

DIGGING DEEPER

What Does A Donkey And A Fortune Teller Have To Do With A Christian?

Text: Num. 22-24, 31

INTRODUCTION: One of the very interesting accounts of Israel's Wilderness Wanderings comes to us in Numbers 22-24, with a final revealing commentary on the event in chapter 31. These happenings are often labeled "**Balak and Balaam**" or "**Balaam and the Talking Donkey.**"

As we dig deeper tonight, we are going to examine this account, but not just to understand the story, but to seek its significance for us as followers of the Lord Jesus. You may be surprised to learn that Jesus Himself refers to these events and draws from them a stern warning for the modern day church.

First, we start with the account in the Book of Numbers.

I. KING BALAK HIRES BALAAM TO CURSE ISRAEL.

Num. 22:1-6 ¹ Then the children of Israel moved, and camped in the plains of Moab on the side of the Jordan *across from* Jericho.

² Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. ³ And Moab was exceedingly afraid of the people because they *were* many, and Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel. ⁴ So Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this company will lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field." And Balak the son of Zippor *was* king of the Moabites at that time. ⁵ Then he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which *is* near the River in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying: "Look, a people has come from Egypt. See, they cover the face of the earth, and are settling next to me! ⁶ Therefore please come at once, curse this people for me, for they *are* too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I know that he whom you bless *is* blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed."

A. Who's Who

1. **Balak – King of Moab** (God had told Israel not to war against Edom or Moab, and Balak did not know that. Therefore he feared Israel because they had defeated the Amorites.)
2. **Balaam – A Soothsayer, Diviner (Fortune Teller) who served multiple gods**
3. **Donkey – Balaam's faithful beast of burden who was wiser than her master**

B. The Plot

1. **Leaders of Moab and their ally Midian try to hire Balaam.** Num. 22:7 So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the diviner's fee in their hand, and they came to Balaam and spoke to him the words of Balak.
2. **God tells Balaam "No."** Num. 22:12 And God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed."
3. **Balaam sends the leaders home, but they return offering more money.**
4. **Balaam sounds good at this point, but there is a crack in his armor.** Num. 22:18-19 ¹⁸ Then Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more. ¹⁹ Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the LORD will say to me."
5. **God tells Balaam he can go, but He tells Balaam to strictly limit what he says to the words that God gives him.** Num. 22:20 And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men come to call you, rise and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you—that you shall do."
6. **Now arises a mystery.** Num. 22:21-22 ²¹ So Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab. ²² Then God's anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the LORD took His stand in the way as an adversary against him. And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him.
 - a. **If God told Balaam he could go, why was the Lord angry with him?**
 - b. **The answer is in Num. 22:32** And the Angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because *your way* is perverse before Me. **God says Balaam's way was perverse or "contrary."**
 - c. **Apparently Balaam was going, but his heart was not committed to speaking only the Word of the Lord. His eye was on the riches.**
 - d. **This is confirmed in Num. 22:34-35** ³⁴ And Balaam said to the Angel of the LORD, "I have sinned, for I did not know You stood in the way against me. Now therefore, if it displeases You, I will turn back." ³⁵ Then the Angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak." So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.
7. **Following the mystery is a miracle.**

Num. 22:23-35 ²³ Now the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the way and went into the field. So Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back onto the road. ²⁴ Then the Angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, *with* a wall on this side and a wall on that side. ²⁵ And when the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she pushed herself against the wall and

crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck her again. ²⁶ Then the Angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. ²⁷ And when the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam's anger was aroused, and he struck the donkey with his staff.

²⁸ Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"

²⁹ And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have abused me. I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!"

³⁰ So the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden, ever since *I became yours*, to this day? Was I ever disposed to do this to you?"

And he said, "No."

³¹ Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand; and he bowed his head and fell flat on his face. ³² And the Angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because *your way is perverse before Me*. ³³ The donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times. If she had not turned aside from Me, surely I would also have killed you by now, and let her live."

³⁴ And Balaam said to the Angel of the LORD, "I have sinned, for I did not know You stood in the way against me. Now therefore, if it displeases You, I will turn back."

³⁵ Then the Angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak." So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

8. **Balaam goes to meet with King Balak of Moab, but now he goes afraid to speak anything except the words God gives him.** Num. 22:38 And Balaam said to Balak, "Look, I have come to you! Now, have I any power at all to say anything? The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak."
9. **Balaam proceeds to deliver four prophecies. They were prophecies because God gave him the words, even though Balaam was not one of Yhwh's prophets.**
 - a. Num. 23:7-10 ⁷ And he took up his oracle and said: "Balak the king of Moab has brought me from Aram, From the mountains of the east. 'Come, curse Jacob for me, And come, denounce Israel!' ⁸ "How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? And how shall I denounce *whom* the LORD has not denounced? ⁹ For from the top of the rocks I see him, And from the hills I behold him; There! A people dwelling alone, Not reckoning itself among the nations. ¹⁰ "Who can count the dust of Jacob, Or number

one-fourth of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, And let my end be like his!”

