

**NUMBERS 23-36 BALAAM'S FATE; MOABITES DEFEATED, INHERITANCE**

In the last study, Balaam, a powerful seer, accepted money to curse Israel, contrary to God's wishes. *Nelson's Study Bible* says about him: "Balaam was a prophet who specialized in animal divination. He would inspect the liver of a ritually slain animal to ascertain from its shapes and markings the will of the gods. Such prophets also observed the movements of animals and birds in order to ascertain certain signs from the gods. It was thought that such prophets could in some mysterious manner influence the gods by various rites. If Balaam could influence the 'god' of Israel (as Balak supposed), then he might reverse their blessing, bring them under a curse, and destroy them....In v. 8, Balaam speaks of the Lord as though he were intimate with him. Because he was an internationally known soothsayer, it's likely that he had heard enough about Israel from emissaries of Moab and Midian to have learned the name of the God of Israel. Indeed, the story of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt would have been widely known throughout the Middle East (see Deut. 2:25)."

Balaam is important in the Bible because, "he is represented as the archetype of the false teachers of the Christian Church who pervert the truth of the gospel in the interests of personal gain and under the guise of Christian liberty advocated compromise with the world" (*ISBE*, Vol. 1, p. 405).

He was the great religious leader of the Babylonian system at that time and was powerfully used by Satan. We see later that the end-time false prophet, the leader of the same Babylonian system, is going to have some of the same powers as Balaam to deceive the world, much as Simon Magus did in the 1st century, posing as a Christian leader in Rome and deceiving so many.

In the New Testament, Peter refers to Balaam example when talking about the false prophets in his day who had apostatized from the faith, "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies...They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of *Balaam the son of Beor*, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking

with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet" (2 Peter 2:15-16).

Jude also adds about these false prophets, "Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in *the error of Balaam* for profit and perished in the rebellion of Korah" (Jude 11).

In Revelation, the example of Balaam is again used to warn the brethren of not committing spiritual fornication with the world, as the Israelites did physically with the pagan Moabites.

Christ says to the Pergamos church, "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" (Rev. 2:14).

It is very interesting that we have archaeological evidence confirming Balaam's very existence.

In 1967 archaeologists digging up the remains of Deir Alla, an ancient Ammonite city on the east bank of the Jordan, found an inscription that mentions Balaam, the son of Beor. Three times in the first four lines he is referred to as "Balaam son of Beor," exactly as in the Bible. This represents the first Old Testament prophet, although a false one, to be dug up in Bible lands--not his tomb or his skeleton, but a text about him. The text also represents the first prophecy of any scope from the ancient West Semitic world to be found outside the Old Testament, and the first extra-biblical example of a prophet proclaiming doom to his own people. The 16 lines of an incomplete inscription on a wall turned out to be part of one of Balaam's prophecies, in a language similar to that recorded in the book of Numbers.

Balaam evidently was well known as a "cursing prophet," for Balak specifically summoned Balaam for the purpose of cursing Israel (Num 22:6). Much of the Deir Alla text was given to curses uttered by the prophet. The term "shadday-gods" is used on two occasions in the text. Shadday is one of the names for God in the Old Testament, used mainly in the book of Job...Balaam used the name twice in his blessing speeches where it is translated "Almighty" (Num 24:4, 16).

In the Bible, God forced Balaam to prophesy four different times about Israel's blessings and victories instead of its cursings. "Then he took up

his oracle and said: 'The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor...who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, who falls down, with eyes wide open: How lovely are your tents, O Jacob!...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 arrows' " (Numbers 24:3-8).

The restored text discovered in Deir Alla reads: "Inscription of Balaam, son of Beor, the man who was a seer of the gods. Lo, the gods came to him at night and spoke to him. According to these words, and they said to Balaam, son of Beor thus: 'There has appeared the last flame, a fire of chastisement has appeared!' And Balaam arose the next day and he could not eat and he wept intensely. And his people came to him and said to Balaam, son of Beor: 'Why do you fast and why do you weep?' And he said to them: 'Sit down! I shall show you how great is the calamity! And come, see the deeds of the gods!' These words are strikingly similar in detail to the biblical account and not too far from where Balaam pronounced, much to his disgust, the blessings on Israel. Apparently the memory of what happened to this seer remained in the memory of the Ammonites and was recorded in their version.

Archaeologist Andre Lemaire, who pieced together the incomplete script, wrote: "...The inscription from Deir Alla, dated to about the middle of the eighth century B.C. and written on the wall of what may have been some kind of religious teaching center, is very likely the earliest existing example of a prophetic text. The principal personage in the Deir Alla text is the seer Balaam, son of Beor, well known to us from the stories in Numbers" (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, September-October 1985, p. 39).

