

Balaam and the Moabites  
Numbers 22 - 27  
February 17, 2019

Next Week. Numbers 28-36

Proverbs 28:15. "Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked man ruling over a helpless people."

Wesley's Questions for Class Meetings. #6. "Did the Bible live in me today [or this week]?"

What does the Bible Mean?

Chapter 21 ended with Israel defeating the Amorites and dwelling in their land. Ammon was in the country east of the Jordan River and generally opposite Jericho. Now Israel set out and camped on the plains of Moab.

Chapters 22 to 24 are a story of two characters. First, Balaam, son of Beor from Pethor, an ancient city in upper Mesopotamia near the Euphrates River. Second, Balak, son of Zippor, King of Moab. Balak means "one who lays waste" and Zippor means "a small bird" like a sparrow.

The chapters also deal with Moab. Moab was south of Ammon and east of the Dead Sea. It was a place of concern to Israel from the Exodus until the fall of Jerusalem. According to Genesis 19: 20-38, the ancestor of the Moabites was Moab, son of Lot and the older of his two daughters. Ruth, the subject of the Book of Ruth, was a Moabitess.

The story of Balak and Balaam is intriguing. Balaam is a prophet for hire and a diviner from a far and distant land - some 400 miles from the place of the event. Balak (of Moab) sent elders with a fee to Balaam to hire him to curse the Israelites who had defeated Ammon and whose numbers were a threat to Moab. God deals with Balaam directly and through a talking donkey to proclaim quite the opposite of the requested and expected curse.

Read. Numbers 22: 8-20

Balaam tells the representatives to lodge for the night so he can, "...bring you back the answer the Lord gives me." This suggests that Balaam believed in God, but the remainder of the text suggests that Balaam is the spokesman for and god. God asked who the men are. God reminded Balaam to beware of the company he keeps. Our associates exert subtle influence on us and impact our influence on others. Our decision to follow people should receive careful consideration. God told Balaam not to go with the men to Balak, so Balaam told them to return to their country, "...for the Lord has refused to let me go with you." Balaam continued to refuse to go regardless of the reward until God told him to go with the men, but he must follow God's words.

Questions.

Do others influence us?

Are we careful to choose who we should follow?  
Does our prayer life show that we follow God's bidding?

Read. Numbers 22: 22-14 (22-35, 36-41)

It is difficult to see why God would be angry with Balaam. He had waited for God's instructions. But Balaam, while following the Lord's commands, was blind like we sometimes are. Then, "God opened Balaam's eyes,...." He saw the angel for himself. He saw that he was being hindered in order to help him fully understand God's message and ways.

Finally Balaam went to Balak and his princes and after Balak made large sacrifices they went together to a high place and saw the people of Israel.

Questions.

Are we more like Balaam or his donkey? How so?  
Have we ever been surprised to realize that we are opposing God? What made us realize that?  
Is it possible to know God's will every step of the way?  
How can we tune ourselves better to know God's will for us?

The next section is three oracles of Balaam. They are strikingly parallel to the Deir Alla inscriptions from the eighth Century BC found in Jordan. A prophet named Balaam receives a vision from a council of "Almighty" Gods. The vision in 24:4 is from "Almighty" God. The oracles here are parallel to the inscriptions in that a curse is changed into a blessing.

Read. Numbers 23: 8-12 (Balaam's First Oracle)

Balaam had Balak build altars and offer sacrifices. Then Balaam delivered God's message which is his first oracle.

- V 9. A people apart is a people secure under God. Are we Christians "apart?"
- V 10. The dust of Jacob is the myriads of the Israelites. Jacob's issue is millions of Israelites.
- V 10. Righteousness. Being right with God and man makes it right when man meets death.

Questions.

When we seek God is our approach similar to Balaam's altars and sacrifices?  
When are our desires most often in conflict with God's?

Over Balak's objection Balaam acts like a true prophet. He *only* speaks what God put into his mouth.

So they go to another place to view the Israelites and they repeat building the altars and making sacrifices. Again Balaam receives the word of God.

Read. Numbers 23: 18-26 (Balaam's Second Oracle)

- Vs 19-20. God is not man. He does not lie or change his mind. He does not speak

and then not act. He does not promise and not fulfill. He has blessed. I (Balaam) cannot change it.

- V 21. Balaam must bless Israel and he discerns no misfortune for Israel.
- V 23. Israel is not the beneficiary of magic but of the proclamation, "See, what God has done."
- V24. Israel will prevail against its foes.

