

Adult Bible Class

The Book of Numbers

Lesson #13, Chapter 21-22

Numbers Chapter 21

Victory over the Canaanites

Numbers 21:1 (NLT) The Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the Negev, heard that the Israelites were approaching on the road through Atharim. So he attacked the Israelites and took some of them as prisoners. **2** Then the people of Israel made this vow to the Lord: "If you will hand these people over to us, we will completely destroy all their towns." **3** The Lord heard the Israelites' request and gave them victory over the Canaanites. The Israelites completely destroyed them ["devoted them and their cities to destruction" ESV] and their towns, and the place has been called Hormah ever since.

It is the devil's pattern to attack those "*approaching on the road.*" When God's people make progress toward victory, satan doesn't like it. The only way to overcome the temptations, sins, evil habits, passions, and tempers which would try to overcome us on our Christian journey is to regard these things as God's enemies and exterminate them. The ancient Israelites proclaimed that if God would help them, they would do their part. God did, and they did.

The concept of "*devoted to destruction*" is seen throughout the books of Moses and beyond. The city of Jericho was "devoted to destruction," meaning that everything and everyone was to be destroyed. Sin must be eradicated and destroyed.

The Bronze Snake

Numbers 21:4 Then the people of Israel set out from Mount Hor, taking the road to the Red Sea to go around the land of Edom. But the people grew impatient with the long journey, **5** and they began to speak against God and Moses. "Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die here in the wilderness?" they complained. "There is nothing to eat here and nothing to drink. And we hate this horrible manna!"

6 So the Lord sent poisonous snakes [KJV: fiery serpents] among the people, and many were bitten and died. **7** Then the people came to Moses and cried out, "We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take away the snakes." So Moses prayed for the people.

8 Then the Lord told him, "Make a replica of a poisonous snake and attach it to a pole. All who are bitten will live if they simply look at it!" **9** So Moses made a snake out of bronze and attached it to a pole. Then anyone who was bitten by a snake could look at the bronze snake and be healed!

This incredible story that takes place just a few weeks or months before the Israelites cross into the Promised Land is the only type or picture that Jesus Christ claimed for Himself as a type of His own crucifixion:

John 3:5 (NKJV) Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6** That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' . . .

9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"

10 Jesus answered and said to him . . . 13 No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

We have seen many types of Christ in our study of the books of Moses, but this one is notable since Jesus Himself refers to it. We see Jesus Christ lifted up on the cross in the likeness of sinful flesh in order to save from the deadliness of sin those who will look upon Him in faith (or believe on Him).

The Israelites in the story above were discouraged, and this led to complaining (they were discouraged because the way was hard). This was the younger generation and their children, and they were again acting like their parents. They didn't appreciate the manna, and they were anxious with thirst, but they let it go too far by speaking against the man of God and God Himself. If this generation were ever going to be spiritually ready to take the Promised Land, something was going to have to give. The forty years was almost up, and they seemed no more ready than their parents forty years before!

The refusal of the Edomites to let them pass caused them to have to travel through some of the bleakest terrain that they had yet encountered. Sometimes the path through this world is hard! They were discouraged, and they complained bitterly, but God was going to send them a message.

When people complain about their lot in life, when they complain and lose heart about where God has them, when they complain about God's provision, they can sin terribly against Him. They can commit particular sins that fasten on them and poison them.

The Israelites called out to Moses, who had been their mediator all through their journeys. Moses made a serpent of brass (or bronze) to resemble the fiery serpents. The Lord Jesus Christ came in the likeness of sinful flesh (Romans 8:3) even though He Himself had no sin, and He condemned sin in the flesh. The brazen serpent was lifted up upon a pole so all who would look upon it would live. In the same manner, spiritually speaking, all who are suffering and dying from sin can look upon the Savior who died on the cross - and live. Paul said:

1 Corinthians 10:9 (NKJV) nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; 10 nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

The Scripture says, "*The Lord sent fiery serpents.*" Because the people ceased trusting Him, the Lord delivered them to one of the many dangers on the way. Perhaps God chose this method because it is a picture of that first serpent in the garden of Eden that tempted Eve to sin. The serpent is a picture of sin that brings death. We read in the story that "*many were bitten and died.*" The people were at a crossroads. They could either die or call on a Mediator to help them.

The people said, “*We have sinned . . .*” A cry of repentance and a cry for help resulted in an answer and a deliverance. The brazen serpent was lifted up - for all who would - to look upon it and live. The cause of the problem becomes the means by which the sin is atoned.