So here we have another biblical figure confirmed by archaeology and shown not to be a myth.

Josephus, the 1st century Jewish historian, mentions Balaam was the greatest seer of his day and writes, "He said to King Balak, 'Set out the handsomest of your daughters...to force and conquer the modesty of those that behold them...that when the young men of the Hebrews desire their company, they allow it then, and when they see that they are enamored of them, let them take their leave; and if they entreat them to stay, let them not give their consent until they have

persuaded them to leave off their obedience to their own laws and the worship of that God who established them, and to worship the gods of the Midianites and Moabites; for by this means God will be angry with them...

"Now the young men were induced by the fondness they had for these women...so they gave themselves up to what they persuaded them, and transgressed their own laws...and they went with insatiable inclinations into them; and even some of the principal men illustrious on account of the virtues of their fathers, they also were corrupted with the rest. Even Zimri, the head of the tribe of Simeon, accompanied by Cosbi, a Midianite woman, and being desired by her to disregard the laws of Moses, and to follow those she was used to, he complied with her, and this both by sacrificing after a manner different from his own, and by taking a stranger as his wife. When things were thus, Moses was afraid that matters should grow worse and called the people to a congregation" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book IV, chapter VI, section 9-10).

Gross immorality and religious apostasy was spreading, and in order to stem the tide, God told 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. So Moses said to the judges of Israel, 'Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor.' And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Now when Phineas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand, and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel. And those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand" (Numbers 25:4-9)/

Phineas's zeal and godly indignation was rewarded by God, who said, "Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace, and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel" (25:12-13). He is an example of godly zeal when religious

apostasy and immorality become rampant among God's people. How many more with the spiritual indignation of Phineas were needed when some church leaders began to apostatize some years ago!

After this takes place, a census is taken of all the males over 20 years old. All the first generation of Israelites had died "except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun" (27:65).

After the census is taken, that was also used to properly distribute the Promised land in an equitable way, Joshua is now named as the successor of Moses. God says, "Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, *a man in whom is the Spirit*, and lay your hand on him...And you shall give some of your authority to him that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the Lord for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out and at his word they shall come in" (27:18-21).

God then repeats to them different commandments, including the importance of keeping the Sabbath (28:9) and the Feast Days (28:16-29:40).

Then comes the battle with the Midianites and Moabites, and remember, Moses had asked them for permission to pass through their land peaceably but they refused, and instead hired Balaam to deceive and cause them to sin and be punished by God.

God said to Moses, "Take vengeance on the Midianites for the children of Israel. Afterward you shall be gathered to your people'...And they warred against the Midianites. Just as the Lord commanded Moses, and they killed all the males. They killed the kings of Midian with the rest of those who were killed...and *Balaam* the son of Beor they also killed with the sword" (31:2-8). Thus ends the ignominious history of Balaam, just as the end-time false prophet will also meet his end.

After dividing the great booty according to God's instruction, so all would be fair to everyone, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh ask if they could settle down in this land. After assuring Moses they would help conquer the land of Canaan before settling in, they received permission. There would then be two and a half tribes of Israel east of the Jordan, and nine and a half west of the Jordan. Because of their treachery, the Moabite, Midianite and Amonite kingdoms were greatly reduced.

As the Israelites are ready to enter Canaan, God again warns them of the corrupt society there, and that they are to drive them completely out of the land or if they resisted, to exterminate them. God had given the Canaanites some 400 years to repent of their evil ways but they had not repented. So the principle that universal sin requires universal punishment, as in the Flood and Sodom and Gomorrah, also applies here.

He said, "When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you; destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places, you shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell in it, for I have given you the land to possess...But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell. Moreover it shall be that I will do to you as I thought to do to them" (33:51-56). Here we see again that God is no respecter of persons—if Israel corrupts itself morally and spiritually, it will face the same punishment as the other nations.

God then set the boundaries for each tribe and appointed the leaders over each tribe. He carefully selected the future six cities of refuge run by the Levites, where a person that had committed an accident with the loss of life could flee. These cities would run from north to south, and from east to west for easy access to everyone (35:9-34).

Also, laws of inheritance were set up so the inheritance of each tribe would be preserved after the different marriages took place. God said, "Thus no inheritance shall change hands from one tribe to another, but every tribe of the children of Israel shall keep its own inheritance...These are the commandments and the judgments which the Lord commanded the children of Israel by the hand of Moses in the plains of Moab the Jordan, across from Jericho" (36:9-13). So ends the book of Numbers.