

## **ABIDE IN COVENANT WITH CHRIST**

*25 While Israel encamped at Shittim, the people began to indulge in sexual immorality with the Moabite women; <sup>2</sup>because they had invited the people to offer sacrifices to their gods, and the people ate with them and bowed down to their gods. <sup>3</sup>So it was that Israel joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor; and the anger of Jehovah was aroused against Israel. <sup>4</sup>Jehovah said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and hang them up\* in broad daylight for Jehovah, so that Jehovah's fierce anger may turn away from Israel." <sup>5</sup>So Moses said to Israel's judges, "Put to death all those who have joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor."*

*<sup>6</sup>One of the Israelite men came back and brought among his people a Midianite woman, right before the eyes of Moses and the whole congregation of the children of Israel while they were mourning at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. <sup>7</sup>When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, he left the congregation, took a spear in his hand, <sup>8</sup>and followed that Israelite man into his tent. He thrust the spear through both of them—right through the Israelite and into the woman's body. Then the plague against the Israelites was stopped. <sup>9</sup>Those who had died from the plague numbered twenty four thousand. <sup>10</sup>Then Jehovah said to Moses, <sup>11</sup>"Phinehas, son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the children of Israel, so that I did not consume them in my zeal—for he was as zealous as I am[ for my honor] among them. <sup>12</sup>Therefore, tell him that I am making my covenant of peace with him. <sup>13</sup>It shall be the covenant of a perpetual priesthood for him and his descendants after him, because he was zealous for his God and made atonement for the children of Israel." <sup>14</sup>Now the name of the Israelite man who was put to death, the one who was put to death along with the Midianite woman, was Zimri, the son of Salu, the leader of one of the families[ of the tribe] of Simeon. <sup>15</sup>And the name of the Midianite woman who was put to death was Cozbi, the daughter of Zur, a tribal chief of a Midianite family.*

*<sup>16</sup>Jehovah said to Moses, <sup>17</sup>"Treat the Midianites as enemies and put them to death, <sup>18</sup>because they treated you as enemies when they deceived you [in the incident] at Peor and the affair[ involving] their sister Cozbi, the daughter of a Midianite leader, the woman who was put to death at the time of the plague that came as a result [of the incident] at Peor." (Num. 25:1-18)*

*\*Note Deuteronomy 21:22-23, If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land Jehovah your God is giving you as an inheritance.*

### **Introduction**

The arctic polar bear loves to eat seals.

Sometimes, in order to catch a seal, he resorts to a cunning bit of trickery. The polar bear knows that the seal loves to eat fish. So, if the hole in the ice through which the seal does his fishing is not too far from the edge of open water, the polar bear will

take a deep breath, slip under the water, and swim to the seal's fishing hole. He will then imitate a fish by scratching lightly on the underside of the ice. When the seal hears the scratching sound, he dives into the water to catch the fish, only to find himself suddenly caught in the huge, deadly embrace of the polar bear. (*Our Daily Bread*, 10/1/96)

In Numbers chapter 25 we find the people of Israel falling prey to a similar trap set for them by the cunning strategy of the Moabites. Realizing that they could not defeat Israel in battle, and having failed to have God pronounce a curse against Israel, the Moabites decide to seduce Israel into sin. They invite the people of Israel to join them in their pagan festival of idolatry and immorality.

What is the consequence of Israel accepting that invitation? The Moabites succeed in alluring Israel into forsaking the divine covenant and thereby compelling the LORD to enact His righteous judgment against them.

Here is an important spiritual lesson to learn: When you abandon your covenant relationship with Christ, you fulfill the devil's desire by making yourself vulnerable to the LORD's righteous judgment.

Let us be sure to abide in covenant with Christ, so that we may experience His promised blessing.

