

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 13

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

CHAPTER 22

INTRODUCTION

The children of Israel moved and encamped on the plains of Moab on the eastern side of the river Jordan. There they faced a different kind of enemy. Recently, they had won military victories against king Arad of the Canaanites, king Sihon of the Amorites, and king Og of Bashan. These victories had boosted their morale. Unknown to them, the king of Moab was engaging a diviner, by the name of Balaam, to curse the children of Israel so that the Moabites, who were in league with the Midianites, could defeat them. These events are recorded in Numbers 22-24.

Many people know about Balaam because his donkey talked and had a conversation with him. This is narrated in Numbers 22. It is a strange event because it is true, and the theological value of the narrative is one of the most profound. The chapter displays the power of God, the ineffectiveness of spiritual rulers of darkness, and God's intent to protect His people.

The chapter can be divided into five sections: (1) the king sends for Balaam; (2) Balaam's first meeting

with the king's emissaries; (3) the second attempt to hire Balaam; (4) the attempt of the Angel of the LORD to keep Balaam in obedience; (5) Balaam met with king Balak.

OUTLINE

A. Balak, the King of Moab, Sent for Balaam (22:2-21).

1. The Moabites were afraid because of Israel's victories over the Amorites (22:2-3).
2. King Balak made a pact with the Midianites to stop Israel (22:4).
3. King Balak sent his ministers to summon Balaam (22:5-6).
 - a) Balak expressed his fear of Israel (5).
 - b) Balak called Balaam to curse Israel (6).

B. Balaam Refused to Go to the First Meeting (22:7-14).

1. Balak's emissaries met with Balaam (22:7).
2. Balaam intended to seek the LORD (22:8)
3. God told Balaam not to go and not to curse Israel (22:9-12)
4. Balaam refused to go and sent the emissaries back (22:13)
5. The emissaries returned and reported to Balak accordingly (14).

C. Balaam Went on the Second Meeting (22:15-21).

1. King Balak sent back the emissaries to Balaam with more gifts and promises (22:15).

2. The emissaries met with Balaam and persuaded him with promises of better and bigger gifts (22:16-17).
3. Balaam seemed not to be moved by the promises and gifts (22:18).
4. Balaam asked God again (22:19).
5. God told Balaam to go with the emissaries and to speak only the word that the LORD would give him (22:20).
6. Balaam saddled his ass and went with the emissaries (21).

D. The LORD Opened the Mouth of Balaam's Ass (22:22-35).

1. God was angry that Balaam went (22:22a).
2. The Angel of the LORD hindered Balaam from going (22:22b).
3. Balaam and his ass (22:23-30).
 - a) The ass turned away because it saw the Angel of the LORD (22:23a).
 - b) Balaam smote the ass to turn it to the right way (22:23b).
 - c) The ass could not proceed because the Angel of the LORD stood in the way (24-26).
 - d) The ass finally fell down and Balaam hit it with a staff (27).
 - e) The LORD made the ass to speak (28a).
 - f) The ass complained to Balaam for his unreasonableness (28b-30).
4. The LORD opened the eyes of Balaam (22:31-35).

- a) Balaam was able to see the Angel of the LORD (31a).
- b) Balaam fell face down (31b).
- c) The Angel of the LORD chided Balaam for mistreating the ass (32a).
- d) The Angel of the LORD gave the reason why the ass turned away (32b-33).
- e) Balaam confessed his sin and was willing to abandon the mission (34).
- f) The Angel of the LORD told him to go but he should only speak the word of the LORD (35).

E. Balak Welcomed Balaam (22:36-41).

1. Balak received Balaam in the city of Moab (22:36).
2. Balak chided Balaam (22:37).
3. Balaam admitted that he had no power and would only do God's bidding (22:38).
4. Balak entertained Balaam and his men (22:39-40).
5. Balak took Balaam to a high place to have a panoramic view of the children of Israel (22:41).

COMMENTARY

Call Balaam, the Diviner

The Moabites were kinsmen of Israel. They were the descendants of Lot by his elder daughter (Genesis 19:37). The Moabites had nothing to fear from the Israelites. In fact, the LORD had specifically told Moses

that they should not contend against the Moabites (Deuteronomy 2:9). King Balak should not fear the Israelites. But he was overcome by what the Israelites did to the Amorites kings, Arad, Sihon and Og. He was so emotionally terrified the very thought of Israel was repulsive and distasteful to him. He allied with the Midianites, who were also a distant relative of Israel. The Midianites were descendants of Abraham by his second wife Keturah (Genesis 25:2, 4). King Balak took the lead and together they sought the services of a diviner. A diviner is one who uses the means of cursing and blessing to alter the future for evil or for good for money. The famous diviner they sought was Balaam, the son of Beor, who lived in Pethor by "the river" (that is, Euphrates). Balak acknowledged that Israel was "too mighty for me." He wanted Balaam to curse Israel so that Israel would be weakened and defeated by him. So Balak sent his emissaries with rewards and gifts to persuade Balaam to curse Israel. In those days, it mattered to people what the diviners or sorcerers, like Balaam said. We are not surprised that many people today still believe in such things.

