do.

They're going to go ask Balaam. But who is Balaam and where does he come from? Well, there's been a lot of head scratching over this, but we have the answer right there in verse 5. Now, if you look at your text note in the New King James, it says that Pathor,

where Balaam lives, is near the river, and the note says that is the Euphrates. Well, it's not the Euphrates, and with all apologies to the New King James guys, this is one of the cases where they just got it wrong.

If you look on a map of the ancient world in the back of your Bible, you get one of those big maps that shows you the whole big panorama, the Mediterranean Sea, the Arabian Gulf, and all of that. The Euphrates is hundreds of miles. It's over on the other side of the desert.

The east wind hasn't come across the desert when it hits the Euphrates. It's a way on over there. And you know the story when Balaam comes over on his donkey, and he's not going to ride his donkey all the way up the Euphrates Valley and come through the way Abram did and back down into the land, and he's not going to assail to cross the desert on his donkey.

So, when it says the river, what is the river? Well, go back to Numbers 21 and verse 10. The children of Israel moved on and camped in Oboth, and they journeyed from Oboth and camped at Ej Abarim in the wilderness, which is east of Moab, toward the sunrise. From there they moved and camped in the valley of Zered, and from there they moved and camped on the other side of the Arnon, which is in the wilderness that extends from the border of the Amorites.

For the Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites. This is where Israel is when Balak sees them. They're right on his border, and his border is the river Arnon.

That's what separates the Amorites, who are further up north, from Moab. That's his northern border. So, Israel has come up and hooked around him and is heading over toward the land.

So, he sees them. There's all of this modern scholarship that says, oh, the Israelites, it wasn't really a big exodus. There wasn't really two million of them that came out of Egypt.

It was a trickle, it was a gradual migration, and it was mythologized into this great exodus. This is a real common scholarly view. Well, among other things, they're flying in the face of this evidence, because when Balak looks at them, he says, they're covering the earth.

Did you see this past week the locust plague that they're having over in Russia? They showed film of it, and they just carpet the ground. A guy was walking through the field, and they were coming up like leaves blowing in the wind. You couldn't see the ground for the locusts.

We've talked about that before in connection with Amos and with the little house in the

prairie, back when Laura went through all that. Well, this is what Balak sees when he looks out over the Israelites. They're like locusts.

They carpet the ground. There's so many of them. So, this idea of a little trickle of a few raggedy Israelites into the land is ridiculous.

So, here they are. They're covering the land, and the river that's in view here is the Arnon River. Now, the Arnon is within easy reach.

It's within a day's journey or so of where Balak is. So, that's our first clue. Pathor, wherever it was, is on the river Arnon, not the river Euphrates.

And then it says, in the land of the sons of his people. Well, you already know the Hebrew word for people, because if you remember, and I'm sure you do, back when we studied Lot and his two daughters, and we had Moav, when the daughter named her son Moav. Moav is father, and the name in front of it, the M in front, means from, from my father.

My son is from my father, Moav. And Ammon means my people. This son is my people.

He's certainly my people, but because I've had him with my father. And so, both of these names are a reference to their origin as the product of incest. Well, Am, A-M, means people in Hebrew.

So, when it says, in the land of the sons of his people, this is going to be B'nai, the sons of, and then it's Am with a suffix, and the suffix is O, because when you want to say it's his, when you say it's my, you put a Y on the end. Over in Isaiah, it says, Lo Ami, not my people. Lo means no, or not, and Am is people, and E is mine.

Not my people, it's the name of one of the, it's Lo-Ruh-Hamah, and Lo-Ami, and all that. Well, here, it's Amo, so it's B'nai Amo. Well, Amon is the same thing with a, with a noon.

If you've ever seen a final noon in Hebrew, it's a, if you could imagine a T with the right half of the upper cross piece broken off, so that it would look kind of like a seven, well, a noon is normally a, kind of like a closed bracket, a right bracket, where you have the, the top part and then a vertical thing, and then going back the original way. It'd be like taking a staple and pointing the ends to the left, laying it on a paper. That's a noon, except when it's at the end of a word, and a noon, the letter N, at the end of a word, you have the top part pointing to the left, you have the vertical stroke going down, but then you just continue the stroke on down below the line, and that's how you write a final noon.