## **I. Abide in Covenant with Christ, and Thus be Protected from God's Righteous Judgment**

Balak, the king of Moab, takes Balaam up to a high place overlooking the nation of Israel encamped on the plains below. As Balaam seeks to curse the people of Israel, the LORD puts a divine word of blessing on his lips:

*Then Balaam uttered his oracle: Balak brought me from Aram, the king of Moab [has brought me] from the eastern mountains. "Come," he says, "curse Jacob for me. Come and denounce Israel." <sup>8</sup>How can I curse those whom God has not cursed? And how can I denounce those whom Jehovah has not denounced? <sup>9</sup>From the rocky peaks I see them, and from the hills I observe them. They are a people who live apart; they shall not be counted among the nations. <sup>10</sup>Who can count the dust that is Jacob, or number even a fourth of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and may my end be like his! (Num. 23:7-10)*

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Balaam asks the question, "*How can I curse those whom God has not cursed?*" In New Testament terms, the answer to that question is found in the Apostle Paul's teaching contained in Romans 8:31-39,

*What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup>He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he*

*not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup>Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. <sup>35</sup>Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written: For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. <sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any power, <sup>39</sup>neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:31-39)*

*If God is for us, who can be against us?* (vs. 31.) This does not mean to imply that the Christian has no adversaries (verses 35-36 speak of the most violent kinds of opposition.) What it means is that if God is for us, all opposition of any kind and from any quarter is of no account. It cannot destroy our soul, but can only contribute to the furtherance of our salvation—speaking of the opposition he faced, the apostle Paul testifies, *“I know that, through your prayers and the help [provided] by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the result of all this will be my deliverance. <sup>20</sup>This is in keeping with my heart-felt expectation and hope that in no circumstance will I be put to shame; on the contrary, I have all confidence that as always, so now also, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death”* (Phil. 1:19-20.) Note, also, Psalm 118:6; *“The LORD is at my side; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”* (i.e., what can man ultimately accomplish against me?)

God, indeed, is for us. The proof of this is the fact that He *“did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all”* (vs. 32.) Then follows the assurance: since He did not even spare His Son, surely God will not withhold anything else that we may need (vs. 32b.) As the hymn writer, Thomas Chisholm, expressed it, “Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!”

Since God is for us, there can be no condemnation (vs.33-34.) *“Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?”* Here is a challenge to the world and the devil to try and prosecute the Christian. Paul assures us, *“It is God who justifies.”* Our defense and security lay in the fact that it is the Judge of all the earth who pronounces a verdict in our favor. The reason He can do so resides in the fact that *“Christ Jesus ... died* (bearing our sins and satisfying the justice of God), and he *was raised to life* (the testimony that His sacrifice was acceptable to God), and He is now seated *at the right hand of God* (He is honored by God and has access to God), where he *is also interceding for us”* (presenting His blood on our behalf.)

Consequently, there comes the assurance that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (vs.35-39.)

Abide in covenant with Christ, and thus be protected from God's righteous judgment. *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Rom. 8:1.)

## II. Abide in Covenant with Christ, Being Assured of His Faithfulness

Having failed in his first endeavor to pronounce a curse upon Israel, Balak has Balaam try again. But to Balak's dismay, not only is the word of blessing not retracted, it is reaffirmed by God and made even more sure:

*Then [Balaam] uttered his oracle: Arise, Balak, and listen; pay attention to me, son of Zippor. <sup>19</sup>God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he spoken, and will he not act? Has he promised, and will he not fulfill it? <sup>20</sup>Listen; I have received [a commandment] to bless; he has blessed, and I cannot reverse it. <sup>21</sup>He has not seen iniquity in Jacob, he has not observed obstinate behavior in Israel. Jehovah his God is with him; the shout of a king is among them. <sup>22</sup>God brought them out of Egypt; he is for them like the strength of the wild ox. <sup>23</sup>There is no sorcery [that can prevail] against Jacob, neither is there any divination that can succeed against Israel. It will now be said of Jacob and of Israel, "See what God has done!" <sup>24</sup>Look; the people rise like a lioness; they rouse themselves like a lion. He shall not rest until he has devoured his prey and drinks the blood of his victims.* (Num. 23:18-24)

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Balaam declares, *"God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he spoken, and will he not act? Has he promised, and will he not fulfill it?"* (Num. 23:19.) God is not like men; He does not lie; He does not go back on His Word. God cannot act contrary to His nature: *"God ... cannot lie"* (Titus 1:2.) On the contrary, the LORD is true to His Word and faithful to fulfill His promises. Israel found this to be true in the days of Joshua, *"Not one of all Jehovah's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled"* (Josh. 21:45.) What Israel found to be true in the days of Joshua, the Christian shall find to be true in the day of Jesus Christ at His return in glory. By way of illustration: Someone spray painted on the wall of a highway overpass the words, "God Lies," in big black letters. For the sake of truth and accuracy, it would be appropriate to insert the word "Never" in bold red paint: God **NEVER** Lies—the red symbolizing the shed blood of Jesus who is the Guarantee of the fulfillment of all the promises of God.