- b. Num. 23:18-24 ¹⁸ Then he took up his oracle and said: “Rise up, Balak, and hear! Listen to me, son of Zippor! ¹⁹ “God *is* not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? ²⁰ Behold, I have received a *command* to bless; He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it.

²¹ “He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, Nor has He seen wickedness in Israel. The LORD his God *is* with him, And the shout of a King *is* among them. ²² God brings them out of Egypt; He has strength like a wild ox.

²³ “For *there is* no sorcery against Jacob, Nor any divination against Israel. It now must be said of Jacob And of Israel, ‘Oh, what God has done!’

²⁴ Look, a people rises like a lioness, And lifts itself up like a lion; It shall not lie down until it devours the prey, And drinks the blood of the slain.”

- c. Num. 24:3-9 ³ Then he took up his oracle and said: “The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor, The utterance of the man whose eyes are opened, ⁴ The utterance of him who hears the words of God, Who sees the vision of the Almighty, Who falls down, with eyes wide open:

⁵ “How lovely are your tents, O Jacob! Your dwellings, O Israel! ⁶ Like valleys that stretch out, Like gardens by the riverside, Like aloes planted by the LORD, Like cedars beside the waters. ⁷ He shall pour water from his buckets, And his seed *shall be* in many waters.

“His king shall be higher than Agag, And his kingdom shall be exalted.

⁸ “God brings him out of Egypt; He has strength like a wild ox; He shall consume the nations, his enemies; He shall break their bones And pierce *them* with his arrows. ⁹ ‘He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him?’

“Blessed *is* he who blesses you, And cursed *is* he who curses you.”

- d. Num. 24:15-17 ¹⁵ So he took up his oracle and said: “The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor, And the utterance of the man whose eyes are opened; ¹⁶ The utterance of him who hears the words of God, And has the knowledge of the Most High, *Who* sees the vision of the Almighty, *Who* falls down, with eyes wide open:

¹⁷ “I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel, And batter the brow of Moab, And destroy all the sons of tumult.

10. Balaam finishes his prophecies and goes home. Num. 24:25 So Balaam rose and departed and returned to his place; Balak also went his way.

So Balak is frustrated. Israel has been blessed. They remain camped on the plains of Moab, ready to approach the Jordan River where they shall cross and at last enter the Promised Land. And then suddenly and without explanation, everything changes!

Num. 25:1 Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab.

II. THE ISRAELITES COMMIT IDOLATRY IN MOAB.

- A. Why?** Num. 25:2-3 ² They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. ³ So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.
- B. The Moabite women enticed some of the Israelite men to join in their licentious worship of Baal.**
- C. God punished all the offenders.** Num. 25:4-5 ⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the LORD, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel." ⁵ So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor."
- D. In verses 17 and 18, God also told Israel to later attack the Midianites because they were in collusion with the Moabites to lead Israel into idolatry.**

At this point in the text, we seem to leave everything about the Moabites, the Midianites, and Balak and Balaam as God instructs Israel concerning a census and certain offerings.

Then in chapter 31, God tells Israel it is time to take God's vengeance on the Midianites, and they do. In verse 8 it names the kings of the Midianite tribes that Israel kills, and then it says

Num. 31:8b Balaam the son of Beor they also killed with the sword.

III. THE DEATH OF BALAAM

Interesting, **Balaam gets killed while he is with the Midianites.**

What was he doing there?

Why does God let him get killed?

He only spoke the Word of the Lord.

Yet in every reference to Balaam after this point in Scripture, it always refers to him as a wicked man.

What do these Biblical authors know that we do not know?

IV. FIGURING IT ALL OUT

- A. The answer comes from the lips of the Risen Christ when He sends a message to the church at Pergamos.**

Revelation 2:14 "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling

block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

- B. Balaam could not speak an evil prophecy or fortune against Israel, so he found another way to get the lucrative payment from Balak.**
- C. He told King Balak and the Mididanite kings to have the women seduce the Israelite men into joining in their promiscuous worship of Baal and thus commit idolatry against their God.**

V. THE WARNING TO THE CHURCH AND TO CHRISTIANS

Jesus' warning to the church and to Christians is against the doctrine of Balaam.

The doctrine of Balaam is the doctrine of accommodation to the ways of the world.

It is the doctrine of compromise to do things as the world does them.

It is the teaching that says "speak the Word of the Lord, but do the works of the world."

Conclusion:

Such doctrine of Balaam holds great sway and prominence in the lives of many a Christian and the practices of many a church!