Well, the, the O, or the Wow, or Vav, that's on the end of this word, is the very same thing, only shorter. It's, it's like a shepherd's crook, with the end, with the top crook pointing to the left, and it's a, a little hook at the top, and then a vertical stroke. So you

have vertical stroke, vertical stroke, they look just alike.

It's very easy in Hebrew to drop a letter, especially when they repeat like this, and when you've got one right next to another, you can have a wrinkle in the page and miss one of these little vertical strokes. So my suggestion to you is that this is B'nai Amon, and this, these are the sons of Ammon, and this is where Pthor is, this is where Balaam is from. Is he an Israelite? No.

But does he know the God of Israel? Does he know the God that Lot knew? How many generations are we down from Lot? Not that many. We're, we're looking at Abraham's grandson, Jacob, as he speaks, and then you come on down the few hundred years of the, the bondage in Israel, and then here's Israel coming back up out of the land. Moab and Ammon have become peoples in the land, but is there the, the likelihood that some of those people were aware of the God of Abraham? Absolutely.

Could there be a remnant over there? Certainly. And so here's an Ammonite, in my view, Balaam, who is a prophet of God. He's a genuine prophet of God.

He has problems. He's not perfect, and he's not like Melchizedek in any way, but he does know the true God. So that's a little background on Balaam, just free, no extra charge.

But here he is hired. He is a hireling, and this, one of the reasons I bring this up is if you ever find yourself over in Revelation and you get to the letters to the seven churches and you get to the place where it talks about airing the error of Balaam and going the way of Cain and the doctrine of Balaam, the doctrine of Balaam is over in, in those letters. And I think in Jude or 2 Peter or someplace you have the error of Balaam and going the way of Cain.

What is this a reference to? What was Balaam's big problem? Well, he was merchandising the Word of God. He had hired himself out. He'd compromised and had his eyes on earthly things even though he was the possessor of the oracles of God, an insight into God's plans and purposes.

He got his eyes on, hey, I can parley this. I can turn this into a little money-making operation. And God had to rebuke him with the donkey incident to get his mind straight so that he could deliver an accurate oracle over Israel.

And that's why you have the donkey thing. Oh, by the way, one other thing. Well, two other things actually.

You know the whole story of Balaam. How did Israel come into possession of this? How did Moses get it to put it into numbers? Because the Israelites are all down in the valley. This is happening external to them.

So I ask myself this question. Well, here you've got the details of Balaam's oracle. You've

got the words that he spoke and the interchange between him and Balak.

How did anybody in Israel ever get a hold of this? How did Moses find it out to set it down? Well, first of all, I thought, well, you've got Balaam there and perhaps Balaam, after his operation here, had some contact with Israel and told them. But you don't have that because when you go to the end of the story, after the cursing and so forth, after his fourth prophecy, it tells you in 2425 of Numbers, Balaam rose and departed and returned to his place and Balak went his way. So Balaam didn't go directly down to Israel.

These would have been traditions. This is something that Balaam would probably have written down in the land of Ammon and this came into possession of the Israelites in some other way, if it was Balaam that was the only source of this. But something I had not realized until I was reviewing for this class is back in chapter 22, because Balaam had the whole thing where they come and God says, don't go, and then finally God gives him permission to go.

And in verse 20 of Numbers 22, God came to Balaam at night and said to him, if these men come to call you, rise and go with them, but only the word which I speak to you, that shall you do. Apparently this wasn't Balaam's normal practice. He would have a grain of truth, but he would embellish and add to it and really give them their money's worth.

And God says, look, if you're going to go, you be sure and only deliver the word I give you. Don't be adding a bunch of your own embellishments. So verse 21, Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab.

We know what's coming up, the angel with the sword and all that. But look at verse 22, God's anger was aroused because he went and the angel of the Lord took his stand in the way as an adversary against him. This used to always be a puzzle to me.

Well, God just gave him permission to go and now God's angry because he did go. Well, you remember the principle throughout the word of God, it's not just what you do, it's why you do it. And you get the idea that as soon as Balaam got permission from God, he's back to his scheming ways.

He's figuring, well, how much can I milk them for? What can I say that's going to really run the price up here? And his motivation is all wrong. He's not going because he's trying to be faithful to God's word and deliver exactly what God said. He's, God gave him permission to go and he's going.

Why would God be angry? Not because he's going, but why he's going. And so God is going to give him a little corrective medicine here to purify his motives and he's going to do it through fear and through threatening his life to be sure that he sticks to the word of the oracle and doesn't start adding a bunch of Balaamisms. But notice the end of this

verse.