Balaam goes on to proclaim, *"Jehovah his God is with him ... <sup>22</sup>... he is for them like the strength of the wild ox. <sup>23</sup>There is no sorcery [that can prevail] against Jacob, neither is there any divination [that can succeed] against Israel"* (Num. 23:21b, 22b-23a.) The LORD has promised to stand with us: *"God has said, Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you"* (Heb. 13:5.) Paul experienced this promise to be true: *"the Lord stood by me, and strengthened me; ... and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. <sup>18</sup>The Lord will deliver me out of every evil work, and will save me for his heavenly kingdom. To whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen"* (2 Tim.

4:17-18.) The LORD has promised to supply us with His divine power: *"You then, my son, be strong with the grace that is in Christ Jesus"* (2 Tim. 2:1.) The Apostle Paul also experienced the truth of this divine promise: *"[the Lord] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, because my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest upon me. <sup>10</sup>That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties, for when I am weak, then I am strong"* (2 Cor. 12:9-10.) The LORD has promised to protect us from the evil one: *"I am not asking that you would take them out of the world, but that you would keep them from the evil one"* (Jn. 17:15,), this is part of our Lord's intercessory prayer made to His Father on our behalf.

Abide in covenant with Christ, and be assured of His faithfulness. *"Trust in Jehovah forever, for Jehovah, Jehovah [himself], is an everlasting rock"* (Isa. 26:4.)

### III. Abide in Covenant with Christ, and Experience His Goodness

Once again Balaam looks down upon the nation of Israel encamped on the plains of Moab and utters his prophecy:

*Then he uttered this oracle: The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of one whose eyes see clearly, <sup>4</sup>the oracle of one who hears the words of God, who sees a vision from the Almighty, who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are open. <sup>5</sup>How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel! <sup>6</sup>They are spread out like valleys, like gardens beside a river, like aloes planted by Jehovah, like cedars beside the waters. <sup>7</sup>Water shall flow from his buckets; his seed shall have abundant water. His king shall be greater than Agag; his kingdom shall be exalted. <sup>8</sup>God brought them out of Egypt; he is for them like the strength of the wild ox. <sup>9</sup>They shall devour hostile nations and break their bones into pieces; with their arrows they shall pierce them. (Num. 24:3-9)*

By the Spirit of God, what Balaam describes is not a people encamped in the wilderness, but a people dwelling in Paradise: *"How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel! <sup>6</sup>They are spread out like valleys, like gardens beside a river, like aloes planted by Jehovah, like cedars beside the waters. <sup>7</sup>Water shall flow from his buckets; his seed shall have abundant water. His king shall be greater than Agag; his kingdom shall be exalted"* (Num. 24:5-7.)

The picture presented here is that of great abundance and blessing: luxurious gardens beside flowing rivers, ... fragrant trees with ample sources of water, ... buckets with water flowing **out of them**. Note the testimony of the Lord Jesus in John 10:10b, *"I have come so that they may have life and have it abundantly."* Note, too, the promise He makes in John 7:37-39a,

*Now on the last day, the great day of the Feast, Jesus stood and cried out, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup>Whoever believes in me, as*

*the Scripture has said, From within him shall flow rivers of living water. <sup>39</sup>Now he was referring to the Holy Spirit, whom they who believed in him were to receive.*

The abundant spiritual life of which Christ speaks can be blocked up or stifled by:

**unbelief:** *“He could not do any mighty work there; although he did lay his hands upon a few sick people and heal them. <sup>6</sup>He was amazed at their unbelief. He went around to all the villages teaching.”* (Mk. 6:5-6); or by ...

**bitterness:** *“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup>Get rid of all bitterness and rage and anger and clamor and slander, along with all malice.”* (Eph. 4:30-31)

Abide in covenant with Christ, and you shall experience His blessing.

*Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of scoffers. <sup>2</sup>But his delight is in the law of Jehovah, and on his law he meditates day and night. <sup>3</sup>He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.* (Psl. 1:1-3)

#### **IV. Abide in Covenant with Christ, and You will Share in His Triumph**

In his final word of prophecy Balaam reveals to Balak what will happen in the future—this prophecy relates the future events of history and especially the final outcome of history:

*Now I am going back to my people, but come, let me advise you as to what this people will do to your people in the future. <sup>15</sup>Then he uttered his oracle: The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of one whose eye sees clearly, <sup>16</sup>the oracle of one who hears the words of God, who has knowledge from the Most High, who sees a vision from the Almighty, who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are open. <sup>17</sup>I see him, but not yet; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth. <sup>18</sup>Edom will be conquered; Seir, his enemy, will also be conquered, but Israel will perform valiant deeds. <sup>19</sup>One coming out of Jacob shall have dominion, he shall destroy the survivors of the city. <sup>20</sup>Then [Balaam] saw Amalek and uttered his oracle: Amalek was first among the nations, but he will come to ruin at last. <sup>21</sup>Then he saw the Kenites and uttered his oracle: Your dwelling place is secure, your nest is set in the rock; <sup>22</sup>nevertheless, you Kenites will be destroyed when Asshur takes you captive. <sup>23</sup>Again he uttered his oracle: Ah, who can live when God does this? <sup>24</sup>Ships will come from the shores of Kittim; they will subdue Asshur and Eber, but they, too, will come to ruin.* (Num. 24:14-24)

Numbers 24:17-20 prophesies the coming of a mighty Israelite monarchy: a monarchy that shall totally destroy Moab (vs. 17,) take possession of Edom (vs. 18,) and execute divine vengeance against Amalek (vs. 19-20.) The prophecy of verses 17-20 was fulfilled in the reign of Saul and David. Saul was used by God to repay the Amalekites for what they had done to Israel in the wilderness:

*Samuel said to Saul, "I am the one Jehovah sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from Jehovah. <sup>2</sup>This is what Jehovah of hosts says: I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they ambushed them when they came up out of Egypt. <sup>3</sup>Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys." (1 Sam.15:1-3)*

David crushed the kingdom of Moab: *"David also defeated the Moabites. He made them lie down on the ground and measured them off with a length of cord. Every two lengths of them were put to death, and the third length was allowed to live. So the Moabites became subject to David and brought tribute" (2 Sam. 8:2)* and also took possession of Edom: *"He put garrisons throughout Edom, and all the Edomites became subject to David" (2 Sam. 8:14a.)*

Numbers 24:21-22 foretells the rise of a Middle Eastern superpower. The Kenites, whose dwelling place was thought to be secure, shall be conquered and carried away captive by a people from the land of Asshur. Verses 21-22 were fulfilled with the rise of the great military empires of Assyria/Babylonia and Persia; each of whom came from the east and advanced west to the Mediterranean Sea.

Numbers 24:23-24 foretells the rise of a world superpower. Ships shall come from the coast of Kittim (possibly Cyprus) and they shall occupy the nations of the Middle East (Asshur and Eber.) Verses 23-24 were fulfilled by the great conquering empires of the west: the Greeks and the Romans.

Numbers 24:24c prophesies the final overthrow of the superpowers and empires of the world. One power rises to supplant another, but the final word is, *"they, too, will come to ruin."* Verse 24c shall be fulfilled when our Lord Jesus Christ returns in glory and brings the great day foretold in Revelation 11:15, *"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."*

Abide in covenant with Christ, and you shall share in His triumph.

*To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Rev. 3:21)*

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.  
Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the  
righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to  
all those who have longed for his appearing.* (2 Tim. 4:7-8)

## **Conclusion**

When you consider this whole episode in Israel's wilderness journey (recorded in Numbers 22-25,) there is a warning and an exhortation to us. The warning: When you abandon your covenant relationship with Christ, (as Israel did when they joined the Moabites in their idolatry and immorality,) you fulfill the devil's desire by making yourself vulnerable to the LORD's righteous judgment. The exhortation: Abide in covenant with Christ your God and Savior, so that you may experience all His blessing.