

Sunday School Lesson for October 12, 2025
Numbers 22:22-35

Welcome to Sunday School on the go from the First Baptist Church in Tallassee. I'm Jim Glass, one of the teachers in the Pairs and Spares Class, and, on this second Sunday of October, we've been tracing the steps of the Israelites as they're making their way to the Promised Land after their miraculous deliverance from Egypt. They've made it to Kadesh-Barnea and sent one man from each of the twelve tribes to spy out the land, but the report that ten of them brought back was that "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are." As a result, the Lord caused them to wander in the desert for forty years--one year for each day the spies had searched out the land--and so that a new and hopefully more obedient generation would be prepared to seize the moment and the land.

And that brings us to the latter half of chapter twenty of the Book of Numbers and the actual beginning of the trek into the Promised Land. Their first obstacle along the way was the nation of Edom that lay to the east of where they were in Kadesh. Edom was the land where the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother, lived. It lay along an ancient trade route that linked Egypt with Mesopotamia in what is now eastern Turkey. The road is still traveled and is a popular tourist route through Jordan. **You can see Edom and the King's Highway on this map.**

Even though Moses appealed to their common ancestry, the Edomites refused to allow the Israelites to pass through their territory. Aaron died around this time, and he was buried on Mount Hor. Nearby lived a group of Canaanites who attacked the Israelites and took some of them captive. In response, the Israelites engaged them in battle around Hormah and defeated them.

To avoid going through Edom, they traveled south all the way to the Gulf of Aqaba, then went north again, east of Edom. In Numbers, chapter 21,

Moses had asked the Amorites for permission to pass through their territory. When they refused, they were defeated and the Israelites took possession of the land from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River. You can see the locations of these two rivers and the plains of Moab on this map. They continued north, engaging other Amorites in battle until they came to the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan at Jericho as we read in the opening verse of chapter 22.

With chapter 22, the fourth and final division of the Book of Numbers begins. In the remaining chapters, we learn about the things that happened as the Israelites were encamped in the plains of Moab and certain instructions that Moses delivered to the people as they prepared to enter the Promised Land.

The Moabites lived east of the Dead Sea in what is now Jordan. They were the descendants of Moab, the son of Lot and his eldest daughter as we find in Genesis, chapter nineteen, verse 37.

The land of Moab was characterized by its fertile plains and rugged highlands, making it very suitable for agriculture and livestock, and the people who lived there were known for their rich pastures and their skill in farming.

The Moabites worshiped the god Chemosh, whom they considered their national deity. Their idolatrous worship often included human sacrifice, as we find in Second Kings, chapter three, verse 27, where we read that the king of Moab offered his firstborn son as a sacrifice to Chemosh.

As the Israelites began moving towards the Promised Land, word came to the Moabites about their numbers and their God. As a result--verse three, "Moab was in great dread of the people, because they were many. Moab was overcome with fear of the people of Israel." So, the king of Moab, whose name was Balak, asked for help from the Midianites.

So, who were the Midianites? The Midianites traced their ancestry back to a man named Midian who was the son of Abraham by his wife, Keturah. Some time after Isaac was born, Abraham took another wife and had six sons

by her. The Midianites were a nomadic or semi-nomadic people, tending flocks and engaging in trade. You'll recall that Joseph was sold by his brothers to a band of Midianites, and we learn from Exodus, chapter two, that Moses went to Midian after killing an Egyptian slavemaster.

While he was in Midian, he met and married one of the daughters of Reuel, also known as Jethro, who is described as a priest of Midian. The fact that Jethro was a priest of God gives us some insight into the religious background of the people and the knowledge of God that the main character in our text today might have had.

Back to our story. Out of fear of the approaching Israelites--verse five--, Balak "sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the people of Amaw, to call him, saying, 'Behold, a people has come out of Egypt. They cover the face of the earth, and they are dwelling opposite me. Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.'"

