

Week Ten March 9/10
A Clash of Kingdoms
Numbers 22-25

SPECIAL NOTE: The Teaching Lesson will focus primarily on Numbers 22

Summary and Goal:

The Bible has established the story of God choosing a people for Himself to bless the world, the descendants of Abraham. He brought them out of slavery in Egypt, gave them the Law by which He wanted them to live, and gave them promises of land that would belong to them. Our passages today tell a story of not only God's protection of the Israelites from their enemies but also the destruction that comes as a result of their sin. By observing God's interactions with His people, as well as the consequences of their actions, we see patterns that remain true for God's people.

Background Passages: Numbers 22-25

Session in a Sentence: God protects His people to accomplish His will from inevitable opposition from the world, but that does not make us immune from the real, worldly consequences of our sin.

Kingdom Connection: God's calling for all of His people involves the building of His Kingdom. It is for that purpose that He calls, guides protects, and moves us. When our actions stray from the building of His kingdom and into sin, we face real consequences.

Missional Application: This passage gives us an example of God protecting His people from fierce hatred and opposition because He wanted them to participate in His mission. The same God who can turn curses into blessings also calls us to be part of His mission in the world. God's protection, provision, and Providence should give us encouragement and excitement to find His individual calling on each one of our lives.

Introduction

We are still in the Exodus Era, and with the story, we are looking at today, we see that God is keeping His Covenant that was made back in the Patriarch Era to Abraham. Throughout our chronological study of the Bible, we will see the consistency of God's purpose and plan.

As we start our lesson in Numbers 22, we see King Balak's concern about Israel's conquests and victories. These victories were a result of the covenant relationship that God established with Abraham in Genesis 17:1-4. (*January 5th, pg. 18*)

Gen. 17: 1-4 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. 2 And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." 3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: 4 "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations.

In Numbers 22:1-6 (*March 6th, pg. 243*), we see that the concern that Balak (*King of Moab*) had when the children of Israel moved and camped in the plains of Moab on the side of the Jordan across from Jericho.

Numbers 22: 1 Then the children of Israel moved, and camped in the plains of Moab on the side of the Jordan *across from* Jericho. 2 Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. 3 And Moab was exceedingly afraid of the people because they were many, and Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel. 4 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. 5 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! 6 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."

WHO IS BALAK?

Balak, King of Moab, was obviously a powerful and wealthy man who benefited from possessing land in the area that God had promised to the Israelites. He wanted to retain his power, prestige, and wealth, and he worried that the coming of the Israelites would threaten his status. The dread and fear felt by Balak were sent directly by God himself (see Exodus 23:27). With that in mind, Balak decides to use all the power and connections at his disposal to deal with this threat. He reaches out to Balaam, a man who he believes has the power to bless and curse others, to curse the people of Israel. This pattern of behavior is normal for those who achieve power and prestige in the world. Using control, influence, and political machinations to dispose of people who are threats is the normal pattern of those with power. This is particularly true when leaders are responding to and threatened by the people of God.

WHO IS BALAAM?

(Teachers: please look at Wiersbe Bible Commentary of OT, pgs. 285-286 for additional info.)

Balaam is a non-Israelite (*Gentile*) prophet who knew about God but did not know God as the one true God. He had a reputation for success in divination and incantation (*the use of occult power to grant blessing or cursing*), and he was willing to sell his services to all who could pay his fee. (Wiersbe OT, pg. 286) The Bible acknowledges that Balaam had power because of the Balak's request for Balaam to curse Israel. We will see that God never denies that Balaam has the power to bless or curse, but it is evident that God controls Balaam and his actions. Let's look at Balak's strategy to defeat Israel.

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE ELDERS AND BALAAM

Numbers 22: 7 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. ⁸ 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.
(March 6th, pg. 244)

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN GOD AND BALAAM

Numbers 22: 9 Then God came to Balaam and said, "Who *are* these men with you?"¹⁰ So Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, *saying*, ¹¹ '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.'" *(March 6th, pg. 244)*

Notice it was God who came to Balaam, not the other way around. God is sovereign and omniscient. God entered a dialogue with Balaam, not because He did not know what was going on, rather because He did know what was going on.

Balaam did not deny that he had the power to curse or bless Israel, but he introduces us to the power and authority of God. Balaam's initial response to the Balak's request was for them "Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you, as the Lord speaks to me." Balaam's response should give us great comfort and confidence. It should remind us of another situation where God had to permit Satan to take any action. Remember when Satan came before God in Job 1 and asked permission from God to impact Job's life. We look at Job during the Patriarch Era. There was a dialogue between God and Satan behind the scenes unbeknownst to Job, that allowed Satan to take action, but only within the parameters set up by God.

Just as Satan had to go in the presence of the Lord and state his case, the same is true for Balaam.

God's answer to Balaam was "No " because Israel was blessed. Another thing to note is that the pseudo power of man is nothing compared to the power and authority of God.

Although Balaam has a reputation of having the power of cursing and blessing nations, we can see the ultimate answer was with God, our Father. Let's look at God's answer to Balaam -

Numbers 22: 12 And God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed."

Application

The encounter with Satan in Job 1 and with Balaam in Numbers 22 should remind us of the truth found in Matthew 28:19 and Ephesians 6:12

First, we should always remind ourselves that we have authority in Christ because of the blood covenant that we have with Him. We have authority because all authority has been given to Him. Look at what He says in Matthew 28:18-19.