1 Corinthians 15:21 (KJV) For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. **22** For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

Israel's Later Sin of Idolatry

Later in Israel's history we read a story which lets us know that the Israelites kept the bronze serpent that Moses made. This story takes place about seven hundred years later:

2 Kings 18:1 (NKJV) Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea the son of Elah, king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign . . . **3** And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done.

4 He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it *Nehushtan*.

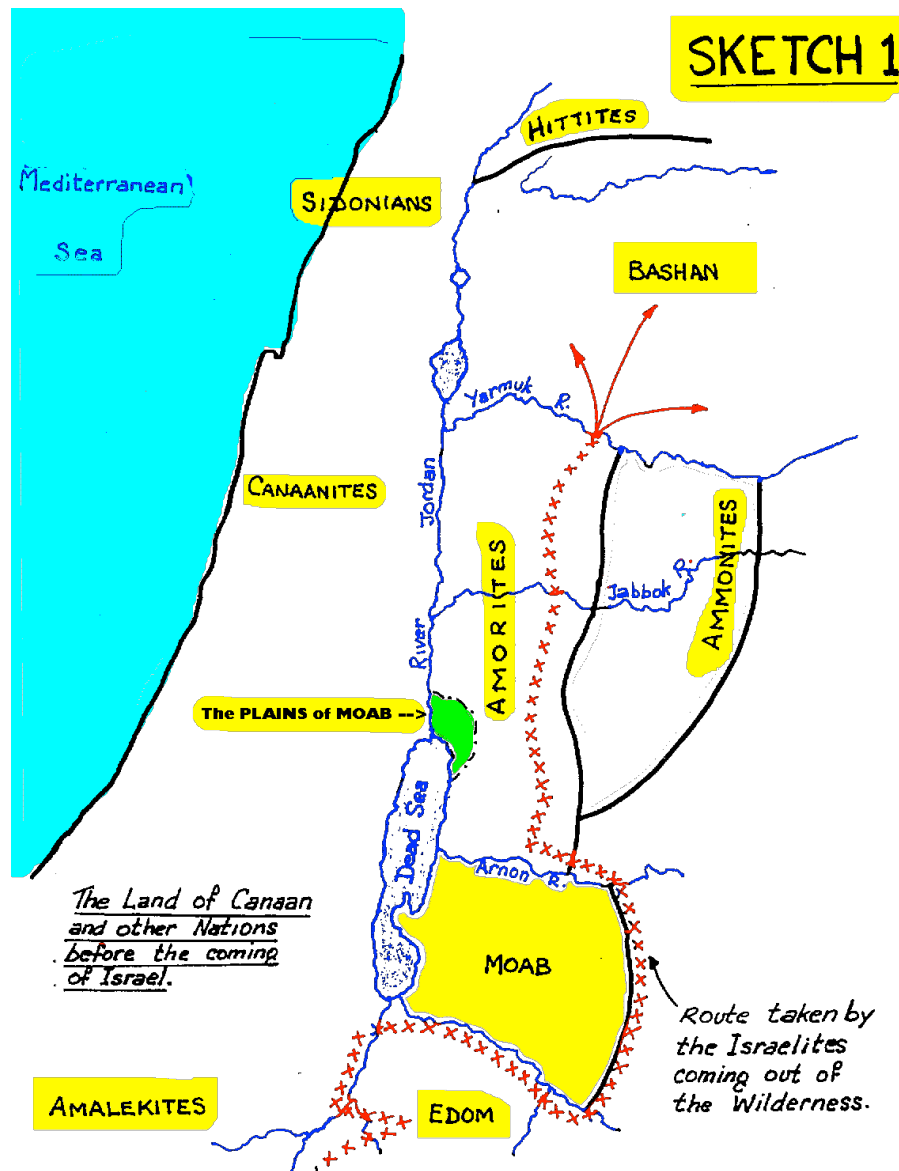
The very thing that brought salvation and healing when the children of Israel were about to be overcome by the effects of sin - was now worshiped as an idol! How mankind can twist and pervert the good things of God! Hezekiah called it what it was - *Nehushtan* - which means “a piece of brass.” That's all it was!

There are those that would like to worship the cross itself rather than worship Jesus Christ who died upon it. The cross is but wood, but the sacrifice that was made on that cross has eternal value. *Nehushtan* should remind us that even good things - and good people - can become idols in our lives. Our worship belongs to Jesus Christ alone. Nothing else, regardless of its incredible history, is worthy.