We don't know much about Balaam. In verse five, we read that he was the son of Beor at Pethor which is near the River. Pethor was a town on the banks of the Euphrates River--known by those who lived there as "the" river. Balak, hearing of Balaam's reputation for effective blessings and curses, sent messengers who offered to pay Balaam to curse Israel. The questions about how Balaam gained that reputation have puzzled scholars for centuries.

They ask, "From where did Balaam gain his knowledge of God and how much did he actually know about God?" Some have said he was a pagan sorcerer who spoke in the Name of God because God had given him that insight in order to hasten the entry of the Israelites into the Promised Land. At times, it seems that Balaam had a very well-defined understanding of Who God is as well as a passing faith in God.

However he had gained this knowledge, he had a great following among the people who lived in this region because of his ability to foretell the future, discover things that had been lost, drive away evil spirits, or bring on curses for which he was famous.

In a day and age when little was known about the workings of God's creation, people turned to divination, the practice of attempting to foretell future events or discover hidden knowledge by supernatural means. For the great majority of them, every inanimate object in nature was possessed or inhabited by a spirit that could be appeased or provoked, depending on how an individual might try to relate to or treat the spirit.

Everything had supernatural significance--tea leaves, the rustle of trees in the wind, the direction and form of lightning flashes, animal entrails, the form of flames of fire that consumed a sacrifice or the smoke that rose from it, birth defects, the pattern of birds in flight--everything had a hidden message that could be known and understood, but only by those who had the hidden knowledge.

Because "everything" had a spirit that was somehow connected to and controlled by a higher power that ruled the world and human affairs to the smallest detail and manifesting itself through nature, nothing whatsoever could happen without some deeper significance that could be discerned by a few, select, specially trained individuals--like Balaam.

Because the Midianites shared the Moabites' fear of the children of God and the God Whom they served, they got together and agreed to hire Balaam to curse the children of God. So convinced of Balaam's abilities was Balak that he instructed his representatives to tell him, "I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed." When the representatives from these two groups came to Balaam, he told them he would ask the Lord how he should respond.

In verse nine, we read, “And God came to Balaam and said, ‘Who are these men with you?’ And Balaam said to God, ‘Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, saying, “Behold, a people has come out of Egypt, and it covers the face of the earth. Now come, curse them for me. Perhaps I shall be able to fight against them and drive them out.” God said to Balaam, “You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.””

The first thing that jumps out of this paragraph is that God came to Balaam. Exactly how this happened, we don’t know. Most scholars think it was in a dream as God had previously revealed Himself to the pagan king, Abimelech, in Genesis, chapter twenty and to Laban in Genesis, chapter thirty. God’s instructions to Balaam were quite clear: he was not to go with Balak’s men and he was not to curse the Israelites, because they were blessed.

The next morning, Balaam told the princes of Balak--verse thirteen--: “the Lord has refused to let me go with you.” This wasn’t exactly what the Lord had told him. God had also told Balaam that he was not to curse the Israelites, but Balaam told the Moabite and Midianite representatives only that God said he couldn’t go with them. It seems that he wanted to see how far he could go to comply with their request instead of doing exactly what the Lord had directed him to do.

One commentator says this of the character of Balaam: “If Balaam had been a true prophet and a faithful servant of Jehovah, he would at once have sent the messengers away and refused their request, as he must then have known that God would not curse His chosen people. But Balaam loved the wages of unrighteousness. This corruptness of his heart obscured his mind, so that he turned to God not as a mere form, but with the intention and in the hope of obtaining the consent of God to his undertaking.”

When Balak heard the report of the first attempt--verse seventeen--, he “sent princes, more in number and more honorable than these.” Because Balak believed that the God of Israel was nothing more than a national idol

who could be manipulated to bend His will to Balak's purposes, he reasoned that Balaam was just holding out for a better offer which could certainly have been the case given his reputation and the less-than-truthful answer Balaam had given.

