

**Saturday, March 16**

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**Numbers 24:1 - 25: 18**

**24 1** By now Balaam realized that the LORD was determined to bless Israel, so he did not resort to divination as before. Instead, he turned and looked out toward the wilderness, **2** where he saw the people of Israel camped, tribe by tribe. Then the Spirit of God came upon him, **3** and this is the message he delivered: "This is the message of Balaam son of Beor, the message of the man whose eyes see clearly, **4** the message of one who hears the words of God, who sees a vision from the Almighty, who bows down with eyes wide open: **5** How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob; how lovely are your homes, O Israel! **6** They spread before me like palm groves, like gardens by the riverside. They are like tall trees planted by the LORD, like cedars beside the waters. **7** Water will flow from their buckets; their offspring have all they need. Their king will be greater than Agag; their kingdom will be exalted. **8** God brought them out of Egypt; for them he is as strong as a wild ox. He devours all the nations that oppose him, breaking their bones in pieces, shooting them with arrows. **9** Like a lion, Israel crouches and lies down; like a lioness, who dares to arouse her? Blessed is everyone who blesses you, O Israel, and cursed is everyone who curses you." **10** King Balak flew into a rage against Balaam. He angrily clapped his hands and shouted, "I called you to curse my enemies! Instead, you have blessed them three times. **11** Now get out of here! Go back home! I promised to reward you richly, but the LORD has kept you from your reward." **12** Balaam told Balak, "Don't you remember what I told your messengers? I said, **13** 'Even if Balak were to give me his palace filled with silver and gold, I would be powerless to do anything against the will of the LORD .' I told you that I could say only what the LORD says! **14** Now I am returning to my own people. But first let me tell you what the Israelites will do to your people in the future." **15** This is the message Balaam delivered: "This is the message of Balaam son of Beor, the message of the man whose eyes see clearly, **16** the message of one who hears the words of God, who has knowledge from the Most High, who sees a vision from the Almighty, who bows down with eyes wide open: **17** I see him, but not here and now. I perceive him, but far in the distant future. A star will rise from Jacob; a scepter will emerge from Israel. It will crush the heads of Moab's people, cracking the skulls of the people of Sheth. **18** Edom will be taken over, and Seir, its enemy, will be conquered, while Israel marches on in triumph. **19** A ruler will rise in Jacob who will destroy the survivors of Ir." **20** Then Balaam looked over toward the people of Amalek and delivered this message: "Amalek was the greatest of nations, but its destiny is destruction!" **21** Then he looked

over toward the Kenites and delivered this message: “Your home is secure; your nest is set in the rocks. **22** But the Kenites will be destroyed when Assyria takes you captive.” **23** Balaam concluded his messages by saying: “Alas, who can survive unless God has willed it? **24** Ships will come from the coasts of Cyprus ; they will oppress Assyria and afflict Eber, but they, too, will be utterly destroyed.” **25** Then Balaam left and returned home, and Balak also went on his way.

**25 1** While the Israelites were camped at Acacia Grove, some of the men defiled themselves by having sexual relations with local Moabite women. **2** These women invited them to attend sacrifices to their gods, so the Israelites feasted with them and worshiped the gods of Moab. **3** In this way, Israel joined in the worship of Baal of Peor, causing the LORD ’s anger to blaze against his people. **4** The LORD issued the following command to Moses: “Seize all the ringleaders and execute them before the LORD in broad daylight, so his fierce anger will turn away from the people of Israel.” **5** So Moses ordered Israel’s judges, “Each of you must put to death the men under your authority who have joined in worshiping Baal of Peor.” **6** Just then one of the Israelite men brought a Midianite woman into his tent, right before the eyes of Moses and all the people, as everyone was weeping at the entrance of the Tabernacle. **7** When Phinehas son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron the priest saw this, he jumped up and left the assembly. He took a spear **8** and rushed after the man into his tent. Phinehas thrust the spear all the way through the man’s body and into the woman’s stomach. So the plague against the Israelites was stopped, **9** but not before 24,000 people had died. **10** Then the LORD said to Moses, **11** “Phinehas son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron the priest has turned my anger away from the Israelites by being as zealous among them as I was. So I stopped destroying all Israel as I had intended to do in my zealous anger. **12** Now tell him that I am making my special covenant of peace with him. **13** In this covenant, I give him and his descendants a permanent right to the priesthood, for in his zeal for me, his God, he purified the people of Israel, making them right with me. ” **14** The Israelite man killed with the Midianite woman was named Zimri son of Salu, the leader of a family from the tribe of Simeon. **15** The woman’s name was Cozbi; she was the daughter of Zur, the leader of a Midianite clan. **16** Then the LORD said to Moses, **17** “Attack the Midianites and destroy them, **18** because they assaulted you with deceit and tricked you into worshiping Baal of Peor, and because of Cozbi, the daughter of a Midianite leader, who was killed at the time of the plague because of what happened at Peor.”

**2** **1** At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. **2** (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) **3** All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. **4** And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. **5** He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was now obviously pregnant. **6** And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. **7** She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them. **8** That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. **9** Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, **10** but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. **11** The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! **12** And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger." **13** Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, **14** "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased." **15** When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." **16** They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. **17** After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. **18** All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, **19** but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. **20** The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them. **21** Eight days later, when the baby was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel even before he was conceived. **22** Then it was time for their purification offering, as required by the law of Moses after the birth of a child; so his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. **23** The law of the Lord says, "If a woman's first child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the LORD ." **24** So they offered the sacrifice required in the law of the Lord—"either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." **25** At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him **26** and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. **27** That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, **28** Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, **29** "Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. **30** I have seen your salvation, **31** which you have prepared for all people. **32** He is a light to reveal God to

the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!” **33** Jesus’ parents were amazed at what was being said about him. **34** Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby’s mother, “This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but he will be a joy to many others. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. **35** As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul.”

#### **Psalm 59:1 - 17**

**59** **1** Rescue me from my enemies, O God. Protect me from those who have come to destroy me. **2** Rescue me from these criminals; save me from these murderers. **3** They have set an ambush for me. Fierce enemies are out there waiting, LORD, though I have not sinned or offended them. **4** I have done nothing wrong, yet they prepare to attack me. Wake up! See what is happening and help me! **5** O LORD God of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, wake up and punish those hostile nations. Show no mercy to wicked traitors. Interlude **6** They come out at night, snarling like vicious dogs as they prowl the streets. **7** Listen to the filth that comes from their mouths; their words cut like swords. “After all, who can hear us?” they sneer. **8** But LORD, you laugh at them. You scoff at all the hostile nations. **9** You are my strength; I wait for you to rescue me, for you, O God, are my fortress. **10** In his unfailing love, my God will stand with me. He will let me look down in triumph on all my enemies. **11** Don’t kill them, for my people soon forget such lessons; stagger them with your power, and bring them to their knees, O Lord our shield. **12** Because of the sinful things they say, because of the evil that is on their lips, let them be captured by their pride, their curses, and their lies. **13** Destroy them in your anger! Wipe them out completely! Then the whole world will know that God reigns in Israel. Interlude **14** My enemies come out at night, snarling like vicious dogs as they prowl the streets. **15** They scavenge for food but go to sleep unsatisfied. **16** But as for me, I will sing about your power. Each morning I will sing with joy about your unfailing love. For you have been my refuge, a place of safety when I am in distress. **17** O my Strength, to you I sing praises, for you, O God, are my refuge, the God who shows me unfailing love.

#### **Proverbs 11:14**

**11** **14** Without wise leadership, a nation falls; there is safety in having many advisers.