Numbers 21 Continued - The End of Journeys, The Beginning of Victories

Israel's Journey to Moab

Numbers 21:10 (NLT) The Israelites traveled next to Oboth and camped there. **11** Then they went on to Iye-abarim, in the wilderness on the eastern border of Moab. **12** From there they traveled to the valley of Zered Brook and set up camp. **13** Then they moved out and camped on the far side of the Arnon River, in the wilderness adjacent to the territory of the Amorites. The Arnon is the boundary line between the Moabites and the Amorites . . .



We should note that the Israelites' wanderings are about over. They are taking up their position east of the Jordan River, fighting enemies there, ready to cross Jordan River and take the Promised Land.

16 From there the Israelites traveled to Beer, which is the well where the Lord said to Moses, "Assemble the people, and I will give them water." **17** There the Israelites sang this song:

"Spring up, O well! Yes, sing its praises!

18 Sing of this well, which princes dug,
which great leaders hollowed out with their scepters and staffs."

The fact that the Israelites were now getting water by their own hands from a well speaks volumes. While wandering in the wilderness, God supplied their needs (manna from heaven, water from a rock, clothes that never wore out, shade in the scorching sun). When they finally enter the Promised Land, the land itself will be God's provision to them - as long as they walk in obedience to the Lord.

Then the Israelites left the wilderness and proceeded on through Mattanah, **19** Nahaliel, and Bamoth. **20** After that they went to the valley in Moab where Pisgah Peak overlooks the wasteland.

Mt. Nebo is the same as Mt. Pisgah. It is here that Moses will die and be buried, seeing the Promised Land but not actually going there. From here, the Israelites will go down the valley onto the plains and there cross the Jordan River. Jericho is just on the other side of the Jordan (a few miles from it).

Victory over Sihon and Og

21 The Israelites sent ambassadors to King Sihon of the Amorites with this message:

22 "Let us travel through your land. We will be careful not to go through your fields and vineyards. We won't even drink water from your wells. We will stay on the king's road until we have passed through your territory."

23 But King Sihon refused to let them cross his territory. Instead, he mobilized his entire army and attacked Israel in the wilderness, engaging them in battle at Jahaz. **24** But the Israelites slaughtered them with their swords and occupied their land from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River. They went only as far as the Ammonite border because the boundary of the Ammonites was fortified.

The Amorites were Canaanites (they were sometimes nomadic). They were not relatives of Israel like the peoples of Edom, Moab, and Ammon. Years earlier, they had come south and battled Moab for a part of their land. Israel was not commanded to spare the Amorites like they were the people of their relatives. In fact, God commanded them to smite them because of their wickedness (Deut. 2:24). However, Israel gave the Amorites a chance to let them pass through their land. The Amorites wouldn't have it. Therefore, this land of the Amorites would end up being a part of the Promised Land along with the territory across Jordan.

Bible scholars say that this battle with the Amorites was probably the first battle that the younger generation had to fight (Joshua leading them).

25 So Israel captured all the towns of the Amorites and settled in them, including the city of Heshbon and its surrounding villages. **26** Heshbon had been the capital of King Sihon of the Amorites. He had defeated a former Moabite king and seized all his land as far as the Arnon River . . .

