

INTRODUCTION

There is a real world beyond what we can see with our eyes. That is the story line for the movie series “Matrix.” It describes a future world conquered by computers. The machine plants electronic chips into human brains to control them. The world they see and feel is actually a simulated reality created by the computers. The mission of the main characters is to save people and bring them back into the real physical world. It is just a movie. However, there is some spiritual truth to it. We live in this world. However, the Bible tells us that there is an unseen spiritual world out there. Our God is a Spirit, and so is our enemy, Satan. If you are a child of God, then you are enlisted to participate in a spiritual warfare. We can only prevail if we rely on God. In Numbers chapter 22, God’s people also encountered a hidden enemy. After the Israelites had defeated Sihon and Og, their momentum should be on an all-time high. But now there was a visible adversary who employed an invisible weapon. The king of Moab wanted to hire a sorcerer to curse the Israelites. We have similar religious rituals in the eastern world. We said a while back that in the ancient time, a country had its own guardian deity to protect its people. When a nation triumphed in a battlefield, it meant that the god it worshipped was stronger than its opponent’s idol. Now the god of Moab launched a war against Jehovah. The false gods from the ancient to modern time are all Satan’s agents. Satan is the unseen enemy behind our back. But fear not brothers and sisters! God will protect His children from the attack of the evil one. That is the lesson we shall learn from our story today. We shall study three characters in the passage – a scared king, a sneaky wizard and the sovereign Lord.

EXPLANATION

1. 膽怯的君王 A Scared King

First, there was a scared king of Moab named Balak. The Israelites were now camping in the plains of Moab. That was on the eastern shore of the river Jordan facing Jericho. The **map** on the screen tells us their approximate location. God forbade them to attack Moab because the Moabites and Israelites were distant relatives. He would not give them the land. But king Balak saw Israel as a potential threat. He heard what the Israelites did in Egypt, and he knew how they destroyed the two Amorite kings. Balak was scared. Therefore, he formed an alliance with Midian, which was to the southeast of the region. The two countries sent representatives to seek help from a professional psychic called Balaam. They said to Balaam in **verse 6**: “Now come and put a curse on these people, because they are too powerful for me. Perhaps then I will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the country. For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed.” Balak hoped that Balaam could weaken the Israelites, so that they would fall in war. Balaam was the top guy in the field. Archaeologists found some writings about Balaam on a wall in the nowadays Jordan, which is where Moab was located in the Old Testament time. Were Balaam’s words really that magical? People in those days believed that some highly respected figures had prophetic power in their messages. We see a few examples in the book of Genesis. Abraham said that the descendants of his two oldest sons, Ishmael and Isaac, would be rivalries (chapter 16). Isaac declared an oracle about his two sons. He blessed

Jacob but painted a gray future for Esau (chapter 27). Jacob blessed his twelve sons before he passed away (chapter 49). Those blessings were understood as prophetic. We also need to keep in mind that spiritual media can tap into the force of darkness. Paul said in [Ephesians 2:1-2](#) – 1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. Satan has certain supernatural power to influence the world. When we do not know Christ, we are controlled by him like slaves. We do not feel the bondage of sin because we are numb to its effects. Satan blinds us from the truth and lures us away from God. Those who perform divination derive their knowledge and power from the devil. I know a brother who practiced meditation before he became a believer. He said he could float in the air at the height of his performance. He could see evil spirits. He also told me that all the Chinese kung-fu can find its origin in the dark spiritual world. Here is a word of caution for you. I know many people play Tai-Chi or yoga as exercise. I am sure any physical activity has its health benefits. But you have to watch out if any motion, breathing or meditation skill you follow has something to do with idol worship. There is a scared king in our story. We can be scared by the problems we face too. It is natural to seek professional help. There are great doctors who specialize in treating various diseases. There are skillful immigration attorneys who help people file petitions. There are experienced counselors to deal with relational conflicts. Ultimately, all human wisdom and knowledge come from God. He can make use of the resources God puts around us. However, we need to make sure that the advice we receive does not contradict with the Bible. You should not comply if an expert suggests you to spend time on meditation instead of taking medicine. A lawyer may ask you to exaggerate or even lie about certain things on your application form. A therapist may recommend you to divorce rather than to reconcile with your spouse. If a solution clearly violates God's truth, then it is definitely not from God. Hardship should draw us nearer to Him. We pray for a resolution. But we also ask God for a submissive heart whether He grants our wish or gives us an alternative outcome. Ultimately, we want God to receive all the glory. God will give us peace when we walk closely with Him.

2. 狡猾的巫師 A Sneaky Wizard

Balak, the scared king, was looking for help. He made an emergency call to Balaam. I will label him as a sneaky wizard. When the messengers came to his door, Balaam asked them to stay overnight while he waited for God's instructions. God spoke to Balaam that night in [verse 12](#): ... "Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed." God did not allow Balaam to go to Moab. Balaam could not curse those whom God had promised to bless. The envoys thus went home empty-handed. But king Balak would not give up yet. He sent a larger group of more honorable officials to present the request a second time. Balak told Balaam to freely name any fee. But Balaam did not seem to be moved. He answered in [verse 18](#): ... "Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything great or small to go beyond the command of the Lord my God." Just like the first time, Balaam asked the representatives to rest for the night until God gave him an advice. It looks like Balaam had a humble heart to God. Did he really? He was actually using the name of God as a bargaining chip. At the first visit, God had clearly rejected the invitation. Balaam did not need to wait as if God might change His mind. Balaam emphasized the silver and gold of Balak in his reply. Why? He threw the envoys a hint that their king should be ready to empty his national vault. Balaam was playing his psychological game and negotiation trick all along. In addition,

we see how other Bible writers describe Balaam. For example, [Joshua 13:22](#) reads: “In addition to those slain in battle, the Israelites had put to the sword Balaam son of Beor, who practiced divination.” Balaam used witchcraft to make money. Then also in [2 Peter 2:15](#) - They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. Balaam was just a wealth-craving Harry Potter trying to take advantage of Balak! He was like a dishonest merchant who raises the price of food, water and gas when a hurricane is approaching. He knows that some people are willing to pay whatever it costs when the timing is urgent. Balaam treated Jehovah as another false god he could manipulate. A sorcerer may receive special messages from a spirit. He in turn sells the information to his clients for profit. As a result, both the fortune-teller and the customers are hooked by the idols. Satan and his demons have certain power. However, they cannot foresee the future like God does. They just fool people with some vague advice. My wife used to be a nurse in Taiwan. There was a time when she had to work night-shift and was unable to attend church. Once she went with a non-believing colleague to see a medium. The fortune-teller gave detail advice to her friend on career and future marriage, etc. When the counseling session was over, my wife asked the guy out of curiosity: “Master, what about me? I am going to U.S. soon.” The person stared at my wife for a moment, then briefly said: “You will have a bright prospect if you pursue a career in religion.” The diviner could not see anything other than the fact that my wife is a child of God. Her future is in God’s hand. Brothers and sisters: let me remind you that God warns us plainly in the Bible not to seek divination. Do not read the zodiac prediction, do not ask people to check your feng-shui or read your palm. Sometimes, even Christians believe that there is some magic power in certain numbers. They ask for some particular numbers when they sign up for phone service. When they buy a home, they will skip houses if the street numbers do not sound lucky. Brothers and sisters: do not fall into Satan’s trap. Personally, I do not care if the street number is 666! If you are a child of God, then your life is under His protection. God has His perfect plan for you. Just read the Bible, fully trust God’s promise and seek His guidance through prayer. Besides, some of you came from an idol-worship background. Your parents might give you some form of lucky charm before you came to U.S. If you are determined to follow Christ, then you must cut off all the ties with false gods. I say this with all seriousness: any lingering relationship with Satan will only bring you curse and not blessing. In the name of Jesus our Lord, I would be more than happy to help you remove those items.