The angel of the Lord took a stand in the way as an adversary against him and he was riding on his donkey and his two servants were with him. Now when I got this on the flannel graph in child evangelism class, all I saw was Balaam and the donkey. But there are two servants with him.

He's got some companions, some witnesses. These two servants are with him everywhere he goes. They're with him when he stands on the mountain and blesses Israel.

So you've got two additional individuals who may have eventually found their way to Israel and communicated this information because this is not going to have been revealed by direct divine revelation to Moses. It came through some sort of a path, either from Balaam or from these two servants. But again, I just thought I would point that out.

I had never really stopped to realize that there were two, in addition to all of the Moabites that may have been on hand, the Moabite rulers and so on. Certainly Balak isn't going to trouble himself to tell Israel about his failure to curse them. But these two servants are also individuals who may have eventually been the means of this coming over.

Let's go to chapter 24 of Numbers. With that background, we know that this is coming from God. This is not something Balaam invented.

He says in verse 21, in the midst of this oracle, he blesses them the first time back earlier in the chapter. And he says the same thing that we've already pointed out. In verse 7, Balak the king of Moab has brought me from Aram, from the mountains of the east.

Come and curse Jacob for me and come denounce Israel. Once again, you know where Aram is. The Aramaic language comes from Aram.

This is Syria, Syria its southwest border is going to be right down there at the land of the Amorites where the Arnon is. So he says, he has brought me from Aram, from the mountains of the east to come curse Jacob and denounce Israel. How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? 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 are 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. And of course there's a great irony there because Balaam's end does wind up being like Israel because Israel goes out under discipline and so does Balaam.

But once again, you can't even number them. You can't even number a quarter of them, they're so numerous. They just carpet the earth.

That's the first blessing. Balak is all upset. So he gets them to come back up and try this again.

In verse 18, 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. Why? Verse 21.

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. Both of our words for lion are here. The ari or aria and the labia are both here.

He rises like a lioness, lifts himself up like a lion. It shall not lie down until it devours the prey and drinks the blood of the slain. So this is the lion when he goes up on the prey and in victory he is going to slaughter them and drink their blood.

So this is your first reference in Balaam's oracle. There is a second one in Numbers 24 because when he delivers his third prophecy and you get down here he says, the utterance of Balaam, this is 24.3 of Numbers, the utterance of Balaam, the son of Beor, the utterance of the man whose eyes are opened, the utterance of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, who falls down with eyes wide open. Very graphic picture of the prophetic trance.

How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your dwellings, O Israel, like valleys that stretch out like gardens by the riverside, aloes planted by the Lord, cedars beside the waters. Remember the strong branches? He shall pour water from his buckets and his seed shall be in many waters. His king shall be higher than Agag and his kingdom shall be exalted.

God brings him out of Egypt. He has strength like a wild ox. He shall consume the nations, his enemies.

He shall break their bones and pierce them with his arrows. And look at verse 9. He bows down, he lies down as a lion and as a lion who shall rouse him. Word for word out of Jacob's oracle.

Of course this makes Balak angry and you go on from there. But once again you have

the imagery of the strong branches of rulership, the shout of a king, the lion on the attack, the lion consuming the prey, crouching down, bowing down like a lion. Who will rouse him? And this is a mixed metaphor, not in the classic sense that we think of mixing a metaphor, but mixed in the sense that the symbolism, the meaning of it can be taken positively or negatively.

In the one sense he is the raging lion who is undefeatable, who rises up and seizes the prey and gains victory. We sang this morning the war cry song about victory and we sang the ode to joy about the triumph song. And there is a great victory and exploitation of victory, but pride goeth before a fall and a haughty spirit before destruction.

If you rest on your laurels, if you constantly sing the praise of your old victories, it puts me in mind of the song that they used to sing in Israel about Saul. Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands and Saul's victories were in the past. But the point is we can't rest on our laurels.

We can't even rest on the laurels of Christ. We've got to be moving forward and seize and lay hold of the fruits of that victory and not let them slip away. The lion that crouches down and lies down after it is sated is passive and is no longer winning victories.

This is the danger as well as the potential for the lion of the tribe of Judah to lie down and no one can rouse him. Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back we'll continue our analysis of this oracle.