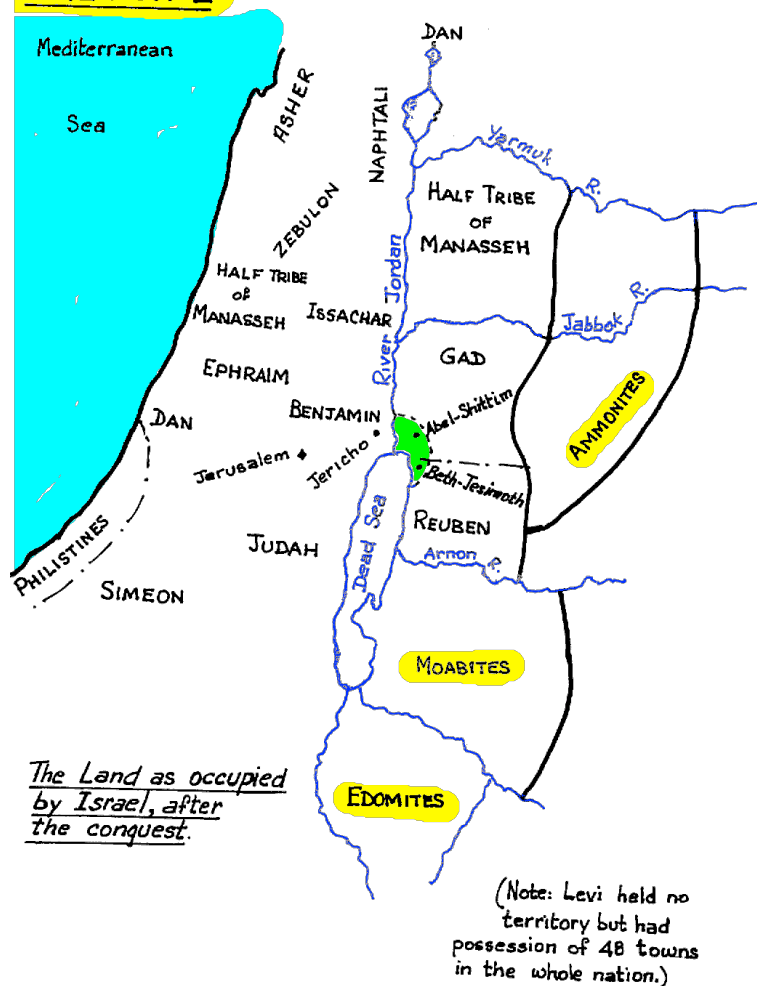
This territory east of the Jordan River was about 50 miles by 30 miles. Israel spread out in this area and no doubt pastured their flocks and herds in the good land.

. . . **31** So the people of Israel occupied the territory of the Amorites. **32** After Moses sent men to explore the Jazer area, they captured all the towns in the region and drove out the Amorites who lived there. **33** Then they turned and marched up the road to Bashan [see map], but King Og of Bashan and all his people attacked them at Edrei. **34** The Lord said to Moses, "Do not be afraid of him, for I have handed him over to you, along with all his people and his land. Do the same to him as you did to King Sihon of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon." **35** And Israel killed King Og, his sons, and all his subjects; not a single survivor remained. Then Israel occupied their land.

We read this account later in Joshua:

Joshua 12:6 Moses, the servant of the Lord, and the Israelites had destroyed the people of King Sihon and King Og. And Moses gave their land as a possession to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

SKETCH 2



The Land as occupied by Israel, after the conquest.

King Og was of a race of giants:

Deuteronomy 3:11 (King Og of Bashan was the last survivor of the giant Rephaites. His bed was made of iron and was more than thirteen feet long and six feet wide. It can still be seen in the Ammonite city of Rabbah.)

Numbers Chapter 22

Balak Sends for Balaam

Numbers 22:1 (NLT) Then the people of Israel traveled to the plains of Moab [see map on page 107] and camped east of the Jordan River, across from Jericho. **2** Balak son of Zippor, the Moabite king, had seen everything the Israelites did to the Amorites. **3** And when the people of Moab saw how many Israelites there were, they were terrified. **4** The king of Moab said to the elders of Midian, "This mob will devour everything in sight, like an ox devours grass in the field!"

So Balak, king of Moab, **5** sent messengers to call Balaam son of Beor, who was living in his native land of Pethor near the Euphrates River. His message said:

"Look, a vast horde of people has arrived from Egypt. They cover the face of the earth and are threatening me. **6** Please come and curse these people for me because they are too powerful for me. Then perhaps I will be able to conquer them and drive them from the land. I know that blessings fall on any people you bless, and curses fall on people you curse."

7 Balak's messengers, who were elders of Moab and Midian, set out with money to pay Balaam to place a curse upon Israel. They went to Balaam and delivered Balak's message to him. **8** "Stay here overnight," Balaam said. "In the morning I will tell you whatever the Lord directs me to say." So the officials from Moab stayed there with Balaam.

Balaam was a prophet from Mesopotamia. A "seer" is a see-er, or someone who predicts events. In some places in the Bible, a prophet of God is called a seer. However, Balaam is more correctly called a soothsayer, or someone who predicts the future by magical arts. He was a sorcerer.

Balaam can be a confusing character to figure out because he *does* acknowledge God and he has a prophetic gift. He knew and revered Jehovah God quite well. Balaam was a man who had faith in God, was aware that God had a will, and knew that God dealt with men. The story of Balaam teaches us that in spite of all this, a person can be very wrong, and his behavior can be evil.