3. 掌權的主宰 The Sovereign Lord

The two characters in our story wanted to use evil power to subdue the Israelites. Balak the scared king was willing to pay a hefty consultant fee to Balaam the sneaky wizard. But no dark force can frustrate the plan of our God because He is the sovereign Lord. We can evidently see God’s hand working behind the scene. God spoke to Balaam when the first group of messengers came. He did not permit Balaam to curse the Israelites because He had planned to bless His people. Since when? God revealed His plan to Abraham in [Genesis 12:2-3](#) 400 years before the Israel race existed: 2 ... “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Since God had intended to bless His people, no greater authority could “un-bless” them. Aren’t you grateful that God’s promises last forever? We as humans constantly change our mind. You might pull out a blue shirt this morning, but afterward you decided to wear a white shirt instead. Some parents

assure their kids to take them to the park, but later they make an excuse that they have more important things to do. God does not need to revise His plans as if His mood swings or He receives new information. We can put our trust in Him! Notice that God said that He would bless those who blessed Abraham. That also includes Abraham's descendants, namely Israel. On the contrary, God would curse those who cursed Israel. Therefore, we can expect what would happen to Balaam, Balak and his allies if Balaam was to curse Israel. God showed His sovereignty by speaking to Balaam, not just once but a second time when more noble representatives came. Read **verse 20**: That night God came to Balaam and said, "Since these men have come to summon you, go with them, but do only what I tell you." We wonder: "Haven't we just said that God would never change His mind? Why did He give Balaam permission to go now?" It was because God's way is always higher than our way. We shall see in the second half of the chapter that God used Balaam to actually affirm His blessing to Israel. Eventually, Balak was the one who received the curse. God could use even a money-loving diviner like Balaam to achieve His goals. It is a good example of the truth in **Romans 8:28** - And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. God is our Master who causes all things, both good and bad ones, to work together to bless those who love Him. We see many other examples in the Bible. God used the Egyptian Pharaohs, king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the Caesars of Rome, etc. to accomplish His plans. Where are those ancient empires now? Their once glorious civilizations have become research topics for archaeologists. God is also fitting everything in your life like pieces of a puzzle to bring out His purpose for you. Paul said those who love God will see His goodness. The question is: do you love God? If so, do you love God so much that you fully trust what He is doing something beautiful in your life? You will certainly face troubles. You will catch a cold, another driver may scratch your car or your flight may be delayed by bad weather. There may be more serious hardship. But God does not stop working in your life even in the midst of difficulties. The sovereign Lord is watching over you. Sometimes even Christians may use words like "luck" or "fate" casually to describe their circumstances. They say they are lucky when they find a parking spot right at the entrance of a grocery store. They think that fate is playing jokes on them because they have an unhappy marriage or they never get a promotion. They worry that they will suffer bad karma after they failed to show kindness when someone asked them for help. None of those is true if you are a follower of Christ. You are in good hands because you are in God's hands! He has written a bright conclusion for your future. He invites you to travel with Him in this journey of faith every day.

CONCLUSION

God will protect His children from the attack of the evil one. Satan is our real enemy behind the scene. What we are fighting against is not the political system that approves laws that are contrary to the biblical principles. We are not confronting the entertainment industry that tries to brainwash us and our children with secular values. We are combating with the gods of money and pleasure. Satan attacks us from all fronts. We are either victors or victims in the spiritual battle. The result depends on the strategy we employ. We are destined to fail if we fight alone and rely on ourselves. We can only win if we maintain a close ally with God. We use the powerful weapons God has given us – His Word of truth and constant prayer. We also need to network with our comrades. God puts brothers and sisters around us so that we can encourage and support each other. We follow Jesus Christ, our commander, to march out in faith.