

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
12-29-21
Numbers 22

¹ Balak, King Of Moab, Fears An Advancing Israel – Verses 1-3

Then the Israelites traveled to the plains of Moab and camped along the Jordan across from Jericho. ² Now Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites, ³ and Moab was terrified because there were so many people. Indeed, Moab was filled with dread because of the Israelites.

22:1-2 Then the children of Israel moved: Israel was, at this point, on the move. They had essentially finished their 38 year exile in the wilderness, and then progressed towards the Promised Land. They continued further towards the Promised Land than the previous generation of unbelief had. They also had the blessing of victory, God preparing them to fight the mighty Canaanites by a series of battles against lesser peoples: the southern Canaanites (Numbers 21:1-3), the Amorites (Numbers 21:23-24), and the Bashanites (Numbers 21:33-35).

22:3 Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel: As Israel advanced towards Moab, Balak, the king of Moab was exceedingly afraid. This was because of the size of Israel and because they had defeated neighbor nations.

Balak's Invitation To Balaam – Verses 4-6

⁴ The Moabites said to the elders of Midian, “This horde is going to lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field.” So Balak son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, ⁵ sent messengers to summon Balaam son of Beor, who was at Pethor, near the Euphrates River, in his native land. Balak said: “A people has come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the land and have settled next to me. 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 land. For I know that whoever you bless is blessed, and whoever you curse is cursed.”

22:4-6 Balaam was a sorcerer, one called upon to place curses on others. Belief in curses and blessings was common in Old Testament times. Sorcerers were thought to have power with the gods. Thus, the king of Moab wanted Balaam to use his powers with the God of Israel to place a curse on Israel—hoping that, by magic, God would turn against his people. Neither Balaam nor Balak had any idea whom they were dealing with!

Balak Sends Men To Hire Balaam's Services As A Prophet – Verses 7-8

⁷ The elders of Moab and Midian left, taking with them the fee for divination. When they came to Balaam, they told him what Balak had said. ⁸ “Spend the night here,” Balaam said to them, “and I will report back to you with the answer the LORD gives me.” So the Moabite officials stayed with him.

22:7 The diviner's fee: This suggests a standard fee for the work of a prophet. They took this standard fee in hand and approached Balaam.

22:8 Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you: Balaam's first compromise was evident when he invited the men to lodge here tonight, so he could hear from God regarding their offer. It was clearly wrong - then and now - to be a prophet for hire. Balaam essentially said, "Let me seek God about this" regarding a matter that was clearly sin and God's will was clear. He cared far more about the diviner's fee than about God's will.

God's Response To Balaam – Verses 9-12

9 God came to Balaam and asked, "Who are these men with you?" **10** Balaam said to God, "Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, sent me this message: **11** 'A people that has come out of Egypt covers the face of the land. Now come and put a curse on them for me. Perhaps then I will be able to fight them and drive them away.'" **12** But God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed."

22:9 Why would God speak through a sorcerer like Balaam? God wanted to give a message to the Moabites, and they had already chosen to employ Balaam. So Balaam was available for God to use, much as he used the wicked pharaoh to accomplish his will in Egypt (Exodus 10:1). Balaam entered into his prophetic role seriously, but his heart was mixed. He had some knowledge of God, but not enough to forsake his magic and turn wholeheartedly to God. Although this story leads us to believe he turned completely to God, later passages in the Bible show that Balaam couldn't resist the tempting pull of money and idolatry (31:16; 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 1:11).

Balaam's Reply To Balak's Messengers And The Counter-Offer – Verses 13-15

13 The next morning Balaam got up and said to Balak's officials, "Go back to your own country, for the LORD has refused to let me go with you." **14** So the Moabite officials returned to Balak and said, "Balaam refused to come with us." **15** Then Balak sent other officials, more numerous and more distinguished than the first.

