

Last time / Lance assigned bodily discharges in Leviticus / awkward / Thanks Lance!

Tonight / he's made it up / one of best sections of Numbers / Balaam & frustrated attempt to curse Israel / for gold from Moab

22:1 • Then the children of Israel moved, and camped in the plains of Moab on the side of the Jordan across from Jericho.

Israel now moving north to prepare invasion

Encountering tribes / refused safe passage / in all these cases, Israel didn't want to battle yet – but were attacked – acting in defense against Edom (ch 20) / Arad (ch 21a) / Amorites (21b) / Bashan (21c) /

/ so they took key cities (Heshbon, Sihon) from Amorites Key – these cities once belonged to Moab (21:26)! So – Maob was watching carefully!

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.

Moab – cousin nation (one of Lot's children) / they should have friendly connection to Israel / not yet under God's judgment, like Canaanites / Israel just wanted passage

Instead of fear, they could have reunited / come back to Yahweh!

They were "sick with dread" – they knew military might would fail / so Balak resorts to spiritual warfare instead – calling for a quaky conjurer named Balaam

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!"

Balaam – one of strangest characters in OT / we'll build portrait – detail by detail – through the narrative

#1 • Balaam is a hired outsider

some try to put him 400 miles away – up by the Euphrates – "his people" is translated in some versions as "Ammon" (ESV) – which is the next tribe north of Moab – so 40–50 miles

Still – the Israelites aren't a personal problem to him – which explains why he has to be HIRED

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."

#2 • Balaam is a mystic / shaman / he's the "big guns"

He has a reputation known beyond his borders / he must either be quite a showman (a faker) or else a reputation for effective cursing & blessing – the big question: is he good or bad? Satanic or a prophet of God?

We'll get back to this in a moment

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.

#3 • Names Yahweh / "As the Lord speaks..." – strangest part – he names the true God of Israel!

God's name was only revealed to Moses after the Exodus, so God's name & reputation was becoming known in the ancient world / the Red Sea & defeat of Egypt was huge!

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.' "

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

#4 • God speaks TO Balaam!

We can assume God spoke in a dream – since vs. 8 mentions that it is night – and Balaam returns in the morning w/ a message

What kind of prophet is Balaam? Options =

A – Balaam is a true prophet of Yahweh

B – unique occurrence w/ false prophet / God intervening

Which one? The clue is coming later...

13 • 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."

14 • And the princes of Moab rose and went to Balak, and said, "Balaam refuses to come with us."

At first, the reader thinks, "Good job, Balaam" – but Balak isn't done working on Balaam

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.' "

Balaam, BTW, is a great picture of TEMPTATION.

If you were in Balaam's sandals, then Balak is the devil tempting you to do wrong – even with huge incentives

this teaches us – temptations come back again and again – even stronger and stronger

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."

Balaam seems to succeed again...

19 • Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the LORD will say to me."

And this is when Balaam FAILS / God had already spoken clearly. Balaam knew what was required of him (refuse them!)

But – he hedges – because he WANTS reward

2 Peter compares false teachers to Balaam...

15 Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing,

16 but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

= loved gain from wrongdoing!

= it drove him to madness

Sin is a form of insanity. We know what God has said, yet we listen to the lusts of the flesh / who in their right mind would challenge the CREATOR?

When you are tempted, say = “THIS IS CRAZY – I’m not in my right mind!”

20 • 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.”

Why does God allow Balaam to go? = Because Balaam wants to go – and Balaam has free will!

God is now using Balaam as a tool of judgment – and still allowing him to pursue his lust for gold

Don’t forget this – God won’t stop your sin / he will allow you to sin / but He will even use it to accomplish sovereign plans & judgment

#4 • God speaks THROUGH Balaam

Don’t assume the one speaking knows God / God might just be using their words for His own purposes / like the dumb donkey!

