

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
1-5-22
Numbers 23

Balaam's First Message: Sacrifice and Preparation – Verses 1-3

¹ Balaam said, "Build me seven altars here, and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me." ² Balak did as Balaam said, and the two of them offered a bull and a ram on each altar. ³ Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stay here beside your offering while I go aside. Perhaps the LORD will come to meet with me. Whatever he reveals to me I will tell you." Then he went off to a barren height.

23:1-3 Balaam offered seven burnt offerings to God on seven separate altars. Pagans as well as Israelites regarded seven as a complete number based on the seven days of creation and seven days of the week. Pagans commonly offered sacrifices on important occasions, as did the Israelites, to secure divine favor and help.

God Meets Balaam And Sends Him Back To Balak – Verses 4-6

⁴ God met with him, and Balaam said, "I have prepared seven altars, and on each altar I have offered a bull and a ram." ⁵ The LORD put a word in Balaam's mouth and said, "Go back to Balak and give him this word." ⁶ So he went back to him and found him standing beside his offering, with all the Moabite officials.

23:4-5 Then the LORD put a word in Balaam's mouth: We might be surprised that God spoke to and through someone as obviously wicked as Balaam. But this shows us that spiritual giftedness does not equal spiritual maturity or holiness of life. God spoke through a donkey in the previous chapter and now He spoke through a bigger donkey.

23:6 So he returned to him, and there he was, standing by his burnt offering, he and all the princes of Moab: When Balaam returned, Balak and all the princes of Moab were ready. They were ready to learn what their money bought them from Balaam.

God's Word To Balak Through Balaam – Verses 7-10

⁷ Then Balaam spoke his message: "Balak brought me from Aram, the king of Moab from the eastern mountains. 'Come,' he said, 'curse Jacob for me; come, denounce Israel.' ⁸ How can I curse those whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce those whom the LORD has not denounced? ⁹ From the rocky peaks I see them, from the heights I view them. I see a people who live apart and do not consider themselves one of the nations. ¹⁰ Who can count the dust of Jacob or number even a fourth of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and may my final end be like theirs!"

23:7 Come, curse Jacob for me, and come, denounce Israel: God knew exactly what Balak wanted. He wanted a spiritual curse on Israel so that they could be defeated in battle.

23:8 How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? Yet, Balaam or any other prophet could not curse Israel if God had not cursed them. Therefore, Balak's money was wasted.

23:10 Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number one-fourth of Israel? Instead, through Balaam God promised to bless Israel by making them a singular nation and blessing them with great size.

Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his! Balaam concluded his oracle (another word for a prophecy) with this longing. Balaam was one of the many who long to die the death of the righteous, yet have no desire to live the life of the righteous. The two go together.

Balak's Disappointment – Verses 11-12

11 Balak said to Balaam, “What have you done to me? I brought you to curse my enemies, but you have done nothing but bless them!” **12 He answered, “Must I not speak what the LORD puts in my mouth?”**

23:11 What have you done to me? The king of Moab was understandably disturbed. He paid good money for a particular outcome, and it the opposite happened.

23:12 Must I not take heed to speak what the LORD has put in my mouth? Perhaps Balaam was disappointed also. It isn't hard to sense a note of sorrow in this response of his. After all, he wanted to please his employer.

Balaam's Second Message: Preparation Before The Prophecy – Verses 13-17

13 Then Balak said to him, “Come with me to another place where you can see them; you will not see them all but only the outskirts of their camp. And from there, curse them for me.” **14 So he took him to the field of Zophim on the top of Pisgah, and there he built seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.** **15 Balaam said to Balak, “Stay here beside your offering while I meet with him over there.”** **16 The LORD met with Balaam and put a word in his mouth and said, “Go back to Balak and give him this word.”** **17 So he went to him and found him standing beside his offering, with the Moabite officials. Balak asked him, “What did the LORD say?”**

23:13-17 A new site afforded a better view of Israel, though the whole nation was still not in view. Balak repeated the same ritual of sacrifice. God does not change His ultimate purposes or go back on His solemn promises.

God's Second Word To Balak Through Balaam – Verses 18-24

18 Then he spoke his message: “Arise, Balak, and listen; hear me, son of Zippor. **19 God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?** **20 I have received a command to bless; he has blessed, and I cannot change it.** **21 “No misfortune is seen in Jacob, no misery observed in Israel. The LORD their God is with them; the shout of the King is among them.** **22 God brought them out of Egypt; they have the strength of a wild ox.** **23 There is no divination against Jacob, no evil omens against Israel. It will now be said of Jacob and of Israel, ‘See what God has done!’** **24 The people rise like a lioness; they rouse themselves like a lion that does not rest till it devours its prey and drinks the blood of its victims.”**

23:18 Rise up Balak, and hear! In this message, God rebuked Balak, and taught him about the Divine nature, that He is not a man, that He does not lie or change His mind, that He always performs His word, and that He has all strength.

23:21 He has not observed iniquity in Jacob nor has He seen wickedness in Israel: God also taught Balak about the people of God, Israel. He taught them that they were blessed, that they were walking in purity, that God was with Israel, had brought them out of Egypt, had protected them against all sorcery and divination, and that He would see them through to victory.

23:22 He has strength like a wild ox: Wild ox (Numbers 23:22 and 24:8) is translated "unicorn" in the KJV. The Hebrew word here (reem) occurs nine times in the Old Testament. The idea behind the Hebrew word is either of one horn or a mighty horn. Some think it refers to a rhinoceros, others to a wild ox, or a strong goat. It is not out of the question that a unicorn may be in mind.

Balak's Disappointment – Verses 25-26

25 Then Balak said to Balaam, “Neither curse them at all nor bless them at all!” **26** Balaam answered, “Did I not tell you I must do whatever the LORD says?”

23:25 Either curse them at all, nor bless them at all! Balak was very frustrated and essentially said, "if you can't curse them, then at least don't go and bless them!"

Balaam's Third Message: Verses 27-29

27 Then Balak said to Balaam, “Come, let me take you to another place. Perhaps it will please God to let you curse them for me from there.” **28** And Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, overlooking the wasteland. **29** Balaam said, “Build me seven altars here, and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me.” **30** Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

23:27 Balak took Balaam to several places to try to entice him to curse the Israelites. He thought a change of scenery might help change Balaam's mind. But changing locations won't change God's will. We must learn to face the source of our problems. Moving to escape problems only makes solving them more difficult. Problems rooted in us are not solved by a change of scenery. A change in location or job may only distract us from the need for us to change our heart.