Balaam knew all about the God of Israel - even *knew* the God of Israel - but his heart was not right, but rather given to covetousness and wickedness. He hired himself out to curse the enemies of those that employed him. The occupation of soothsayer was often inherited back in his day. The power, prestige, and wealth that came from what he did was passed down in families, and Balaam had a responsibility to keep it going. We will read in future chapters that Balaam *does* speak truth for the moment (God can use anyone, and God is in charge). Balaam is not the only unrighteous person mentioned in the Bible who speaks truth from God for the moment. Another example is the high priest, Caiaphas (John 11:49-51).

A person can have a strong religious faith but not be right with God if his heart is not right. Balaam was such a man. A man may be acceptable to men, but at the same time be displeasing to God. Such was the case with Balaam. Therefore, the Bible warns about Balaam in both the Old and New Testaments:

Joshua 13:22 The Israelites had also killed Balaam son of Beor, who used magic to tell the future.

2 Peter 2:1 But there were also false prophets in Israel, just as there will be false teachers among you . . . **15** They have wandered off the right road and followed the footsteps of Balaam son of Beor, who loved to earn money by doing wrong. **16** But Balaam was stopped from his mad course when his donkey rebuked him with a human voice.

Jude 3 Dear friends, I had been eagerly planning to write to you about the salvation we all share. But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people. **4** I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God's marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives . . .

8 . . . these people—who claim authority from their dreams—live immoral lives, defy authority, and scoff at supernatural beings . . . **10** But these people scoff at things they do not understand. Like unthinking animals, they do whatever their instincts tell them, and so they bring about their own destruction. **11** What sorrow awaits them! For they follow in the footsteps of Cain, who killed his brother. Like Balaam, they deceive people for money. And like Korah, they perish in their rebellion.

Revelation 2:12 "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Pergamum . . .

14 ". . . I have a few complaints against you. You tolerate some among you whose teaching is like that of Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel. He taught them to sin by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual sin. **15** In a similar way, you have some Nicolaitans among

you who follow the same teaching. **16** Repent of your sin, or I will come to you suddenly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

There is no person more dangerous than someone who has an understanding and knowledge of God, and even a relationship with God, but whose heart is not right. Unrighteous spiritual leaders will go after influence, power, and money, and they will practice wickedness and immorality. Ignorant people are willing to listen to and follow them because of the spiritual side of them.

Balak, who hired Balaam, rightly judged that Israel's success was due to their God. However, he thought (as did the heathen peoples) that Israel's God was just a local god who could be turned aside or bought off. Though Balak realized that the God of Israel was the source of Israel's success, he wrongly thought he could overcome Israel by going to a soothsayer such as Balaam and coerce him to stop Israel by cursing them. Balak went to Balaam thinking of him as a prophet of the Lord. Balak thought he could fight fire with fire, but he had it all wrong.

It is arrogance to think that God's will in this earth can be manipulated. To think that the word of God from His ministers can be used to work against the declared mind of God is madness! People who have their own will, their own agenda, will go so far as to believe this. These people have a heart that is not right (a heart that is in rebellion), and they are often unteachable. They do what they want, and even God can't do anything with them.

Numbers 22:9 That night God came to Balaam and asked him, "Who are these men visiting you?"

10 Balaam said to God, "Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent me this message: **11** 'Look, a vast horde of people has arrived from Egypt, and they cover the face of the earth. Come and curse these people for me. Then perhaps I will be able to stand up to them and drive them from the land.'"

12 But God told Balaam, "Do not go with them. You are not to curse these people, for they have been blessed!"

13 The next morning Balaam got up and told Balak's officials, "Go on home! The Lord will not let me go with you."

The matter should have stopped there, but it didn't. God spoke to this sorcerer and told him in no uncertain terms, "*Do not go with them.*" However, King Balak wouldn't let the matter drop.

14 So the Moabite officials returned to King Balak and reported, "Balaam refused to come with us." **15** Then Balak tried again. This time he sent a larger number of even more distinguished officials than those he had sent the first time. **16** They went to Balaam and delivered this message to him: "This is what Balak son of Zippor says: Please don't let anything stop you from coming to help me. **17** I will pay you very well and do whatever you tell me. Just come and curse these people for me!"

18 But Balaam responded to Balak's messengers, "Even if Balak were to give me his palace filled with silver and gold, I would be powerless to do anything against the will of the Lord my God. **19** But stay here one more night, and I will see if the Lord has anything else to say to me."

20 That night God came to Balaam and told him, "Since these men have come for you, get up and go with them. But do only what I tell you to do."