Yes – people can get saved in cults / false teachers / God can twist false words to steer people to the truth / Paul says this in Philippians 1 – people preaching w/ wrong motives – but somehow God used it to further the Gospel

This is the best answer to the question – “Was Balaam a true or false prophet?” Answer = *It doesn’t matter! His sin blinded him! He ends up on the side of God’s enemies! By the end of our story, Balaam will be killed as an enemy of Israel. He is powerless against God using his mouth, but Balaam himself is LOST because he won’t submit to God in his heart!*

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.

This is confusing at first – God told him to go – yet was still angry with Balaam?!

It is about Balaam heart & intent! He wants the gold and is WILLING to curse Israel if he can get away with it / even knowing God’s power over 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.

The subtle lesson here is that the dumb donkey has more spiritual sensitivity and awareness than Balaam

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.

Balaam suffers his first injury – a warning – yet instead of repentance, he gets angry and lashes out

Lesson: God might give us a warning shot / a small inconvenience or pain to steer us away from sinful dangers!

Respond w/ repentance, not anger & lashing out / before the sin brings even worse harms

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.

The donkey stopped instead of risking the danger / so Balaam beat the poor thing

Actually, God was pinning Balaam down – so he can't go left or right

Like the previous painful warning – this should have brought brokenness / instead he struck back

If God has brought the walls down around you to keep you from pursuing your sin any further – don't beat those around you – repent! Be broken!

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!"

#5 • He is so whacked, he doesn't find it strange to talk to a donkey! As Peter says, he has a "madness" about him

Again – SIN is INSANITY / drives us to do senseless things / yet the madness of sin is NOT an excuse for it – we ultimately know the TRUTH and are held accountable to it

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.

So here we see that it wasn't the donkey speaking – it was the Angel of the Lord using the dumb donkey's mouth

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.”

“Your way is perverse before me.” Those words are worth reciting the next time you are tempted!

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.”

Interesting – Balaam says he’s turn back if it displeases God

Yet God just said, “Your way is perverse before me.” There should have been no further question or discussion!

When you are tempted – just go with what God clearly says – don’t negotiate. Don’t continue to question the ethics of it. Don’t look for a loophole.

Just turn around and run from it!

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.” So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

Once again – God knows that Balaam really wants, so He allows it / but – Balaam is now just a tool in God’s sovereign plan / He’ll be like the mouth of the dumb donkey in what happens next

36 • 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.

37 • 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?”

38 • 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.”

Well, at least Balaam has warned Balak – things aren’t guaranteed to go as they hope or expect

39 • So Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kirjath Huzoth.

40 • Then Balak offered oxen and sheep, and he sent some to Balaam and to the princes who were with him.

41 • 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.

23:1–4 • they start with sacrifices / surprisingly, in line w/ what might please Yahweh! Like Balaam is trying to get God’s favor to succeed against Israel

Then Balaam said to Balak, “Build seven altars for me here, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams.”

2 • And Balak did just as Balaam had spoken, and Balak and Balaam offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

3 • Then Balaam said to Balak, “Stand by your burnt offering, and I will go; perhaps the LORD will come to meet me, and whatever He shows me I will tell you.” So he went to a desolate height.

4 • And God met Balaam, and he said to Him, “I have prepared the seven altars, and I have offered on each altar a bull and a ram.”

5 • Then the LORD put a word in Balaam’s mouth, and said, “Return to Balak, and thus you shall speak.”

6 • So he returned to him, and there he was, standing by his burnt offering, he and all the princes of Moab.

7 • 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!"

Balaam sees Israel is unlike any other nation – they belong to Yahweh

And they are a righteous people – there's longing in Balaam's words to be like them!

11 • Then Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, and look, you have blessed them bountifully!"

12 • So he answered and said, "Must I not take heed to speak what the LORD has put in my mouth?"

This is now the structure for the next chapter & ½ / He'll try to curse, but God replaces his words with blessings!

We won't cover all these blessings in detail, but jump into a few key parts...

13 • Then Balak said to him, "Please come with me to another place from which you may see them; you shall see only the outer part of them, and shall not see them all; curse them for me from there."

