

BALAK AND BALAAM

BIBLE TEXT Numbers 22:1-41

LESSON 110 - JUNIOR COURSE

MEMORY VERSE: "The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility" (Proverbs 15:33).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Numbers 22:1-41 (KJV)

¹ And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan *by* Jericho.

² And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.

³ And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they *were* many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel.

⁴ And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, Now shall this company lick up all *that are* round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor *was* king of the Moabites at that time.

⁵ He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which *is* by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me:

⁶ Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they *are* too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, *that* we may smite them, and *that* I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest *is* blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed.

⁷ And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand; and they came unto Balaam, and spake unto him the words of Balak.

⁸ And he said unto them, Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the LORD shall speak unto me: and the princes of Moab abode with Balaam.

⁹ And God came unto Balaam, and said, What men *are* these with thee?

¹⁰ And Balaam said unto God, Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, hath sent unto me, *saying*,

¹¹ Behold, *there is* a people come out of Egypt, which covereth the face of the earth: come now, curse me them; peradventure I shall be able to overcome

BIBLE REFERENCES:

Notes:

Goodly Tents

Imagine yourself on the top of Mount Pisgah, looking out over the plains of Moab, at the close of the march of the Israelites. Stretching out below you, as far as eye can see, are the tents of God's people nestled among the acacia trees, all pitched in order according to their tribes. "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!" (Numbers 24:5). These are God's children, and He has watched over them with tender care. He promised that no weapon formed against them should prosper.

Needless Fear

The Children of Israel were on their way to possess the land of Canaan, and God had told them not to meddle with the Moabites, nor to take their land before crossing Jordan (Deuteronomy 2:5, 9). So the Moabites had nothing to fear from this great company of people who were camped in their midst.

The Moabites had heard of some of the victories the Israelites had won over other nations nearby — nations Moses had not expected to conquer, but who had come out to fight against the Children of Israel instead of allowing them the safe passage through their country which they requested. The Moabites were afraid Israel would destroy them "as the ox licketh up the grass of the field," and they felt helpless when they thought of their armies going out to fight against the 600,000 warriors of the Israelites.

Balak was the king of the Moabites, and he thought of another way he believed the Children of Israel could be conquered. He knew of a prophet of Mesopotamia who could bless or curse people, and the words he would speak would come to pass. This man was Balaam, and it seems that he knew about the true God even though he was a foreigner to Israel. But he used the gift he had for personal gain, and he brought the wrath of God upon himself. Balak sent some of his princes with gifts to entice Balaam to come to curse Israel.

To Balak it seemed that the Israelites covered the whole earth; there were so many of them. Now if Balaam would curse them, then the Moabites might go to battle against them and win a great victory. It sounded easy. But he did not realize that he was dealing with more than men. Anything he might do against God's people was against God Himself, and God could with a "breath of his nostrils," destroy every enemy of Israel.

For Earthly Gain

When Balak's mighty men came to Balaam, he was flattered by their promises and the gifts they brought; but he knew enough about God to realize that he would have to have His permission to curse Israel. So Balaam asked the princes to stay all night and he would ask God what to do.

There are people today who are pretending to serve God; but they are doing it only for the material blessings they receive. Some businessmen will join a church for the contacts they can make for profit, and not

them, and drive them out.

¹² And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they *are* blessed.

¹³ And Balaam rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Balak, Get you into your land: for the LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you.

¹⁴ And the princes of Moab rose up, and they went unto Balak, and said, Balaam refuseth to come with us.

¹⁵ And Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honourable than they.

¹⁶ And they came to Balaam, and said to him, Thus saith Balak the son of Zippor, Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me:

¹⁷ For I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people.

¹⁸ And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more.

¹⁹ Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the LORD will say unto me more.

²⁰ And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, *and* go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do.

²¹ And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab.

²² And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants *were* with him.

²³ And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way.

²⁴ But the angel of the LORD stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall *being* on this side, and a wall on that side.

²⁵ And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall: and he smote her again.

²⁶ And the angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place, where *was* no

because they want to worship God. And there are ministers who preach for money, not because they have a love for souls and want to show them the way to Heaven. They are willing to preach anything the congregation will pay to hear; and such people do not want to have their sins uncovered. They are like the people Isaiah spoke of, who asked of their prophets, "Prophecy not unto us right things" (Isaiah 30:10). Balak did not want to know the truth about Israel; and Balaam wanted to please him by prophesying for a price. But God rules in the affairs of men, and the enemy cannot go any farther against the Lord's own than He will allow.

Balaam might be excused this first time for not knowing God's will — although if he had been a true prophet of God he would never have asked the question he did of the Lord — but he was not ignorant long. God appeared to him in the night and told him he could not curse Israel, "for they are blessed."

The next morning Balaam told the princes to go back to their own country without him, because God had forbidden him to curse the Israelites. However, he did not say that God had called them blessed. When the princes reported to Balak they made it sound as though Balaam had refused to come because he wanted greater presents, or more pay.

Balak was desperate. He was willing to give Balaam great riches in order to have the Israelites cursed. So he sent his princes back to Balaam with promises of greater honor, as well as silver and gold.