Matthew 28:18-19 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. (*November 7th, pg. 1426*)

Secondly, we must know that the war that we are in is based on the truth found in Ephesians 6:12

Eph. 6: 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (*December 8th, pg. 1532*)

THE INTERACTION WITH THE MESSENGERS ABOUT GOD'S ANSWER.

Balaam delivers God's answer and tells them that he cannot return with them. Of course, Balak was not done persuading Balaam.

Numbers 22: 15 Then Balak again sent princes, more numerous and more honorable than they. 16 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; 17 for I will certainly honor you greatly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Therefore, please come, curse this people for me.' " 18 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. 19 Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the Lord will say to me." (*March 6th, pg. 244*)

Notice that Balaam is going to approach God with the hope that He might be able to curse Israel in varying degrees. God's answer was "No" because Israel had been blessed. It is very clear that Balaam is tempted by Balaks' offering of riches.

Application

Do you ever get a clear answer from God, but the riches of this world tempted you to be disobedient or you approach our Father about the answered prayer but in a very manipulative way?

Remember that we cannot serve God and riches. Look at Matthew 6:24, Jesus speaking.

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

When Balak approached Balaam the second time, his only acceptable response should have been "away with you Balak," Jehovah God alone is the one I serve".

How do you respond to persistent temptation? Do we look for a better offer? Do we rationalize or justify that it isn't "that bad"? Jesus was faced with the same thing in the wilderness and each time stood His ground based on the truth, power and authority of God's word.

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE BALAAM'S DONKEY AND THE ANGEL OF THE LORD?

When Balaam went with Balak after the second offer of riches, God was angry. *(This is a lengthy passage, but well worth reading to see the unusual dramatic dialogue unfold)*

Numbers 22: 21 So Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab. 22 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. 23 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. 24 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. 25 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. 26 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. 27 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.

28 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?" 29 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!" 30 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."

31 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. 32 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. 33 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."

34 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." 35 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." (*March 6th, pg. 244*)

Application

Let's look at the spiritual progression that is revealed in these verses. First God opens the mouth of the donkey, and then Balaam answers the donkey. I have heard several pastors talk about the miracle of Balaam's donkey speaking, which obviously is very unusual; but the more impressive miracle was that Balaam had a conversation with his donkey. There are times when all of us have had conversations where we feel the other person is as stubborn as a donkey, but most of us have not conversed and argued with a donkey.

However, for me, it is the third action God takes that gives me an important principal that I would like to integrate into my daily walk with the Lord. Look again at verse 31 where says that "Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes". There are several instances where God opens the eyes of those who do not see what is being done spiritually. So often we can't see because we are only looking with physical eyes and not spiritual eyes.

Balaam's eyes were open and saw the Angel and listened to what God said through this Angel.

What does it say?

When the time finally came for Balaam to work for Balak, he had the Moabites prepare sacrifices, and instead of curses, Balaam spoke blessings toward the Israelites. Balaam was not allowed to denounce the people whom God had set aside for blessing. Balaam tries 4 different times in chapters 23 and 24, but each time he is only able to speak a blessing toward God's people. Balak becomes extremely angry at Balaam, but he could not change the words that God put upon Balaam's lips.

What does it mean?

Even if the most powerful people in the world want to harm a person, there is nothing that they can do to undo the blessings and the plans of God. For the people of Israel, God had already

promised to give them the land of Canaan, and Balak's political machinations and Balaam's sorcery would not change that. The apostle Paul speaks about it this way in Romans 8:31: "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*" God, who stands beyond time and space, cannot have his will thwarted by any political, military, or cultural leader, no matter how powerful, persuasive, or determined they might be.

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THEIR SIN NATURE

God had protected Israel on every side. Balak had taken Balaam on each side of their camp, but each time Balaam blessed Israel because God had declared them a blessed people.

Although God had protected Israel and they were not aware of God's specific protection, Chapter 25 gives us the reason for their downfall.

Numbers 25: 1 Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. **2** They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. **3** So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel. **4** Then the Lord said to 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." **5** So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Every one of you kills his men who were joined to Baal of Peor."

This seems harsh, in fact by the end of the chapter we are told that 24,000 people died because of the plague caused by the sin of the Israelites. God never has nor will He ever take sin lightly. There have always been consequences for sin against God's will, plan, purpose and teaching.

Though not in our specific lesson today, later in Numbers and in Revelation we are told how the children of Israel were tempted.

Numbers 31:16 and Revelation 2:14 lets us know that Balaam was playing both sides.

Numbers 31: 16 Look, these *women* caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD. (*March 9th, pg. 258*)

Revelation 2: 14 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. (*December 26th, pg. 1586*)

Application

God does protect us from evil, and I think he does it more than we realize. But our sin nature will seek ways to give our "flesh" opportunity to sin. It is imperative that we take responsibility for walking the truth in Romans 6:12-14.

Rom. 6: 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. (*November 25th, pg. 1489*)

Conclusions

- **God Speaks**, even if He must use a donkey; God speaks the truth in the ordinary and the extraordinary.
- **God Acts**, as He protects us more than we know. He is faithful to us.
- **God Reveals** that he can't be manipulated by any human scheme. He reveals His holiness by dealing with sin.