So they try a different strategy – maybe seeing the whole nation of Israel all gathered is too much – they will go after a small portion

Like eating an elephant – one small bite at a time

14–17 • more sacrifices...

So he brought him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

15 • And he said to Balak, "Stand here by your burnt offering while I meet the LORD over there."

16 • Then the LORD met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, and said, "Go back to Balak, and thus you shall speak."

17 • So he came to him, and there he was, standing by his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab were with him. And Balak said to him, "What has the LORD spoken?"

18 • 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.

Balaam's oracle includes his own limitations – to only bless and not curse

How can God curse Israel? He has chosen to bless Israel!

21 • "He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, Nor has He seen wickedness in Israel.

Wait – God has seen MUCH sin in Israel – what does this mean?

GRACE! Forgiveness. God doesn't see the sin He has forgiven.

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!’

There is no curse against Israel possible – they are under God’s spiritual covering – so no evil spirit can touch them

BTW: this is true of the Christian. Romans 8:1 – there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

You are immune from any external spiritual curse or harm / the only evil a Christian has to worry about is that which come from THEIR OWN HEART

Jesus said, when accused of not ceremonially washing his hands when eating... it isn’t the external things that make one unclean, but rather...

“the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.”

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.”

25 • Then Balak said to Balaam, “Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all!”

26 • So Balaam answered and said to Balak, “Did I not tell you, saying, ‘All that the LORD speaks, that I must do?’”

Balak is frustrated / Balaam says, “see, I told you!”

27 • Then Balak said to Balaam, “Please come, I will take you to another place; perhaps it will please God that you may curse them for me from there.”

28 • So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, that overlooks the wasteland.

New strategy – find a new location! / Notice = “PEOR” this becomes important in ch 25

29 • Then Balaam said to Balak, “Build for me here seven altars, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams.”

30 • And Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bull and a ram on every altar.

24:1 • Now when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not go as at other times, to seek to use sorcery, but he set his face toward the wilderness.

2 • And Balaam raised his eyes, and saw Israel encamped according to their tribes; and the Spirit of God came upon him.

Balaam knew it pleased the Lord to bless Israel – because that’s all that God allowed Balaam to do! So – he decided to go with the flow and not try to resist God!

VS 24:1 – Balaam didn’t use sorcery THIS TIME – unlike the other times! Which tells us: in the first two prophecies, he was TRYING to curse Israel!

3 • 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:

It sounds like Balaam is finally repenting. He isn’t. Don’t be fooled. We’ll see why later.

5 • “How lovely are your tents, O Jacob! Your dwellings, O Israel!”

And the blessing on Israel continues in 6–9

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?’

Look at the second part of vs 9...

“Blessed is he who blesses you, And cursed is he who curses you.”

Straight out of the horse’s mouth (or, the asses’ mouth, if you prefer!) / those who bless Israel are blessed – those who curse Israel are cursed. Balaam should be warned by his own prophecies!

10 • Then Balak’s anger was aroused against Balaam, and he struck his hands together; and Balak said to Balaam, “I called you to curse my enemies, and look, you have bountifully blessed them these three times!

11 • Now therefore, flee to your place. I said I would greatly honor you, but in fact, the LORD has kept you back from honor.”

Even though commanded to be silent by Balak, Balaam had to continue his prophecies...

12 • So Balaam said to Balak, “Did I not also speak to your messengers whom you sent to me, saying,–

13 • ‘If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD, to do good or bad of my own will. What the LORD says, that I must speak’?

14 • And now, indeed, I am going to my people. Come, I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the latter days.”

Before these last prophecies – think about Balaam’s words –

He’s saying – “as much as I tried, I cannot speak against God” / meaning – he admits he can’t overcome God’s power over his mouth – but – he would if he could!