The above Scripture can be difficult to understand. God allowed Balaam to have his own way. God is angry with sin and rebellion, and He was angry with Balaam for prolonging this - Balaam told the men to stay one more night, and he was looking for a word that the Lord had changed His mind. Yes, God did tell him to go with the men, but only because that was what was in Balaam's heart.

Sometimes God lets rebellious people have their own way because there is little obedience in them. God gives them over to their own disobedience.

Balaam and His Donkey

21 So the next morning Balaam got up, saddled his donkey, and started off with the Moabite officials. **22** But God was angry that Balaam was going, so he sent the angel of the Lord to stand in the road to block his way. As Balaam and two servants were riding along, **23** Balaam's donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand. The donkey bolted off the road into a field, but Balaam beat it and turned it back onto the road. **24** Then the angel of the Lord stood at a place where the road narrowed between two vineyard walls. **25** When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it tried to squeeze by and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall. So Balaam beat the donkey again. **26** Then the angel of the Lord moved farther down the road and stood in a place too narrow for the donkey to get by at all. **27** This time when the donkey saw the angel, it lay down under Balaam. In a fit of rage Balaam beat the animal again with his staff.

28 Then the Lord gave the donkey the ability to speak. "What have I done to you that deserves your beating me three times?" it asked Balaam.

29 "You have made me look like a fool!" Balaam shouted. "If I had a sword with me, I would kill you!"

30 "But I am the same donkey you have ridden all your life," the donkey answered. "Have I ever done anything like this before?"

"No," Balaam admitted.

31 Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the roadway with a drawn sword in his hand. Balaam bowed his head and fell face down on the ground before him.

32 "Why did you beat your donkey those three times?" the angel of the Lord demanded. "Look, I have come to block your way because you are stubbornly resisting me. **33** Three times the donkey saw me and shied away; otherwise, I would certainly have killed you by now and spared the donkey."

34 Then Balaam confessed to the angel of the Lord, "I have sinned. I didn't realize you were standing in the road to block my way. I will return home if you are against my going."

35 But the angel of the Lord told Balaam, "Go with these men, but say only what I tell you to say." So Balaam went on with Balak's officials. **36** When King Balak heard that Balaam was on the way, he went out to meet him at a Moabite town on the Arnon River at the farthest border of his land.

Balaam, who loved being paid for his prophecies, had it in his heart to go to King Balak. His heart was not right, as is seen in the Scriptures above. A true prophet of God would have recognized that the Lord was trying to communicate with him, but then, a true prophet of God would not be on a mission to curse God's people!

In the previous scriptures we see a donkey who is more sensitive to spiritual things than the man of God. The Apostle Peter said:

2 Peter 2:12 (NLT) These false teachers are like unthinking animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed. They scoff at things they do not understand, and like animals, they will be destroyed. **13** Their destruction is their reward for the harm they have done. They love to indulge in evil pleasures in broad daylight. They are a disgrace and a stain among you. They delight in deception even as they eat with you in your fellowship meals. **14** They commit adultery with their eyes, and their desire for sin is never satisfied. They lure unstable people into sin, and they are well trained in greed. They live under God's curse. **15** They have wandered off the right road and followed the footsteps of Balaam son of Beor, who loved to earn money by doing wrong. **16** But Balaam was stopped from his mad course when his donkey rebuked him with a human voice.

Let's continue in Numbers:

Numbers 22:37 "Didn't I send you an urgent invitation? Why didn't you come right away?" Balak asked Balaam. "Didn't you believe me when I said I would reward you richly?"

38 Balaam replied, "Look, now I have come, but I have no power to say whatever I want. I will speak only the message that God puts in my mouth." **39** Then Balaam accompanied Balak to Kiriath-huzoth, **40** where the king sacrificed cattle and sheep. He sent portions of the meat to Balaam and the officials who were with him. **41** The next morning Balak took Balaam up to Bamoth-baal. From there he could see some of the people of Israel spread out below him.

Don't let Balaam's spiritual talk fool you. And don't let unrighteous people fool you with their talk of knowing God. Jesus said:

Matthew 7:15 (NKJV) "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. **16** You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? **17** Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. **18** A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. **19** Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **20** Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. **22** Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' **23** And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

CONCLUSION

Jesus said that we would be able to tell a true prophet from a false prophet by the person's fruit, or what they produce (their behavior). A person who claims to know God and have a relationship with Him but who behaves wickedly is a wicked prophet. He deceives himself as well as others.

When a person's heart is right he desires to be acceptable to God.

Romans 2:29 (NLT) No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God . . . it is a change of heart produced by the Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people.