

Bible Stories

BALAAAM

Numbers 22:28-30

August 20, 2022

Israel had been in the desert for nearly 40 years. There had been ups, but mostly there had been downs, due to the people's persistent whining and rebellion.

Recently they had had several military victories and were now camped on the plains of Moab opposite the river Jordan and Jericho.

The people of Moab were terrified and their king, Balak, was shaking in his sandals. Going out to fight Israel was obviously a bad idea – just ask Kings Sihon and Og – but he was not prepared to raise the white flag, so he came up with a plan.

He sent messengers to Balaam, a prophet of God, with the following request: **"A people has come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the land and have settled next to me. ⁶ Now come and put a curse on these people, because they are too powerful for me. Perhaps then I will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the country. For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed."** {Numbers 22:5-6}

Balaam invited the messengers to spend the night with the promise that he would enquire of Yahweh and report back to them in the morning.

In the night Yahweh and Balaam had a conversation:

Yahweh: *Who are these men?*

Balaam: *They're from Moab. They're afraid of Israel and they want me to curse them and drive them out of Moab.*

Yahweh: *No. You are not to go with them. You will not curse Israel because they are blessed.*

The next morning....

Balaam: *Sorry fellas, Yahweh has refused to let me go with you. You'll have to return home without me.*

Not easily deterred, King Balak sent more money and a larger, more important group of Elders back to Balaam {Numbers 22:16-20b}:

Elders: *This is what our king, Balak says: Do not let anything keep you from coming to me, because I will reward you handsomely and do whatever you say. Come and put a curse on these people for me.*

Balaam: *Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I cannot do anything that goes beyond the command of Yahweh, my God. However, stay here tonight and I'll ask again.*

That night, Balaam and Yahweh had another conversation:

Yahweh: ***If** in the morning the men call you, you can go with them; but you will only speak the words I give you.*

Notice the **"IF"** – The elders saying to Balaam, **"We are leaving soon. Come join us for breakfast so we can discuss your plans to go with us."** – would be the sign that Balaam had God's permission to go and curse Israel.

But the men did not call on Balaam in the morning, they simply headed for home, which meant divine permission had been denied.

Balaam set out after them anyway.

In other words, he disobeyed.

- **Numbers 22:22–35** - But [God became angry] because he was going, and the angel of Yahweh stood in the road as an adversary to him; he *was* riding on his donkey, and two servants were with him. ²³The donkey saw the angel of Yahweh standing in the road with his sword drawn in his hand, and the donkey turned aside from the road and went into the field. And Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back to the road. ²⁴The angel of Yahweh stood in the narrow path of the vineyards, *with* [a wall on either side]. ²⁵When the donkey saw the angel of Yahweh, she pressed herself into the wall, and she pressed the foot of Balaam into the wall, so he struck her again. ²⁶Then the angel of Yahweh went further ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was not a way to turn aside *to the right or left*. ²⁷When the donkey saw the angel of Yahweh, she lay down under Balaam, so [Balaam became angry], and he struck the donkey with *his* staff. ²⁸Yahweh opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What did I do to you that you struck me these three times?" ²⁹Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you made a mockery of me! If only I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now!" ³⁰The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden all your life until this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?" He said, "No." ³¹Then Yahweh exposed the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of Yahweh standing in the road with his sword drawn in his hand, and he bowed down and worshiped to his face. ³²The angel of Yahweh said to him, "Why have you struck this donkey three times? Look, I have come out as an adversary because your conduct is perverse before me." ³³The donkey saw me and turned aside from me these three times. If she had not turned aside from my face, then I would have killed you and kept her alive." ³⁴Balaam said to the angel of Yahweh, "I have sinned because I did not know that you *were* standing to meet me in the road. Now, [if it is displeasing to you], I will turn back." ³⁵The angel of Yahweh said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but speak only the word that I will speak to you." So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

Balak: *It's about time! What took you so long?*

Balaam: *I'm here now. Full disclosure, I cannot say anything I want, but only the words Yahweh puts in my mouth.*

Stop 1 – Kiriath-huzoth

Balak took Balaam to the high places of Baal. From there they could see part of the camp of Israel.

7 altars / 7 bulls

- **Numbers 23:7-10** - And he took up his oracle and said: "Balak the king of Moab has brought me from Aram, From the mountains of the east. 'Come, curse Jacob for me, and come, denounce Israel!' ⁸ "How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? And how shall I denounce *whom* the LORD has not denounced? ⁹ For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him; There! A people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations. ¹⁰ "Who can count the dust of Jacob, Or number one-fourth of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his!"