Balaam knew he could not go beyond what God said, — but how he did want those riches! When the princes arrived, he asked them to stay another night while he tried again to get God's permission to go with them. This time there was no excuse for Balaam. He knew God's will in the matter; and what he should have done was send them away in a hurry and tell them never to come back. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). When we begin to entertain the enemy we shall soon find ourselves slipping into his clutches. Balaam still hoped to get some of the reward Balak offered. The Apostle Peter tells us that he "loved the wages of unrighteousness" (II Peter 2:15).

Worldly gain has corrupted many men who started out to serve God. They are so busy piling up wealth that they first neglect God, and then forget Him altogether. Men of high principle, too, often let money blind them to what is honest, and they slip from their uprightness. Justice in the courts can sometimes be perverted by money, and men can buy their way into almost any place if they have the price. It was always so. Solomon, the wisest man in the world, said, "A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men" (Proverbs 18:16) ; and, "A wicked man taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment" (Proverbs 17:23).

Moses was not so. He would rather suffer with the Israelite slaves than gain wealth and power as king of Egypt. And there are still people today who cannot be bought with gifts or money, or a promise of fame; but who serve God with His lowly few, and are willing to do all that they do as unto the Lord.

God's Permission Not Approval

God could see that Balaam's heart was set on receiving Balak's prize, so the second time God permitted him to go with the princes. He had not gone very far when God showed him how much displeased He was with him.

God would sometimes let Israel have their way, too, but "sent leanness into their soul" (Psalm 106:15). We remember that when the Israelites insisted upon having meat, and God sent them quail, while it was still between their teeth He let judgment strike them and many died

way to turn either to the right hand or to the left.

²⁷ And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff.

²⁸ And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?

²⁹ And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee.

³⁰ And the ass said unto Balaam, *Am* not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since *I was* thine unto this day? was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay.

³¹ Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face.

³² And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, I went out to withstand thee, because *thy* way is perverse before me:

³³ And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive.

³⁴ And Balaam said unto the angel of the LORD, I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again.

³⁵ And the angel of the LORD said unto Balaam, Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak. So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

³⁶ And when Balak heard that Balaam was come, he went out to meet him unto a city of Moab, which *is* in the border of Arnon, which *is* in the utmost coast.

³⁷ And Balak said unto Balaam, Did I not earnestly send unto thee to call thee? wherefore camest thou not unto me? am I not able indeed to promote thee to honour?

³⁸ And Balaam said unto Balak, Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say any thing? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak.

³⁹ And Balaam went with Balak, and they

(Numbers 11:33).

Balaam was riding on a donkey, which suddenly swerved from the road and went into the field. He had always been a faithful animal, so Balaam could not understand such an action. Rather than look for the reason, Balaam became angry and beat him. That showed that he was not a man of God, for a real Christian will not be angry and abuse his animals.

Balaam did not know that an angel had stood in the road in front of the donkey, and had caused him to turn, nor that they could not go on until the angel had withdrawn. The road ran between two walls; and here again the angel stood in the way, with his sword drawn. In trying to avoid this heavenly visitor, the donkey pressed against a wall, and hurt Balaam's foot. This made the cruel man more angry, and he beat his humble beast again. The next time the angel appeared, the road was so narrow that the donkey could not turn. Rather than run into the drawn sword, the donkey fell to the ground under Balaam, and Balaam flew into a rage. He shouted at his faithful mount, and said if he had a sword in his hand he would kill him.

A Donkey's Speech

Something happened here that had never happened before, nor has it happened since, so far as we know. God put words into the mouth of the donkey, and he talked like a man. He asked Balaam why he was so mean to him. Had he not always been a faithful donkey to do the wishes of his master?

About that time God opened the eyes of Balaam and he, too, could see the angel with the drawn sword. The angel spoke to him. Now Balaam was ashamed and he bowed low and fell face downward to the ground. And he was afraid, too. He should have been, because God was angry with him for insisting on going with the princes of Balak to curse Israel. This angel, or perhaps it was God Himself, had come to tell Balaam of God's displeasure; and if the donkey had not swerved from before His drawn sword, Balaam would have been a dead man. The donkey had spared his life.

It often makes sinners angry to have anyone speak to them about getting ready for Heaven. They will say mean things to the person who asks them if they are saved. But after they have repented they are happy that someone loved them enough to want to help them get right with God.

Balaam was so frightened now that he was ready to forget about cursing Israel, and to go back home. After all, the riches and honor of Balak would do him no good if he died. But the angel told him to go on, only be very careful what he said about Israel.

Balak was very happy that Balaam finally arrived, and he felt he was beginning to get what he wanted.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Why was Balak afraid of Israel?
- 2 What did he plan to do about it?
- 3 What was Balaam's reputation?
- 4 What did God say about Balak's plan and about Israel?
- 5 What happened when Balaam started to go to Balak?
- 6 How was Balaam's life spared?
- 7 What does II Peter 2:15 say about Balaam?

came unto Kirjathhuzoth.

⁴⁰ And Balak offered oxen and sheep, and sent to Balaam, and to the princes that *were* with him.

⁴¹ And it came to pass on the morrow, that Balak took Balaam, and brought him up into the high places of Baal, that thence he might see the utmost *part* of the people.