This second delegation came to Balaam and said, "Thus says Balak the son of Zippor: 'Let nothing hinder you from coming to me, for I will surely do you great honor, and whatever you say to me I will do. Come, curse this people for me.'" Even though Balaam told them it didn't matter how much they paid him, he could only do what God told him to do; but, he asked them to stay the night so he could inquire of the Lord.

This time, God told him, "If the men have come to call you, rise, go with them; but only do what I tell you." So, the next morning, Balaam saddled up his donkey and left with the delegation. But he soon encounters a rather unexpected obstacle along the way. In verse 22 and the beginning of our focal text for today, we read, "But God's anger was kindled because he went, and the angel of the Lord took his stand in the way as his adversary. Now he was riding on the donkey, and his two servants were with him."

According to the Targum of Jonathan, an Aramaic interpretation of part of the Old Testament in use as early as the third century, AD, the two who rode with Balaam were Jannes and Jambres, the magicians of Egypt, that Paul compares with some in Ephesus in his warning to Timothy in Second Timothy, chapter three, verse eight. But, we can't say for sure this was so.

But we do know that God is angry because Balaam went. But didn't God tell him it was okay to go? "Why," you might ask, "does it appear that God changed his mind and was willing to give in to Balaam's request, and why is God now mad at him because he did what the Lord permitted him to do?"

When Balaam first welcomed Balak's delegation, God had said, "No, you're not to go with them and you're not to curse the Israelites," but that wasn't the message he passed on to Balak's messengers. He told them only a

half truth, opening the door for another chance to do what Balak wanted him to do. In the second visit, God tells Balaam he **could** go with them but he can only do what He tells him. Balaam doesn't appear to have passed this second message on to Balak's messengers at all. Then, when Balaam leaves, God burns with anger. It seems that Balaam went with the expectation that God had begun to bend his will towards Balaam and that he might yet have the chance to curse the Israelites and earn a hefty paycheck and boost his reputation in the process.

More important is the fact that God, in allowing Balaam to go with them, set the stage for him to bless instead of curse the children of God. It also had the effect of impressing upon Balaam the true character of God and Israel's divine election putting him in a corner, so to speak, where he had to decide whether he was for or against the God of Israel.

Not only was God's anger kindled because he went, the angel of the Lord stood in the way as his adversary. It had been the angel of the Lord who had led the Israelites through the wilderness both to guard and guide them as we read in chapter twenty. Now, this messenger of God blocks the road as Balaam's adversary.

The word we have translated as "adversary" is the Hebrew word, "Satan." In the Old Testament, the word appears 27 times and can refer to any significant opponent, whether human or supernatural. Its core idea is opposition--whether military, legal, political, or spiritual.

Balaam was oblivious to the angel of the Lord, driven as he was by his desire for personal gain, as well as, perhaps, the opportunity to actually curse the Israelites. Balaam didn't see the angel, but the donkey he was riding couldn't help but see the angel--verse 23: "And the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road, with a drawn sword in his hand. And the donkey turned aside out of the road and went into the field. And Balaam struck the donkey, to turn her into the road."

Balaam was known throughout that part of the world for his extraordinary visions, but now, what was visible to the eyes of a donkey was invisible to him. John Calvin asks, “[Where did this blindness come from], but from the avarice by which he had been so stupefied, that he preferred filthy lucre to the holy calling of God?” Balaam is blinded by his own insincerity and dishonesty, but his donkey can see everything clearly.

So, what does the donkey do? It turns away from the angel of the Lord--standing in the road--with a drawn sword in his hand. The donkey knew trouble when it saw it and immediately changed course not only to save itself but its rider as well.

What does Balaam do? He beats the donkey. It reluctantly continues on and there's the angel again--this time blocking the path between two hedgerows of vines: “Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on either side. And when the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she pushed against the wall and pressed Balaam's foot against the wall. So he struck her again.” This time, the donkey couldn't move away into a field but pressed itself against the wall to try to squeeze by the angel. And, once again, Balaam whipped the donkey.