Balak: *Hold on! I wanted you to curse them, but you've blessed them instead!*

Balaam: *As I told you before, I am **ONLY** allowed to speak the words Yahweh puts in my mouth.*

Balak: *Come with me and I'll show you the extent of my problem. Maybe you'll be allowed to curse them from there.*

Stop 2 – Pisgah

7 altars / 7 bulls

- **Numbers 23:18-24** - Then he took up his oracle and said: "Rise up, Balak, and hear! Listen to me, son of Zippor! ¹⁹ "God *is* not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? ²⁰ Behold, I have received *a command* to bless; He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it. ²¹ "He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, nor has He seen wickedness in Israel. The LORD his God is with him, And the shout of a King is among them. ²² God brings them out of Egypt; He has strength like a wild ox. ²³ "For *there is* no sorcery against Jacob, Nor any divination against Israel. It now must be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'Oh, what God has done!' ²⁴ Look, a people rises like a lioness, and lifts itself up like a lion; It shall not lie down until it devours the prey and drinks the blood of the slain."

Balak: Just stop talking altogether!

Balaam: I already told you *I can only speak the words Yahweh gives me.*

Balak: *Let's go to another spot. Maybe God will let you curse them from **THAT** location.*

Stop 3 – Peor

7 altars / 7 bulls

- **Numbers 24:3-9** - Then he took up his oracle and said: "The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor, the utterance of the man whose eyes are opened, ⁴ The utterance of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, who falls down, with eyes wide open: ⁵ "How lovely are your tents, O Jacob! Your dwellings, O Israel! ⁶ Like valleys that stretch out, like gardens by the riverside, like aloes planted by the LORD, Like cedars beside the waters. ⁷ He shall pour water from his buckets, and his seed *shall be* in many waters. "His king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. ⁸ "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 his arrows. ⁹ 'He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him?' "Blessed *is* he who blesses you and cursed *is* he who curses you."

Balak: *I called you to curse my enemies, instead you have blessed them three times.*

Balaam: What do you want from me? I'll tell you what I told your messengers.... *"If Balak gave to me the fullness of his house full of silver and gold, I am not able to go beyond the command of Yahweh to do good or evil, from my heart; what Yahweh speaks, I will speak."*

It was clear that Balaam was of no use to Balak, so he was fired. Before he went home, Balaam gave Balak 4 additional prophecies for free.

- Moab will be destroyed.
- Edom will be destroyed.
- Amalek will be destroyed.
- Kenites will be destroyed.

Chapter 25 begins, *"When Israel dwelled in Shittim, the people began to prostitute themselves with the daughters of Moab. ² And they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and worshiped their gods. ³ So Israel was joined together to Baal Peor".....*

- **Chemosh** was the national deity of the Moabites. Child sacrifice and sexual orgies (both heterosexual and homosexual) were a part of worship.

According to **Number 31:16** – it was Balaam who suggested that the Moabite women could get Israel to commit great apostasy by enticing them to engage in sexual and spiritual adultery – bringing on themselves the curses Balak was so desperate for.

Whatever his motivation {financial, restored reputation or both}, Balaam knew 2 things:

- No outside source could successfully curse God's people.
- Only through apostasy would Israel lose God's favor and experience the consequences God had so wanted to protect them from {see Leviticus 18}.

His strategy of leading God's people into apostasy would outlive him {see **Numbers 31:6-8**} and would be a contributing factor to the eventual demise of the nation.

What do we do with this story?

When we see or experience the consequences of a sinful choice, we get mad and accuse God of being short-tempered and harsh. However, the story of Balaam peels back the curtain and allows us to see just how hard God actually works to try and save us from ourselves:

- God said **NO**. There was no room for ambiguity - the answer was **NO**. Balaam willfully chose to disobey.
- God stood right in front of Balaam, but he was so blinded by the sinful path he had chosen, he didn't see Him.
- God threw up barriers in order to slow Balaam down – he just got mad and took out his frustration on his donkey.
- God used the strange circumstance of a talking donkey to try to get Balaam's attention – He was too thick to notice and talked back.

God also said **NO** to Israel.

- "No gods before me"
- "No making, bowing down to or worshiping any idol"
- "No sleeping with someone who is not your wife"
- "No coveting something that does not belong to you"

As long as Israel remained faithful, God would work mightily on their behalf. By their choices to engage with the Moabite women in sexual and spiritual adultery, Israel **PUT ITSELF** outside God's protection.

Don't think for a moment that Satan will give up when we stand tall against external pressure. He knows all too well that as long as we stand with Jesus, he is a defeated foe, so he moves to areas of our life that we think we can manage ourselves. Things we *"don't need"* God's help with. Things we can *"control."* That puts us right in Satan's sandbox. And that is exactly what God is trying desperately to protect us from.