

LESSON 26: NUMBERS 22-25
JULY 18, 2012

OVERVIEW

- . Balak summons Balaam – Numbers 22
- . The character of Balaam
- . Balaam's seven oracles – Numbers 23-24
- . Moab's seduction of Israel – Numbers 25

BALAK SUMMONS BALAAM – NUMBERS 22

- . Fear of Israelites grips Balak, king of the Moabites – Numbers 22:1-4
 - . Israelites easily conquer the Amorites
 - . The Amorites were neighbors and enemies of the Moabites that had caused trouble for the Moabites over the years
 - . Israelites set up camp on larger plain north of the Arnon River, east of Jordan River
 - . Balak and the Moabites form an alliance with the Midianites, to the south
- . A group of elders from the Moabites and Midianites travel to Pethor, to summon Balaam – Numbers 22:5-7
 - . Pethor is approx. 600 km. north of Moab, on the Euphrates River
 - . Balaam is a pagan diviner, well known throughout the region, for his prophecy and effective curses
 - . As a pagan diviner, he made his living charging fees for his services and Curses
 - . As the best diviner in the region, his fees were expensive to which the desperate Moabite king was willing to pay
 - . Balak believed the only hope of defeating the Israelites was to have Balaam put a curse on them
- . Balaam turns down their offer – Numbers 22:8-13
 - . Balaam takes Moabite request before God and God says no – Numbers 22:12
 - . Balaam honors God's request and sends them back home – Numbers 22:13
- . Balak, refusing to give up, sends another delegation, with more distinguished representatives – Numbers 22:14-17
- . Balaam goes back to the Lord who tells him to go, but to do only as the Lord instructs Numbers 22:18-20

- . Balaam and his donkey – Numbers 22:21-41
 - . God is angry when Balaam leaves the next morning (verse 22) and sends the angel of the Lord to stand in the road and block their path
 - . Only the donkey can see the angel – Numbers 22:23-27
 - . First time the donkey sees the angel, she veers off the road in the ditch
 - . Balaam beats her to get her back on the path
 - . Second time the donkey sees angel it veers up against the wall, crushing Balaam's leg
 - . Balaam beats her to get her back on path
 - . Third time, the donkey lies down
 - . Balaam beats her to get her to stand up
 - . The Lord speaks to Balaam through the donkey – Numbers 22:28-30
 - . "What have I done to make you beat me?"
 - . "You have made a fool of me"
 - . The Lord then opens Balaam's eyes so he can see the angel and understand the donkey's actions
 - . This offers the first insight into Balaam and his character
 - . "I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me" – Numbers 22:32
 - . Balaam appears to acknowledge his sin and offers to return Numbers 22:34
 - . The Lord tells him to go forward, but speak only what I tell you
 - . Second time we hear the Lord say these words to Balaam

THE CHARACTER OF BALAAM

- . Was Balaam a man of God, seeking to put God's will above his own
 - . Much of the dialog in Numbers 22 would lend support to this position
 - . When first summoned, he turns to God for direction and follows God's Advice
 - . When summoned again, he turns down any type of financial offer and turns to God for advice
 - . When God says to go he goes
 - . When on the road, once he realizes his mistake with donkey, he admits his sins and offers to turn back
 - . When the Lord says to continue he does
 - . When Balak questions his tardiness Balaam declares he follows the direction of God
 - . "I must speak only what God puts in my mouth"
 - . In Numbers 23 & 24 Balaam utters profound oracles concerning the future of Israel and even the coming of the Messiah
 - . Only a man in relationship with God would hear God's prophecy regarding such important matters
 - . So, was Balaam a godly man who later fell into serious transgressions?

- . Was Balaam using God to further his own agenda and power
 - . The Bible has much to say about this
 - . Numbers 31:7-16
 - . Deuteronomy 23:4-5
 - . 2 Peter 2:15
 - . Jude 11
 - . Revelation 2:14
 - . Numbers 22 gives us a look under Balaam's skin
 - . "I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me" – Numbers 22:22
 - . We are introduced to him as a pagan diviner
 - . He is paid to bestow curses or blessings for money
 - . Does the story of the donkey disclose his true nature
 - . He claims to be a seer, yet the donkey can see the angel and he can't
 - . He claims to be able to speak the words of God, yet God uses the donkey to speak to Balaam
- . Regardless of where Balaam's heart was at, God was able to work His will through Balaam and the situation described in Numbers 22
 - . Whether we are plugged in to God's will or not, God's will be done

BALAAM'S SEVEN ORACLES – NUMBERS 23 – 24

- . The theme of the first oracle is the unique and irrevocable blessing of God upon Israel, which sets it apart from other nations – Numbers 23:1-12
 - . "I cannot curse those whom God has not cursed or denounce those whom God has not denounced"
 - . "Who can count the dust of Jacob"
 - . Reference to Genesis 13:16 where God promised Abraham that He would make His offspring "like the dust of the Earth"
 - . At the end of oracle Balak is beside himself with anger
 - . "I brought you to curse my enemies and you have blessed them"
- . The theme of the second oracle builds upon the first – Numbers 23:27-24:14
 - . Not only did God reaffirm His blessing upon the Israelites, but even claims to dwell in their midst – Numbers 23:21
 - . Second, the matter of past blessing is extended into the future, for the promise is that nothing will stand against Israel – Numbers 23:24
 - . If the first oracle focused on His promise, the second oracle focuses on the steadfastness of His promises
 - . God never begins a work that He will not finish

- . The third oracle is truly prophetic, foretelling Israel's pending settlement in the Promised Land, the rise of the monarchy, and the victory of the Israelites over their many enemies
 - . The most specific prophecy – "Their king will be greater than Agag"
 - . Agag, the future king of the Amalekites, was defeated by Israel's King Saul – 1 Samuel 15:7-9
 - . This event occurred hundreds of years after this prophecy
 - . Once again, Balak is furious to the point of banging his hands together in wild exasperation
- . The last of the major oracles stresses the fact that its prophesies are for a distant date Numbers 24:15-19
 - . "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near" – Numbers 24:17
 - . The messianic language surrounding this prophecy embraces more than a mere human king
 - . "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel" Numbers 24:17
 - . "A ruler will come out of Jacob" – Numbers 24:19
 - . This represents one of the earliest and most powerful messianic prophecies
- . The final three, more minor oracles – Numbers 24:20-25
 - . The first prophesies the destruction of the Amalekites
 - . The second, the destruction of the Kenites
 - . The last is the most puzzling
 - . It refers to ships from Kittim that will subdue Asshur (Assyria) and Eber (Mesopotamia) but will themselves eventually come to ruin
 - . It could refer to the invasion of Alexander the Great or to later Roman incursions
 - . It also could be connected to the invasion of the Sea People or Philistines that occurred much later

MOAB'S SEDUCTION OF ISRAEL – NUMBERS 25

- . For the first time in this narrative with Balaam (Ch. 22-25) Israel becomes directly involved in action's counter to God's will
 - . Although actions against God had been common in the Israelite community, this represents the first known case of apostasy
 - . A complete forsaking of ones religion for another
 - . In this case, the worship of Baal
 - . Baalism, a fertility cult, was practiced by means of sacred prostitution

- . Balaam himself was the instigator of this physical and spiritual seduction
 - . No mention is made in Numbers 25, but this fact is referenced later in Numbers 31:8, 16 and Revelation 2:14
 - . Unable to curse the Israelites, Balaam advises Balak that he could accomplish the same end by enticing the people away from their God to the worship of Baal
- . Phinehas to the rescue
 - . Grandson of Aaron, Israel's first high priest
 - . In the course of the Moabite women seducing the Israelite men, one couple ended up engaging in intercourse at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, for all to see
 - . Phinehas grabs a spear and pierces the couple through the heart
 - . Because of his bold intervention the plague that God had sent in judgment Stopped
 - . An estimated 24,000 Israelite men killed as a result of this transgression

NEXT LESSON IS WEDNESDAY AUGUST 1, 2012: NUMBERS 26 - 36