Balak is disappointed with the continued blessing but Balaam reminds him that he had told him so.

Then Balak took Balaam to a third overlook. Again they make sacrifices. Balaam then looked out and the "Spirit of God came upon him" and he uttered a third oracle.

Read. Numbers 24: 3b-9 (Balaam's Third Oracle)

- V 3b-4. Balaam acts as a true prophet whose eyes are opened. He heard the words of God (not the Lord as has been used up to not in the text). He fell down (sleeps) but his eyes still see.
- VV 5-6. The encampment of Israel is like gardens with trees. Israel has vitality and it comes from God.
- V 8. Israel shall be victorious over their foes.
- V 9. Here the lion has finished his hunt and rests. No one dares to rouse him.

Questions.

Does God wish all the goodness for us that he decrees for Israel? Why or why not?

How has he blessed us in this last year?

Does God *want* only good for us?

Do Balaam's oracles say anything about changing our ways and accepting God's will?

How do we respond to those who are angry with us?

Again Balak denounces Balaam. Balaam again responds that he warned Balak and could only be true to the words God had given him, but he will warn Balak about what God's people will do to Balak's people.

Read. Numbers 24:15-25 (Balaam's Fourth and Final Oracles)

Balaam "saw" as God saw the destruction of the Amalekites (occupied the desert south of Canaan from Beersheba probably into northern Arabia), Kenites (nomads living south of Palestine. Moses' father-in-law was a Kenite), Asshur (the whole Assyrian empire) and Eber (Eber is the ancestor of the Hebrews according to Genesis 10:21, 24-25, 11:14-28). So Eber is probably better taken as the land beyond the Hebrews. It is likely that the future predicted went as far as conquest by the Greeks and Romans. Then Balak and Balaam went their separate ways.

Notice in verse 16, "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel." Early Jews saw this as the Messiah was announced. To take it a bit further, some believe that the Magi followed the star because of this star. God's promise to Abraham was to make his seed as the stars of the heavens so the star evokes the future when the divine promise is fulfilled. A scepter is also mentioned, but Israel would not even have kings for many, many years. This symbol of a ruler is further confirmation of the vision of Messiah. The issue is not raised in the New Testament, but Matthew does refer to the Magi

following a star in the east.

### Questions.

What “enemies” do we face in everyday life?

Has God removed obstacles from us?

Chapter 25 tells that while the people were encamped in Moab, the Israelite men became sexually immoral with the Moabite women. The women invited the men to worship their gods. Israel joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor. Baal of Peor was the local Baal. In Canaan, Baal was the god of fertility but could also be the god of winter rain, storm and chaos. “The Lord's anger burned against them.” The Lord told Moses to tell the leaders to kill the people responsible in broad daylight (the sin was done in the dark of night) so that the Lord's anger would turn away. So Moses issued the command.

In Verse 6, the people were apparently mourning a plague. In front of everyone an Israelite man brought a Midianite woman to his family. Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, was outraged and drove a spear through them both. The plague ended.

The Lord said that the zeal of Phinehas turned his anger away and God would make a lasting covenant with the priests. The Israelite killed was Zimre, leader of the family of Simeon. Because the Midianites had deceived Israel, they were to be enemies to be killed.

Chapter 26, records the second census of the people. There were a total of 601,730 plus 23,000 Levites counted. In the first census there were 603,550 counted. The purpose of this census was to form a basis for allocating the land in Canaan. The Levites were not counted in the desert because there was no allocation of land there. “Not one of them was among those counted ... in the Desert of Sinai. For the Lord had told those Israelites they would surely die in the desert, and not one of them was left except for Caleb, son of Jephunneh, and Joshua, son of Nun.”

Chapter 27 begins with some daughters from the tribe of Manasseh telling Moses that their father had died and left no sons. They requested the father's property so his name would not disappear.

Moses sought the Lord's direction and the Lord instructed him to give the inheritance to the daughters.

The Lord went on to establish that a man's inheritance was to pass on even to his nearest relative in the clan if no one else was a survivor.

Read. Numbers 27:12-23

So Joshua was chosen to succeed Moses.

### Questions.

The daughter's request was for “equality under the law.” What do we hear today about “equality.” Is it

the same as the equality of inheritance? What are the differences between equality and “uniformity” or “fairness” or “special case” treatment under the law?

Is there equality among believers?

Who has been your “Moses” - your spiritual leader? Was there a problem when someone replaced him/her?