God Says, "No"

So the emissaries of Moab and Midian left with rewards for Balaam. They told Balaam all the words of Balak. Balaam did not accept their invitation straightaway. He told them to stay for the night and that he would bring word "as the LORD shall speak unto me" (v.8). That night God came to Balaam. God asked Balaam a question (v.9), "What men are these with you?" This does not

mean that God did not know who these men were and why they came to Balaam. It was a question for Balaam to answer. Balaam answered precisely, that they came to ask him to curse "a people come out of Egypt." Observe that Balaam did not use the name of Israel, neither did Balak. The people in question were none other than Israel. God plainly and unequivocally said to Balaam (v.12), "Thou shalt not go with them and thou shalt not curse the people for they are blessed." Accordingly, the morning of the next day, Balaam sent them back saying that the LORD did not let him go with them.

Balaam could not be considered as a genuine servant of God. He was a Gentile who practised divination, a practice that was condemned by God (Deuteronomy 18:10-- *There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth **divination**, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch*). The fact that he used the name of the LORD (Hebrew, *Yahweh*) does not make him a believer and a follower in *Yahweh*, like Moses or Aaron. As a diviner, his job was to make contact with the gods of the particular people who came to him for guidance and counsel. In this case it was the God of Israel, *Yahweh*. If Israel had a God named *Yahweh*, then to *Yahweh* he must go to seek the will of *Yahweh*. God spoke to Balaam. It cannot be denied. But Balaam just did not know that the God of Israel is not like any other so-called gods, which he had been divining. The God of Israel made it very clear to

him that he must not go and must not curse Israel.

God says, "Go"

Balak's emissaries returned to him and reported that Balaam would not come. This was unacceptable to Balak. He was desperate, and he sent his emissaries back to Balaam with promises of bigger and better rewards and gifts. The emissaries came to Balaam again and persuaded him with all the great things that he might be rewarded for cursing Israel. Balaam said to them (v.19), "Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the LORD will say unto me more." God told him that night to go with the men, but he must speak the word that God would give him (v.20). And Balaam saddled his ass and went with Balak's men.

The obvious thing that surprises us is that God who had told him very clearly not to go, said now to him to go, but Balaam must say and do only what God permitted. God never changes His mind. All of His decisions are right. There must be a good explanation for this. Balaam was told not to go. God did not change His mind. Balaam's refusal to accept the first prohibition, and persisted in going will result in his own ruin. This was so as seen subsequently. In other words, God saw his heart. Balaam thought and hoped that God would change his mind. The word in verse 19, "more," gives him away. But the God of Israel is different from all the other supposed deities. It was clear that he was attracted and tempted by the bigger and better gifts and honours promised him. His boast that he would not go beyond the word of the

LORD, even if Balak would give him "his house full of silver and gold" was pretence to establish his credibility. The divine comments concerning Balaam are not good. Peter the Apostle says (2 Peter 2:15) that he loved "the wages of unrighteousness." Jude says (Jude 11) that Balaam was greedy for reward and he perished." The Lord Jesus Christ Himself testified that Balaam was an evil man (Revelation 2:14). Balaam wanted very much to go; too much of a reward to pass off. God saw his heart, and let him have his own way. That is dangerous, for we remember David's word concerning the LORD (Psalm 62:11), "*God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.* What Balaam ought to have done was to send the emissaries packing back to Balak and tell them not to come back again. He did not do that!

The Donkey Speaks

Balaam saddled his ass and with the tow of his servant, they all left together. God was angry with Balaam. On the way, the Angel of the LORD blocked the way. Balaam's donkey saw the Angel of the LORD blocking the way, and she turned aside out of the way. Balaam hit the donkey. This happened three times. The third time the donkey could not take it and fell under Balaam who became angry and struck at the animal. And all of a sudden and to our surprise, the donkey *spoke*. The LORD gave her the power to speak! Let me paraphrase the conversation between Balaam and his donkey. The donkey said, "Why did you beat me these three times?" Balaam

said, "Because you make a fool of me. If I have a sword I will kill you now." The donkey, "Am I not your donkey who had faithfully served you all these years until now? Have I been in the habit of making a fool of you?" Balaam answered the donkey, "No!"

Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam so that he could now see the Angel of the LORD blocking the way. The Angel of the LORD chided him for hitting the donkey three times. The donkey behaved the way he did because the Angel of the LORD stood in the way. Balaam immediately confessed his sin and suggested that if it displeased the LORD he would not proceed. The LORD told him to go but that he must speak the word that the Lord gave him (v.35).