He knew Yahweh had him beat – yet inwardly, he was still in rebellion

Sometimes we are like that! Jesus died and rose again. He beat sin and death. He has complete sovereign authority and power. And yet, we inwardly scheme to enjoy our sin, yet persist in our outward self-righteous image

15 • So he took up his oracle and said: “The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor, And the utterance of the man whose eyes are opened;

16 • The utterance of him who hears the words of God, And has the knowledge of the Most High, Who sees the vision of the Almighty, Who falls down, with eyes wide open:

So frustrating! Balaam’s mouth is uttering the right words – but his heart is perverse! His own eyes see the power of God / the Spirit is coming upon him – and he is more spiritually lost than his donkey!

17 • “I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel.

A star out of Jacob! A scepter out of Israel! Many believe this is a prophecy of the Star of Bethlehem that heralded Jesus' birth and led the Wisemen to Him

Genesis 49:10 • the scepter would belong to the tribe of Judah

This is messianic = "star" is connected poetically to "scepter" – so it means a King / Royalty

Also – this is probably why the Wisemen came seeking the birth new King in Israel whose birth was heralded by that strange new star they followed from the east.

And now Balaam foretells the impending judgment on all the tribes that caused Israel trouble, as well as the invasion of Canaan...

*And batter the brow of **Moab**, And destroy all the sons of tumult.*

*18 • "And **Edom** shall be a possession; Seir also, his enemies, shall be a possession, While Israel does valiantly.*

19 • Out of Jacob One shall have dominion, And destroy the remains of the city."

*20 • Then he looked on **Amalek**, and he took up his oracle and said: "Amalek was first among the nations, But shall be last until he perishes."*

*21 • Then he looked on the **Kenites**, and he took up his oracle and said: "Firm is your dwelling place, And your nest is set in the rock;*

22 • Nevertheless Kain shall be burned. How long until Asshur carries you away captive?"

The Kenites lived securely in rocky hills – some say "En Gedi" / yet they would be conquered by Assyria

Moses' father-in-law & Jael who slew Sisera w/ the tent peg were Kenites.

These weren't enemies of Israel / but as a tribe they boasted in their security, instead of boasting in God

And then a few last judgment prophecies

23 • Then he took up his oracle and said: "Alas! Who shall live when God does this?"

*24 • But ships shall come from the coasts of Cyprus, And they shall afflict **Asshur** and afflict **Eber**, And so shall **Amalek**, until he perishes."*

What is the mysterious navy that would destroy the coastlands of Israel – including the native tribes still living there? This is probably Rome – which is still over 1000 years in the future! WOW! What a prophecy!

25 • So Balaam rose and departed and returned to his place; Balak also went his way.

So – Balak wasn't able to prevail against Israel through Balaam's curses.

But he is still able to deal a major black eye on Israel – and Balaam had his part to play, as well...

[We'll cover this episode in depth on Sunday...]

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.

So – Balak finds a better way to curse Israel – send their women into the camp!

They seduced Israel into a vast immoral sex party w/ idolatry

16 • Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

17 • “Harass the Midianites, and attack them;

18 • for they harassed you with their **schemes** by which they **seduced** you in the matter of Peor and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a leader of Midian, their sister, who was killed in the day of the plague because of Peor.”

Where did this scheme come from?

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.

Balaam! He knew he couldn't curse God's people verbally – so he came up with a more insidious plan – send the women in to seduce Israel

This is confirmed in Revelation 2:14, to the city of Pergamos...

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.

We'll cover this in depth on Sunday.

For now: the end of Balaam's twisted tale is found when he is killed by Joshua's armies in Josh 13:22 • he died as an enemy of God – not as prophet, but as a phony.

Ch. 22-24 were a long build up to a sudden tragedy in the first few verses of ch. 25. Balaam isn't a story about a talking donkey.

The donkey is in the story to illustrate Balaam. God was using the dumb donkey just he was using Balaam's mouth. / And Balaam was as dumb as a brute beast!

BIG LESSON – don't let your faith just be your mouth / words / appearances it must be rooted in a transformed heart that is surrendered completely to Jesus.