

The Book of Numbers

Lesson 14: Balak Summons Balaam -- Numbers 22:1-41

Israel is camped on the plains of Moab, just across the Jordan from the land God promised. They have nothing in their hands but tents and a long memory of deliverance, yet a king is terrified of them. Balak son of Zippor has watched what Israel did to the Amorites, and now they are spread out on his doorstep like a swarm too vast to count. The text says Moab was in great dread, sick with fear of this people. It is a strange and wonderful thing: the people of God, fresh from the wilderness, frighten the nations not because of their armies but because God is with them.

Balak's plan is not a sword but a spell. If he cannot defeat Israel in battle, perhaps he can defeat them with a curse. So he sends for Balaam, a diviner with a reputation, a man whom kings believe can bless and curse with effect, and he offers him the fee of a soothsayer. Come, he says, curse this people for me, for they are too mighty. From the very start the contest is rigged in a way Balak cannot see: you cannot hire a curse against a people God has chosen to bless. The whole drama that follows is God patiently, sometimes sharply, making that truth unmistakable.

Balaam is one of the most slippery figures in Scripture. He talks like a man devoted to the LORD, insisting he can only say what God puts in his mouth, yet his feet keep drifting toward the money. God tells him plainly not to go, then, when the messengers return with grander promises, lets him go under strict conditions, and then in His anger sends an angel with a drawn sword to block the road. And here comes one of the most astonishing scenes in all of Scripture: a donkey sees the angel that the famous seer cannot, turns aside three times, is beaten three times, and finally opens her mouth to rebuke her master. The animal sees; the prophet is blind. God will have His say, even if He has to use a donkey to say it.

We meet ourselves somewhere in this chapter. Maybe in Balak, frantically trying to manage a threat by working an angle instead of facing God. Maybe in Balaam, saying the right words about the Lord while our hearts lean hard toward the reward. Maybe in the donkey, of all things, sensing that something is wrong on the road and being beaten for our trouble. And over it all stands a God who will not be hired, who guards His people, and who can turn even a divided man and a stubborn animal to serve His purposes. The question this lesson presses on us is simple and searching: is your heart, like Balaam's, quietly bent on gain, or have you learned that the blessing of God can never be bought, sold, or cursed away?

Group Discussion: Why do you think God's people so often frighten a watching world more by who they belong to than by anything they possess, and where do you see that dynamic at work today?

Personal Reflection: Where in your life are you tempted, like Balaam, to use the language of devotion to God while your heart is actually leaning toward some reward you want?

Read Numbers 22:1–41

Study Questions

1. Read Numbers 22:1–6. Balak is gripped with dread and tries to defeat Israel with a hired curse rather than a sword. What does his fear reveal about how the nations perceived God's presence with His people, and why is a curse powerless against those God has chosen to bless?
2. Balak responded to a threat by working an angle instead of facing the truth about God. When you feel threatened or cornered, do you tend to scheme and manage the problem, or to turn honestly to God?
3. Read Numbers 22:7–14. God tells Balaam plainly not to go and not to curse the people, for they are blessed. What does God's clear first answer teach us about the sufficiency of His revealed will, and about the danger of asking again when He has already spoken?
4. Think of a time you knew clearly what God's word required but kept looking for a different answer. What was your heart really seeking in that moment?
5. Read Numbers 22:15–21. Balak sends more honorable men and greater rewards, and Balaam, though he speaks piously about not going beyond the word of the LORD, asks God again. How does the lure of greater reward expose the true bent of a divided heart even behind religious-sounding words?

6. Where is the love of gain or recognition quietly shaping your decisions, even decisions you dress up in spiritual language?
7. Read Numbers 22:22–35, the donkey and the angel. The animal sees the angel with the drawn sword that the famous seer cannot see. What does this reversal teach us about spiritual blindness, and how a heart bent on gain can leave us unable to see what God is plainly doing?
8. When have you been so set on what you wanted that you missed warnings God was placing right in front of you, and what finally opened your eyes?
9. Read Numbers 22:38 with 23:8 and Proverbs 21:30. Balaam admits he can speak only the word God puts in his mouth, and later asks how he can curse whom God has not cursed. How does God's sovereign protection of His people stand firm over every scheme of man, and what does it mean that no wisdom or counsel can prevail against the LORD?
10. Name one specific way Christ is teaching you, through this chapter, to trust that God Himself is guarding you and to root out any divided loyalty so that your heart belongs wholly to Him.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: 2 Peter 2:15–16, Peter condemns the way of Balaam who loved the wages of unrighteousness and was rebuked by his donkey; Jude 11, Balaam is listed among

those who rushed for profit and led others astray; Revelation 2:14, the teaching of Balaam exposed as a snare that led God's people into sin; Proverbs 21:30, no wisdom, understanding, or counsel can prevail against the LORD; Romans 8:31, if God is for us, who can be against us, the New Testament echo of God's protection of His people

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