This incident is very humorous but nonetheless theologically profound. God was angry because he knew Balaam's greed and secret scheme. It was a humiliating experience for Balaam. His donkey, proverbially the dumbest of all animals, could see the Angel of the LORD, whereas Balaam, an internationally known diviner, was spiritually blind and could not see the Angel. Balaam was not surprised at all that his donkey spoke! How blind was he! People who are obsessed with their own ways, avarice and pride are blind to the things and ways of the LORD. People who are not walking in the ways of God will ill-treat the innocent, represented by the donkey.

God wanted to seize the attention of Balaam. When He opened his eyes and Balaam realised his foolishness, the LORD

reminded him to speak only the word that the LORD would give him. God used his donkey to catch his attention. Balaam was certainly very happy that the LORD had changed His mind. God does not. It was not good for him. As a spiritual man he should realise that. But then, money and his reputation were more important to him. God was pointing out to Balaam how foolish and ill guided he was. His sin had blinded him.

God revealed to us His power. He was in control. He was able to make the donkey talk, and talk sensibly too. He was able to make only the donkey see the Angel of the LORD, whereas his two servants and Balak's emissaries were unable. How they would be wondering what was happening.

God's Will or My Will

Balaam arrived in the city of Moab and met Balak. Balak chided him for not coming quickly the first time. He further remarked whether Balaam doubted whether he could pay him. Balaam replied that he had now come but that he would only speak the word that God put in his mouth (v.38). Balaam was in a trapped situation. Earlier he expressed to the Angel of the LORD that if it displeased the LORD he would go back. He wanted to go back because he could not curse Israel, which was what Balak wanted and paid him to do. Therefore, in order to avoid not doing what Balak expected him to do, the solution was to go back. But it was too late. The alternative of avoiding the situation was no longer possible. This predicament must have struck a chord in many a person's heart.

This kind of experience is quite common among people. There is the tension between what we want to do and what *God* wants us to do. In such situations, it is best to obey God. Make no compromises or twist the word of God to suit ourselves. If we carry on doing what we want to do despite knowing that it is not the will of God, it will be dangerous. It will be too late to revert and we may have to bear the consequences of our sinful action. The safest and best way is to do the will of God. **AMEN**

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**MONDAY: Numbers 22:1-6;
Genesis 19:36-37; 25:1-4;
Deuteronomy 23:3-6.¹**

1. Was the fear of the Moabites and the Midianites of the children of Israel necessary?

2. What was Balaam's occupation? What does it tell us about the people in ancient days?

¹ Genesis 23:36 Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father. 37 And the firstborn bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same *is* the father of the Moabites unto this day.

Genesis 25:1 Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name *was* Keturah. 2 And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah. 3 And Jokshan begat Sheba, and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummim. 4 And the sons of Midian; Ephah, and Epher, and Hanoch, and Abida, and Eldaah. All these *were* the children of Keturah.

TUESDAY: Numbers 22:7-14; 2 Peter 2:15-16; Jude 11.²

3. Balaam used the name of the God of Israel, "Yahweh." Does this mean that he was a servant of God? Give reasons for your answer.

4. God told Balaam not to go and not to curse the children of Israel. Does the fact that God spoke to Balaam makes him a true prophet of God?

Deuteronomy 23:3 An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever: 4 Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee. 5 Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee. 6 Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever.

² 2 Peter 2:15 Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam *the son* of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; 16 But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet.

Jude 1:11 Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.

WEDNESDAY: Numbers 22:15-21; Job 2:1-6; Proverbs 1:10-19.³

³ Job 2:1 Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD. 2 And the LORD said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and from in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. 3 And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that *there is* none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause. 4 And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. 5 But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. 6 And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he *is* in thine hand; but save his life.

Proverbs 1:10 My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. 11 If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: 12 Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: 13 We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: 14 Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse: 15 My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: 16 For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. 17 Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. 18 And they lay wait for their *own* blood; they lurk privily for their *own* lives. 19 So *are* the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; *which* taketh away the life of the owners thereof.

5. What was God’s first command to Balaam? When it was so plain and unequivocal, why did Balaam later ask God again (v.19)?

6. Did God change His mind from “No” to “Yes” to Balaam’s request?

THURSDAY: Numbers 22:22-35; 1 Corinthians 2:19-29.⁴

7. In what way was Balaam humiliated in this episode that involved his donkey and the Angel of the LORD?

⁴ 1Corinthians 1:19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 20 Where *is* the wise? where *is* the scribe? where *is* the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. 22 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: 23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; 24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*: 27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: 29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

8. What was God’s purpose in telling Balaam to go although he was prepared to go back?

10. What precious truths do we learn about God in this chapter?

FRIDAY: Numbers 22:36-41; Deuteronomy 13:1-5.⁵

9. After Balaam was welcomed by king Balak, what kind of predicament was Balaam experiencing?

⁵ Deuteronomy 13:1 If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, 2 And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; 3 Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him. 5 And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn *you* away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee.