

Balak and Balaam, Part 1

Numbers 22

Group ¹	C	V	Description
Balak Sends for Balaam	22	1	Israel journeys to Moab, across the Jordan from Jericho
		2-6	Balak, king of Moab, sends for Balaam to curse the Israelites
		7-14	Balaam initially refuses at the Lord's command
		15-20	Balak sends a second group, Balaam agrees to go but to only speak what God tells him to speak
The Angel and Balaam	22	21-30	The angel of the Lord tries to stop Balaam
		31-35	Balaam is allowed to see the angel, who confirms that Balaam is only to speak what the Lord tells him to speak concerning the Israelites
		36-40	Balak goes out to meet Balaam, who in turn reaffirms that he can only speak what God tells him to speak
		41	The next day they go up to a high place and to see the Israelites

Reflections

In this chapter we are introduced to Balaam. We learn that he had a reputation for his prophecies coming true (v6) and that he was a prophet for hire (v7). We also learn that he is from a city, Pethor, by the River, presumably the Euphrates or one of its tributaries, some 400 or more miles away in Aram of Mesopotamia, modern Syria (see Numbers 23:7; Deuteronomy 23:4).²

We will find over the next couple of chapters that there is both good and bad to be said about this man. In this chapter we will see a couple examples.

First, God initially tells him not to go with the men Balak sent, then after being sent for a second time, in defiance of God's will, asks the men to stay the night, and then agrees to go with them, after God permits it with the condition of only speaking what God would tell him. God sends an angel to stop Balaam, who conveys God's anger and reminds him to only speak what God tells him to speak.

Numbers 22:12-13 NASB God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed." **13** So Balaam arose in the morning and said to Balak's leaders, "Go back to your land, for the LORD has refused to let me go with you."

Numbers 22:20 NASB God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men have come to call you, rise up *and* go with them; but only the word which I speak to you shall you do."

Second, he was stubborn to a fault. On his journey to Balak, three times the angel of the Lord tried to stop Balaam and the donkey which he was riding on tried to avoid the angel and wound up injuring Balaam in the process. Finally, the third time, when there was no means of bypassing the angel the donkey laid down. The Believer's Bible Commentary offers this, "Even a donkey, the symbol of stubbornness, knew when to quit, but not the stubborn, willful prophet!"³ Each time the donkey tried to avoid the angel, Balaam struck or beat the donkey. Finally, God opens the mouth of the donkey to confront Balaam about this abuse. Then he is allowed to see the angel of the Lord.

1 (NASB) "Group" column from the headings in the NASB text.

2 (Orr "Pethor")

3 (MacDonald and Farstad on Numbers 22:22-27)

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Third, he initially and repeatedly tells Balak and his representatives that he can only speak what God tells him to speak, especially being instructed by the angel.

Numbers 22:18 NASB Balaam replied to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, either small or great, contrary to the command of the LORD my God.

Numbers 22:35 NASB But the angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but you shall speak only the word which I tell you." So Balaam went along with the leaders of Balak.

Numbers 22:38 NASB So Balaam said to Balak, "Behold, I have come now to you! Am I able to speak anything at all? The word that God puts in my mouth, that I shall speak."

From this chapter, it seems like Balaam might be more than a simple diviner or soothsayer, as was common, who would make predictions based on events in nature or by looking at the remains of sacrificed animals or through some other ritual.⁴ God appears to him in visions in the night and from that he makes his prophetic pronouncements. However, we also know that he was a prophet for hire as well, so probably not a true worshiper of God.

Numbers 22:7 NASB So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the *fees for* divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam and repeated Balak's words to him.

Numbers 22:18 NASB Balaam replied to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, either small or great, contrary to the command of the LORD my God.

It is interesting that Balaam was not an Israelite but God spoke to him. In this, and really only this, he is similar to Melchizedek, who is called a priest of God Most High (Genesis 14:18). We will learn about Balaam in the next couple of chapters.

There and Then: Here and Now

Answer the questions below as you reflect on your own life and this part of our study⁵: *my LOG vs others SPECK*. Here are some possible responses I've identified from the text that might apply to anyone.

S - Are there *sins* for me to avoid or confess?

•

P - Are there *promises* from God for me to claim?

•

E - Are there *examples* for me to follow or avoid?

•

C - Are there *commands* for me to obey?

•

K - How has this passage increased my *knowledge* about God / Jesus / Holy Spirit?

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Key Words: Old Testament, Torah/Pentateuch, Numbers, Balak, Balaam, Angel of the Lord, Prophets

⁴ (Walton et al. on Numbers 22:6)

⁵ *Navigator Bible Study Handbook* (The Navigators), with additions & Matthew 7:1-5.

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