22:13 The LORD has refused to give me permission to go with you: This carries the sense that Balaam wanted to go, but God wouldn't let him. We can easily picture Balaam saying it just this way to the messengers from Balak. "I would really like to go with you, but God won't let me." It was as if Balaam is saying, "God doesn't want me to do this, but I can be persuaded." Balak would exploit this invitation.

22:15 Then Balak again sent princes, more numerous and more honorable than they: It is clear this is the understanding Balak's messengers took back to their king, because he sent more honorable (and more wealthy, no doubt) men to persuade Balaam.

Balak's Messengers Increase The Offer To Balaam – Verses 16-17

16 They came to Balaam and said: "This is what Balak son of Zippor says: Do not let anything keep you from coming to me, **17** because I will reward you handsomely and do whatever you say. Come and put a curse on these people for me."

22:16 I will certainly honor you greatly: No longer did they merely carry with them the diviner's fee of [Numbers 22:7](#); now they also brought a promise of great riches.

22:17 Therefore please come, curse this people for me: Balaam refused to decisively put away a temptation the first time it came. Now he the temptation came back to him stronger than it was before.

Balaam Entertains The Offer From Balak's Messengers – Verses 18-19

¹⁸ But Balaam answered them, “Even if Balak gave me all the silver and gold in his palace, I could not do anything great or small to go beyond the command of the LORD my God. ¹⁹ Now spend the night here so that I can find out what else the LORD will tell me.”

22:18 Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold: We can only imagine Balaam's tone of voice and expression when he said this. He probably wistfully suggested a big offer from these richer messengers of Balak.

I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more: Yet, Balaam knew the character of true prophecy. It did not come from his own initiative, but from the LORD. Even though he wanted to do what they asked, he could not.

22:19 Please stay here tonight: This is proof that Balaam continued to entertain this sin. There was no need to seek God again, when the will of God was clear both from his moral conscience (which troubled him from the beginning) and from the clear revelation of God (spoken in Numbers 22:12).

That I may know what more the LORD will say to me: This sounds so spiritual. "Let me seek the LORD about this one" - but it was completely carnal. Balaam was like a child who, having once heard the father's answer, will ask again, hoping the father's will might change.

God Allows Balaam To Go With Balak's Messengers – Verses 20-21

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.” ²¹ Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the Moabite officials.

22:20-23 God let Balaam go with Balak's messengers, but he was angry about Balaam's greedy attitude. Balaam claimed that he would not go against God just for money, but his resolve was beginning to slip. His greed for the wealth offered by the king blinded him so that he could not see how God was trying to stop him. Though we may know what God wants us to do, we can become blinded by the desire for money, possessions, or prestige. We can avoid Balaam's mistake by looking past the allure of fame or fortune to the long-range benefits of following God.

Balaam, The Donkey And The Angel – Verses 22-27

²² But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the LORD stood in the road to oppose him. Balaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. ²³ When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, it turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat it to get it back on the road. ²⁴ Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path through the vineyards, with walls on both sides. ²⁵ When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, it pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat the donkey again. ²⁶ Then the angel of the LORD moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. ²⁷ When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, it lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat it with his staff.

22:22 God's anger was aroused because he went: Some might think this was unfair, seeing that God told Balaam to go and then was angry because he went. But Balaam only went because he had first rejected God voice, both in conscience and clear command, and God should be angry about that.

22:23 The donkey saw the Angel of the LORD: The donkey was more spiritually perceptive than the prophet. The donkey had no spiritual gifts, but at least acknowledged his Creator. The prophet had wonderful spiritual gifts, but also a disobedient heart and walk.

The donkey turned aside out of the way: The donkey, responding to the Angel of the LORD, turned one way, then another, then finally sat down to avoid judgment. The disobedient prophet suffered along the way, and also made the donkey suffer. The donkey is a perfect picture of a simple, unspectacular, yet obedient follower of God - sensitive to God's direction, a thorn to the disobedient, and a victim of the wrath of the disobedient.

22:27 When the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam: The unusually difficult circumstances of this journey might have suggested to Balaam that his trip was not of God. Yet Balaam probably took it all as being attack from the enemy, and used the circumstances to strengthen his hope that God wanted him to work as a prophet for hire. This shows the great difficulty of judging God's will by circumstances. Many circumstances can be interpreted two ways - if not more.

God's message to Balaam through the donkey – Verses 28-30

28 Then the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and it said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?" **29** Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If only I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now." **30** The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?" "No," he said.

22:29 The donkey saved Balaam's life but made him look foolish in the process, so Balaam lashed out at the donkey. We sometimes strike out at blameless people who get in our way because we are embarrassed or our pride is hurt. Lashing out at others can be a sign that something is wrong with us. Don't allow your own hurt pride to lead you to hurt others.

God's Message To Balaam Through Seeing The Angel Of The LORD – Verses 31-33

31 Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown. **32** The angel of the LORD asked him, "Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me." **33** The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If it had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now, but I would have spared it."

22:31 The Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand: This made the will of God pretty clear in a matter. God told Balaam, about as loud and clear as it could be said, "Don't go, turn back now." But Balaam would not listen.

22:32 Your way is perverse before Me: The Angel of the LORD rebuked Balaam for his mistreatment of his donkey, but especially because Balaam's way was perverse. The word perverse carries the idea of "going the wrong way in a rash manner." This was exactly Balaam's problem.

Since this is the Angel of the LORD, and that the Angel of the LORD tells Balaam that his sin is against Him personally (your way is perverse before Me), it indicates this is an Old Testament appearance of God the Son - the Second Member of the Trinity, Jesus, before His incarnation as a baby in Bethlehem. Jesus temporarily appeared in some sort of human form, for a specific Divine purpose.

Balaam's Meager "Repentance" And Sinful Course - Verses 34-35

³⁴ Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned. I did not realize you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now if you are displeased, I will go back." ³⁵ The angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but speak only what I tell you." So Balaam went with Balak's officials.

22:34 I have sinned: This sounds humble enough, but it was obvious and easy to say when the Angel of the LORD stood before Balaam with a drawn sword in hand. If it displeases You I will turn back: Balaam seemed undecided as to if he really was displeasing God. He asked, "If it displeases You." God made His will clear to Balaam many times, yet Balaam still fished for the answer he wanted from God, and Balaam made it evident he did not want what God had already clearly revealed.

22:35 Go with the men: In response to Balaam's hard heart, God gave Balaam over to his sinful desire. Again, God did not change His mind. Because of Balaam's hard heart, God sent Balaam on a path of judgment.

Balaam Meets With Balak, King Of Moab – Verses 36-41

³⁶ When Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went out to meet him at the Moabite town on the Arnon border, at the edge of his territory. ³⁷ Balak said to Balaam, "Did I not send you an urgent summons? Why didn't you come to me? Am I really not able to reward you?" ³⁸ "Well, I have come to you now," Balaam replied. "But I can't say whatever I please. I must speak only what God puts in my mouth." ³⁹ Then Balaam went with Balak to Kiriath Huzoth. ⁴⁰ Balak sacrificed cattle and sheep, and gave some to Balaam and the officials who were with him. ⁴¹ The next morning Balak took Balaam up to Bamoth Baal, and from there he could see the outskirts of the Israelite camp.

22:36-37 Am I not able to honor you? Here, two kindred hearts met. Balak's warm promise of reward sounded like music in Balaam's ears.

22:38 The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak: Balaam again protested that this was not in his hands. Perhaps he really believed and understood this, or perhaps this was his way of protecting himself in case he failed. Then he could say that it was God's fault, and not his.

22:41 Bamoth Baal means "high places of Baal," referring to pagan shrines where Baal was worshiped near Heshbon and Dibon. It was the first stopping point on the way to the high plains of Moab. From this vantage point, they could see the entire Israelite camp. After a bit of sacrifice, Balak then called upon Balaam to do what he hired him to do - to curse Israel, to rob them of their spiritual strength, so they could be defeated in battle.