

Day 169 - SUNDAY: June 4th

Numbers 22

Numbers 22:1-41 NKJV

Then the children of Israel moved, and camped in the plains of Moab on the side of the Jordan across from Jericho. Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. And Moab was exceedingly afraid of the people because they were many, and Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel. So Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this company will lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field." And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time. Then he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying: "Look, a people has come from Egypt. See, they cover the face of the earth, and are settling next to me! Therefore please come at once, curse this people for me, for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed." So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the diviner's fee in their hand, and they came to Balaam and spoke to him the words of Balak. And he said to them, "Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you, as the LORD speaks to me." So the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam. Then God came to Balaam and said, "Who are these men with you?" So Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, saying, 'Look, a people has come out of Egypt, and they cover the face of the earth. Come now, curse them for me; perhaps I shall be able to overpower them and drive them out.' " And God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them; you

shall not curse the people, for they are blessed." So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, "Go back to your land, for the LORD has refused to give me permission to go with you." And the princes of Moab rose and went to Balak, and said, "Balaam refuses to come with us." Then Balak again sent princes, more numerous and more honorable than they. And they came to Balaam and said to him, "Thus says Balak the son of Zippor: 'Please let nothing hinder you from coming to me; for I will certainly honor you greatly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Therefore please come, curse this people for me.' " Then Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more. Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the LORD will say to me." And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men come to call you, rise and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you—that you shall do." So Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab. Then God's anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the LORD took His stand in the way as an adversary against him. And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. Now the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the way and went into the field. So Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back onto the road. Then the Angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on this side and a wall on that side. And when the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she pushed herself against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck her again. Then the Angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. And when the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam; so

Balaam's anger was aroused, and he struck the donkey with his staff. Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have abused me. I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!" So the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden, ever since I became yours, to this day? Was I ever disposed to do this to you?" And he said, "No." Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand; and he bowed his head and fell flat on his face. And the Angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because your way is perverse before Me. The donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times. If she had not turned aside from Me, surely I would also have killed you by now, and let her live." And Balaam said to the Angel of the LORD, "I have sinned, for I did not know You stood in the way against me. Now therefore, if it displeases You, I will turn back." Then the Angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak." So Balaam went with the princes of Balak. Now when Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went out to meet him at the city of Moab, which is on the border at the Arnon, the boundary of the territory. Then Balak said to Balaam, "Did I not earnestly send to you, calling for you? Why did you not come to me? Am I not able to honor you?" And Balaam said to Balak, "Look, I have come to you! Now, have I any power at all to say anything? The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak." So Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kirjath Huzoth. Then Balak offered oxen and sheep, and he sent some to Balaam and to the princes who were with him. So it was, the next day, that Balak took Balaam and

brought him up to the high places of Baal, that from there he might observe the extent of the people.

Daily Deep Dive:

We'll start this new week as usual with the UCG reading plan: "In chapter 22 we meet some very strong personalities. The first is Balak, king of the Moabites, whose name means "Empty." Next is Balaam, a soothsayer (see Joshua 13:22) from Pethor, a city on the Euphrates in Mesopotamia (compare Deuteronomy 23:4). His name means "Destroyer of the People," and Balak hires him in an attempt to destroy the Israelites. Israel's armies had not confronted Moab as of yet, but Balak, aware of what had happened to his enemy Sihon, was terrified that he and his kingdom were next. The irony of all that follows is that Israel had no fight with Moab. They only wanted passage to the Promised Land. In fact, God had told the Israelites not to attack Moab (Deuteronomy 2:1–9). But Balak either didn't know this or didn't believe it. So he consulted with "the elders of Midian" with whom he may have had alliances. (Though Moses did have Midianite associations through dwelling with his wife's family for 40 years, it is likely that they were far removed from the clans these leaders represented—the Midianites being a widespread, nomadic

people.) Yet Balak probably realized that a military campaign alone was not going to stop the Israelites and the supernatural power behind them. Rather, he needed to employ spiritual warfare—and thus the call for Balaam. *The Nelson Study Bible* explains:

"The Moabites believed that blessings and cursings from the gods could be manipulated by skilled agents, who presumed to be able to traffic with the gods. At the time, the most famous of these agents was Balaam of Mesopotamia. In 1967, a discovery was made in Jordan of an eighth-century b.c. inscription of prophecies of Balaam. This discovery in what was ancient Moab is stunning evidence of the renown of this prophet even hundreds of years after his death. Yet the Balaam of Scripture is thoroughly reprehensible. In Scripture he becomes a paradigm of evil, a nearly satanic figure (see Numbers 31:8; Deuteronomy 23:4–5; Joshua 13:22; Joshua 24:9–10; Nehemiah 13:2; Micah 6:5; 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 1:11; Revelation 2:14). 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 Deuteronomy 2:25)" (notes on Numbers 22:5–8).

When the Moabite and Midianite leaders arrive with payment for Balaam, God informs Balaam, evidently in a night vision, that the Israelites are protected and that he is not to go with these men (Numbers 22:12). It is not that Balaam doesn't want to go beyond what God says—he does. But he knows that he can't. When a larger entourage appears with a "blank check" from Balak, we learn a little about Balaam's sincerity in following God. Motivated by greed, rather than accepting the pronouncement God has already made, he goes to get a "new" word from Him. And

God does give Balaam permission to go, with the restriction that he wait to be called upon by the princes and that he do only what God says.

Yet Balaam apparently doesn't wait on the princes, but heads out on his own to join them, contrary to God's specific instructions, thus angering God. Then we have the colorful reversal of roles in Balaam's arguing with the dumb donkey and the donkey using logic with him! (verses 22–31). Moreover, the donkey could see the angel with the drawn sword while Balaam could not. This was all rather ironic. "Balaam was supposed to have been able to communicate with the gods through animals. However, in this situation, the 'seer' was blind to the presence of the true God. It was the animal who was the seer, perceiving the true will of God in the Angel that blocked the path" (note on Numbers 22:22–30). Balaam's insincere conversation with the angel shows the desires of his heart are not to please God.

When Balaam comes to Balak, he explains that he can only say what God will allow, though with all his heart he would love to get around God and curse Israel." [END]

I don't have anything additional to add to this chapter.