

Rev 25-10-22b

We're going to pick up our study now and pick up the pace of our study a little bit. I think we understand that there is a lot going on here. These are the last formal words that the Lord Jesus addresses to his body, the church, directly and emphatically.

And there's not a wasted word, a wasted image, a wasted moment in any of these messages. And it is so significant that he begins by tying what is currently happening to past failures in Israel long ago. And among all of the many things that are going on in Revelation, Jesus is harking back to Israel and lessons learned from them because what is going to unfold, especially starting in chapter six and following, is also about Israel.

12,000 from each tribe, the time of Jacob's trouble. It is the woman who gives birth to the child and is attacked by the dragon who is the devil. And this is past Israel in the letters, looking at Balaam and Jezebel.

It is future Israel looking at the bulk of this book that is coming up. But in every case, the church is enjoined and encouraged to learn from failures in Israel. And so he begins with Balaam.

Turn with me back to numbers. Let's just be sure we understand what the doctrine of Balaam is. This is Numbers chapter 22 through 24.

Numbers 22 through 24, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, the fourth out of the five of the Pentateuch. And you remember the outline of this in 22.5, you have the presence of the people of God, the descendants of Jacob, the delivered people of Israel. And so in chapter 22, you have Balak, who is the king of the Moabites.

And he sees the children of Israel camped in the plains of Moab on the side of the Jordan across from Jericho. Haven't yet crossed. This is going to happen sometimes hence.

Balak, the son of Zippor, saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. You look, they defeat King Sihon and King Og in the previous chapter. So Balak sees this, the Moabites were exceedingly afraid of the people because they were many.

Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel. So Moab said to the elders of 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 sent messengers to Balaam, the son of Beor at Pithor, which is near the river in the land of the sons of his people. The river, of course, capital R, that's the Euphrates. And it's 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 the people for me. They are too mighty for me.

Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. I know that he whom you bless is blessed and he whom you curse is cursed. The elders of Moab, the elders of Midian departed with the diviner's fee in their hand.

They came to Balaam, spoke to him the words of Balak. He said, lodge here tonight. I will bring back word to you as the Lord speaks to me.

Pay close attention to what happens next. Pay close attention to what happens next. Lodge here tonight, you elders of Moab and Midian.

I will bring back word to you as the Lord speaks to me. So the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam. Then God came to Balaam and said, who are these men with you? How often does God lead with a question? Does God know who the people are? Of course, this question is not for God's benefit.

It is for Balaam's. Balaam says to God, Balak, the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me saying, look, a people has come out of Egypt and they cover the face of the earth. Come now, curse them for me.

Perhaps I shall be able to overpower them and drive them out. God said to Balaam, you shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people for they are blessed.

This is God's first answer. How many times does God have to say a thing for it to be true? There are people who argue with some of the abominations that are described in the Bible. Some of the rejected lifestyles that you find old Testament and new that are prohibited and are designated as what God turns people over to because they are in the grip of evil and they're making incredibly bad choices.

These are not good things. They're not tolerable. They're not something you can explain away and pretend like it was only isolated cases.

When God says a thing, he only has to say it once for it to be true and for it to be binding, for it to be a command or for it to be a blessing and a promise. John 3.16, whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. If that was the only verse, if you only had the John or you only had chapter three of the gospel of John, would that be sufficient? Would John 3.16 be enough to place your faith in for salvation? It ought to be.

How many times does God have to say a thing for it to be true? Balaam says these guys have come. They want me to curse Israel. God says don't go.

Don't go. I am blessing Israel, not cursing them. This should be the end of the chapter.

Balaam told the princes of Midian and Moab, sorry, God says no, go away. End of story. But Balaam rises in verse 13 and said to the princes of Balak, go back to your land for the Lord has refused to give me permission to go with you.

So the princes of Moab rose and went to Balak and said, Balaam refuses to come with us. We're still good so far. Balaam has absolutely expressed the will of God here.

So Balak sent more princes, more numerous and more honorable than they. This is one of the identifiable named fallacies that something is a good idea or it is true if more people say it. If you can appeal to higher authorities, this is the authority fallacy.

Well, so-and-so is a well- named your great scholar or your scientist. He says this, it must be so. So Balak ups the ante by sending more credentialed messengers.

Notice it doesn't say he upped the diviner's fee. He sent more honorable messengers. You should listen to these guys.

You've heard their names. They're in the news. They came to Balaam and said, thus says Balak, please let nothing hinder you from coming to me.

I will certainly honor you greatly. I will do whatever you say to me. Therefore, please come curse this people for me.

Now you get the promise of more reward, better messengers, bigger reward. So Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord, my God to do less or more. Now, therefore, please, you also stay here tonight that I may know what more the Lord will say to me.

Why is he asking a second time? Did God stutter the first time? Did God not make himself clear? Let me go back and see if I can torture the text until it will say anything I want it to say. This is what they used to say about data in science. If you torture the data long enough, it'll tell you whatever you want to hear.

And so Balaam says, well, I'll go ask God again and see if he has changed. God is not a man that he should change his mind. Balaam thinks, well, bigger messengers, bigger reward.

Maybe God will change his mind and let me go. Maybe he just wanted me to be richer and be in good with more famous people. Stay here tonight.

Let me see what God says. So verse 20, God came to Balaam at night and said to him, if the men come to call you, rise and go with them. But only the word which I speak to you that you shall do.

Now, what is the word that God just now spoke to Balaam? Pay attention. You can observe a lot here. What did God just say? Do you see an if anywhere in this context? If the men come to call you, rise, go with them.

But only the word which I speak to you that you shall do. Not that you shall repeat or that you shall say. The word that I speak to you, that's what you do.

What is the word that God just spoke? If they come and call you, go. This is like a sign. If they don't come and call you, don't go.

If these men come and call you, go. So what happens in the next verse, 21? So Balaam rose in the morning, settled his donkey and went with the princess of Moab. Does it say that the princess came and called him? It does not.

He rose first thing in the morning, saddled up his donkey. He did not do only what the word of God said. Does it say, and behold, Balaam sat and waited until a prince came at his door and called him.

He just goes. He did not fulfill the condition. There's a reason this is in the scripture.

If they call you, go, but only do what I have said. He doesn't do what God said. He doesn't wait for them to call.

He's out there with his donkey and his traveling provisions says, well, when are we leaving? So why is God's anger kindled in verse 22? People have been confused. God says, okay, you can go, but only speak my word. And then God's angry when he does go.

God is angry because God basically said, you're not allowed to go on the first night. And the second night you're not allowed to go unless they call you. But he went because his greed got the better of him.

And he reinterpreted God's word and he ignored a crucial detail. God emphasized it. Only do what I say.

What did I say? You can't go unless they call you. Doesn't say they called him. He just went.

And this is sort of Balaam's version of it. Well, I got up and went. Doesn't say I didn't wait for them to call me.

This is why in verse 22, God's anger is aroused because he went. The condition was not met. He disobeyed.

It's a fine detail. How many times does God have to say a thing? Now, Balaam, I'm not kidding here. If they don't call you, don't go.

If they call you, you can go. But if they don't call you, don't go. God says it once and that ought to be enough.

Pay attention to detail. This is a lesson for us. One of the errors of Balaam is he doesn't listen.

He lets his desire for self-gratification reinterpret God's word for him. He takes a part that says, go with them and ignores the condition if they call you. This is why I didn't understand.

How long have I been studying the word of God? Until this week, I didn't understand why God

was mad at Balaam. Now I can't unsee it. Of course God's mad because those guys would have never called him and he would not have gone.

And God does not want Balaam to go, even though God's going to work it together for good and there are going to be these oracles, these prophetic oracles. More on that in a minute. But Balaam was not supposed to go at all.

If Balaam had been obedient and not gone, these oracles would have been delivered another way. Moses would have spoken them. Joshua would have delivered them.

They come from Balaam. The problem is Balaam is also going to teach Israel, he's going to teach Balak how to get Israel to stumble and to sin. Balaam's presence in Moab is going to give the enemy the key to attack and cause Israel, they can't get cursed.

God says, no curses on Israel. So Balaam says, you know, I can't curse them for you. What I can do for you is tell you how to get them to curse themselves, to disqualify themselves from God's protection and blessing.

I can tell you how to get them in trouble with the God who will not allow me to curse them. And as the story unfolds, you have these oracles and you can study this story in detail, but you see the key here. Balaam is not supposed to go at all.

He goes anyway. God stops him with the angel and for the second time emphasizes, I will let you continue, but you better not say a single word that I don't give to you to say. And now Balaam is spooked enough that he is not going to go against God's word.

When you get to chapter 23 and he begins with these oracles, it says in verse 7 of 23, Balaam takes up his oracle and says, and he gives that first oracle, don't have time to go through them. So there's seven altars, seven bulls, seven rams, seven, seven, seven, right? Seven altars, seven bulls, seven rams. You see that in verse four, seven altars, a bull and a ram.

Second prophecy begins in verse 13. Third prophecy begins in verse 27. Each time seven altars, seven bulls, seven rams.

Notice that after three of Balaam's oracles, the fourth one changes. His procedure changes and he doesn't build seven altars. He doesn't put seven bulls and seven rams.

This evidently is some part of the enchantment or sorcery that he was engaging in for the first three, but starting with number four, it's different. Just make a mental note. Number four is different.

So he takes up his oracle. Most people say Balaam has four oracles, but if you count carefully, you see, he takes up an oracle again in verse 15. Then in verse 20, he took up his oracle and said, when he's looking at Amalek, what number is this? This is going to be number five, right? With Amalek in verse 20.

Then he looks on the Kenites and takes up his oracle in verse 21. That's number six. Then in verse 23, he takes up his oracle and says, who shall live when God does this? Ships shall come from Cyprus, afflict the coasts and Eber and Amalek until he perishes.

So there are a total of seven oracles here, if you count the number of times he takes up his oracle. Then in verse 25, at the end of chapter 24, it says, Balaam rose and departed and returned to his place. Balak also went his way.

It doesn't say anything about Balaam teaching Balak to cause the children of Israel to stumble. But in the next chapter, Israel remained in Shittim or Acacia grove in your new King James. And the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab.

We know from subsequent passages that this strategy, it's so interesting to me. It isn't detailed here in numbers 22 through 24, but elsewhere in scripture, it is. Numbers 31, verse 8, you find out that the Israelites are going to kill Balaam.

So they warred against the Midianites in verse 7 of numbers 31. Just as the Lord commanded Moses, they killed all the males. They killed the kings of Midian with the rest of those who were killed, gives their names.

Balaam, the son of Beor, they also killed with the sword. Why would they kill the prophet of God that pronounced blessing upon them? Flip, slip down to verse 16. Moses said to the people, have you kept all the women alive? These women caused the children of Israel through the council of Balaam to trespass against the Lord in the incident of Beor.

And there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord. That's referring back to chapter 25. Moses says that all happened on the council of Balaam.

You can find this reinforced. You can just write it down. We won't turn there.

Deuteronomy chapter 23, verses 4 and 5. Moses speaking to Israel says the Ammonites and the Moabites are not allowed in the assembly. Remember Ruth is from Moab and this injunction comes to the four. Moses says the Ammonites and the Moabites are not allowed into the assembly because they hired Balaam, the son of Beor to curse them.

Joshua chapter 13, verse 22. Balaam, the soothsayer, Balaam, the diviner was slain among those killed by Israel during the conquest. Joshua 24, verses 9 and 10.

Joshua reminds Israel how Balak hired Balaam to curse but God refused and blessing came instead. This is reviewed again in Nehemiah chapter 13, verse 2. As they are reading the law, they recall that Moab hired Balaam to curse, but God turned the curse to blessing. And they then use this incident as justification for excluding foreigners that had opposed Israel.

You remember how that turns out in Nehemiah. Micah chapter 6, verse 5. This is Micah and his prophecy. Micah 6, verse 5. God calls Israel to remember Balak and Balaam and what happened

from Shittim to Gilgal, from the Acacia Grove to Gilgal.

So if you count up the total number of mentions of Balaam, starting with numbers 22, 24, chapters 22 through 24, the main narrative, then numbers 31, verses 8 and 16, Balaam's death, then Deuteronomy 23, 4 and 5, Joshua 13, 22, Joshua 24, 9 through 10, Nehemiah 13, 2 and Micah 6, 5. Interestingly, you wind up with seven major mentions of Balaam in the Old Testament. He's going to be mentioned three times in the New Testament. Second Peter 2, 15 through 16, talking about those who have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam, son of Baor, who loved the wages of wickedness, but he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey, a beast without speech, who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's insanity, the prophet's madness.

Second Peter 2, 15 and 16. Jude, it's only got one chapter, Jude 1, 11. Woe to these who take the way of Cain, who rush for profit into Balaam's error and have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.

And then finally, our passage, Revelation 2, verse 14, the doctrine, the teaching of Balaam taught Balak to entice the Israelites. Seven Old Testament major references, three in the New Testament. If you want to see significance in numbers, it's at least a helpful memory aid.

But what is this teaching? What is the way of Balaam? This is personal profit, personal gratification, causing one to affirm what is true, God's blessings on Israel. He can do nothing but speak that truth, but he also gives Balak the way to undermine God's people and to get them to shoot themselves in the foot through eating what is sacrifice to idols and fornication. That is the specific way that the women of Moab get Israel to fall.

So back just quickly to Numbers 25, this is what we have to watch for. What is the doctrine of Balaam? Israel remains at the Acacia Grove. People began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab.

They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. They make friends with these women and end up compromising the worship of the one true God. How long now have they had the Ten Commandments? Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, and so on. And yet the people are seduced by these Moabite women. Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel.

And the punishment for this is pretty severe. Take all the leaders of the people, hang the offenders before the Lord out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel. Moses said to the judges of Israel, every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor.

By fornicating and adulterating with these women, they have been joined to that woman's God.

They have been joined to Baal by joining with these women who are Baal worshipers. So then you have the Midianite woman and Phineas, the son of Eleazar, running him through with the javelin, the man and the woman, because he does it so brazenly.

He's unabashed, he's unashamed. He thinks it's perfectly okay to flout and flaunt God's guidance about sexual purity in Israel. And Phineas runs them through.

One javelin thrust kills them both, and God commends him. The Lord spoke to Moses in verse 11, Phineas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned back my wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with my zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in my zeal. Therefore, I give to him my covenant of peace.

It shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God and made atonement for the children of Israel. And he gives the name of the Israelite man who was killed, Zimri, the son of a leader of a father's house among the Simeonites. This guy is influential.

If he does this and gets away with it, there's an entire segment of the tribe of Simeon, and that tribe can infect the rest of Israel with this sort of bending of God's rules and disregard of God's standards. And Cosby, the daughter of Zur, was the woman. He was a head of the people of a father's house in Midian.

These aren't just two random hapless individuals. These are from leadership houses. You remember how unions of men and women from different nations, different countries, different peoples created a bond, and that bond is immediately broken.

Israel is not going to be joined to the Midianites in this way. Harass the Midianites and attack them. They harassed you with their schemes by which they seduced you in the matter of Peor and in the matter of Cosby, the daughter of a leader of Midian, their sister, who was killed in the day of the plague because of Peor.

So it came to pass after the plague, the Lord spoke to Moses and Eliezer, the son of Aaron, the priest, saying, take a census and so on. But there is a plague in Israel because this teaching, this strategy of Balaam is followed, and he gets them to collapse and corrupt within rather than being attacked from outside. Balaam never mounts an army attack on the hosts of Israel.

He gets them to be plagued by the Lord himself, and executions take place from within. So the way of Balaam, the error of Balaam, seduction, self-gratification, this is the attack that is mounted against believers who are unassailable in their doctrine but can be corrupted and perverted in their practice and what they tolerate. You tolerate that woman Jezebel.

You have among you those who teach and follow the way of Balaam, who introduced sin in the camp. God has promised victory to Joshua and the people. You think about Achan, who brings sin into the camp and buries the plunder in his tent, and he and his family cause Israel to be defeated.

The entire nation is defeated because of Achan's sin. A-C-H-A-N. If you're not familiar with that story, you can look it up.

It's a similar problem. Sin in the camp obviates, negates, puts on hold God's promise of victory and conquest and enjoyment of blessing and peace in the land. There is conquest necessary, and if you tolerate sin in the camp, God's blessing is removed.

This is the transition point, by the way. If you have heard some of the earlier discussion we've had about conditional versus unconditional promises, many people go back to the Abrahamic covenant and the other covenants and say, well, these are unconditional covenants. Sometimes in their early expression, you can say, well, God doesn't say, Abraham, if you're faithful, all nations of the earth will be blessed.

You find out the conditional nature as you move through the Old Testament. All nations are not going to be blessed when Israel tolerates and practices sin and fornication and idolatry. The promise goes into suspension, and it is reserved only for those individuals who don't bow the knee to Baal and so on.

You find out that even though these promises sound unconditional in their early expression, their fulfillment is conditioned on faithfulness and obedience, and you cannot be an overcomer. So we turn the corner here real quickly, because what is happening in the church today? Progressive Christianity takes these truths of scripture and questions them. Remember in 1 John, where you have the idea of what is the victory that overcomes the world? Turn for a closing passage back to 1 John.

Look at 1 John chapter 4. Chapters 4 and 5 are replete with this. 1 John 4.2, by this you know the spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.

Not that Jesus, a wonderful rabbi and humble teacher, has come in the flesh. Jesus the Christ. Jesus the Messiah.

Jesus the anointed of God. Look down at verse 15. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

We're going to see when we get to chapter 3 of Revelation, when Jesus introduces himself to the church in Thyatira, here in chapter 2, actually. We're going to see some other things in chapter 3. But notice, to the angel of the church of Thyatira, right, these things says the Son of God. It's the only place in all of the Revelation where Jesus calls himself the Son of God.

You never see him call himself the Son of God, even in the Gospels. He refers himself almost exclusively as the Son of Man. The Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost.

Jesus very unusually calls himself, in the greeting to Thyatira, the Son of God. What does John say in 1 John 4, 15? Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have known and believed the love that God has for us.

God is love, and he who abides in love, abides in God, and God in him. Love has been perfected. Remember the problem in Ephesus? Lost sight of the love? John emphasizes it here.

Verse 19, we love because he first loved us. And this is what leads to chapter 5 of 1 John. Verse 9, if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.

This is the witness of God which he has testified of his Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself. All of these who follow Ahriman, you know, Jesus wasn't God originally.

He became God. He never said he was God in the Gospels, the Synoptic Gospels. John writing toward the close of the first century, which I actually agree with.

I think when Jesus tells John, testify to what you have seen, to what you see, and what you're going to see. I think the Gospel of John is certainly a fulfillment of that. But the victory that overcomes the world is our faith.

In 1 John 5, 3, this is the love of God that we keep his commandments. They're not burdensome. Whoever is born of God overcomes the world in verse 4. And this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith.

The assault on your faith and the assault on your love is the doctrine of Balaam and the teachings of Jezebel. That what makes me happy, what fulfills me, what accommodates my predilections, what I want to do with my sexual life or my economic life or my social life, my relationship life, what makes me feel good, that's what I'm going to do, rather than the faith and the hope and the love that come from scriptures. This is the attack.

This is what Jesus is emphasizing when he talks about Balaam and Jezebel and the Nicolaitans. Those who tell you it's okay to please yourself, to pursue that which gratifies me instead of what God has said. That's what got Balaam out of bed in the morning.

I'm going to go with these Moabites and these Midianites and get me some riches. I'll say whatever God wants me to say, but I didn't do what he told me to do, which is don't leave unless they come and get you, which they didn't do. Not only that, he pronounces the but from the same source comes the key by which they are going to bring on themselves a plague from the Lord himself.

God has promised to bless them, but that doesn't mean that they are not going to come under discipline and judgment from God for breaking the commandments, for being seduced. And this incident at Peor is mentioned six more times in the Old Testament scripture. It's a big deal.

Balaam's presence and what he did to Israel is not forgotten, Old Testament or new. We can't let it happen to us. The Lord Jesus brings it up in the very last book of the Bible.

Don't be seduced. Don't be caused to bring yourself under condemnation. You may be able to

resist like the Smyrnans, every outside pressure and persecution to the point of death, but the enemy from within gets you.

That's what happens in Ephesus. The deeds of the Nicolaitans are present. You hate them.

That's good. But in the process of hating, don't forget your love. So many people hate what the opposition is doing.

They forget to love what the good guys are doing. Love the Lord, love the Lord's people. That's Ephesus problem.

Pergamos and Thyatira, they tolerate people who teach these bad things and to their harm. Well, much more to see here. We'll catch up again this coming Sunday, but we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the blessing we have of fellowship and of the opportunity to pray for one another, to see the faithful example of the Lord Jesus, of John, of these believers who were faithful to the point of death like Antipas and those in Smyrna. We pray that as we reflect on these truths, the Holy Spirit will illuminate our path, help us to see in our own lives, in our own circumstance, in our own relationships and contacts, both with those who are outside and those who are within, the necessity for faithfulness and obedience so that we can truly be overcomers and engage in service and function that glorifies the Lord Jesus now and in the ages to come.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.