Moving farther on, the angel took up another position, this time in a place too narrow for the donkey to turn--verse 26: “Then the angel of the Lord went ahead and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam. And Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff.” The donkey realizes that there's no possibility of going backward or forward, no way to turn to the right or the left, so it just collapses on the ground. With this third example of apparent stubbornness on the part of this dumb animal, it seems that Balaam has had enough, and his anger is aroused to the point that he strikes this dumb animal a third time.

But the donkey isn't just some dumb animal--it's a creature made by the sovereign handiwork of God and gifted with a very unique ability for such a moment as this, and, in spite of his renown as a seer you can be sure Balaam never saw this coming--verse 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?' And Balaam said to the donkey, 'Because you have made a fool of me. I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you.' And the donkey said to Balaam, 'Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Is it my habit to treat you this way? And he said, 'No.'"

In this miraculous occurrence that those who seek to disprove the Bible often use to attack the truth of the Word of God, the donkey's ability to perceive the appearance of the angel of the Lord before Balaam doesn't produce any real difficulty, for it's a well-known fact that irrational animals have a much keener instinctive sense of natural events before they happen, including such things as earthquakes and storms, and horses have been credited with saving their riders from dangers they didn't see.

So, what about the donkey actually speaking? In the actual meaning of the words as they appear in the text, there is nothing to suggest that the conversation didn't take place as we have presented to us. The donkey's feelings were expressed, but a donkey doesn't normally have the rationality or the ability to speak in a human language. There's nothing in this account that suggests that Balaam was in a state of prophetic ecstasy or that this event was revealed to him somehow in a dream. It seems that, as Augustine suggests, Balaam "was so carried away by his [avarice], that he was not terrified by this marvellous miracle, and replied just as if he had been speaking to a man, when God, although He did not change the nature of the [donkey] into that of a rational being, made it give utterance to whatever He pleased, for the purpose of restraining his"--that is, Balaam's--"madness." Balaam heard the donkey speak as the Lord opened its mouth. The God Who can bring creation into

existence by merely speaking a word has absolutely no difficulty enabling one of his creatures to speak.

Balaam lacked the spiritual sense to discern the presence and intention of the angel of the Lord because his sight--spiritual and physical--had been blinded by his thirst for wealth and honor. In his blindness, he lost all sense of self-control and beat the donkey with his staff. God might have rebuked Balaam through the angel, but He knew that more than a simple reprimand was called for, so He decided to humble this blind, stubborn, so-called prophet who prided himself on having eyes for divine revelations by opening the mouth of a dumb animal who became his teacher in that moment.

Not only did the donkey ask Balaam why he had struck it three times now, Balaam answered it. That he actually engaged in a conversation with a donkey may be more astonishing than just the donkey speaking to him. However, Balaam was a prophet of sorts who may have been accustomed to hearing voices when no other person was present; he had a broad and unquestioning faith and familiarity with things unseen; it was part of his profession as a sorcerer to engage with signs and wonders that the ordinary person would never consider; and he lived in an environment where the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural were often blurred.

And he was angry: "You have made a fool of me. I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you." One commentator points out the fact that "nothing blunts the edge of natural surprise so much as rage. Things which afterwards, when calmly recollected, cause the utmost astonishment, notoriously produce no effect at the moment upon a mind which is thoroughly exasperated."

Not only did the donkey speak to Balaam, it replied to his complaint as if it understood what he had said and went on to continue the conversation in verse thirty, asking, "Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Is it my habit to treat you this way?" There was no

deep, mystical revelation in the words of the donkey. It merely asked if, in all the years it had been the faithful beast of burden he had ridden on since he first rode a donkey--some writers say for thirty or forty years now--, if, in all this time, it had ever done anything like this before. There must have been a very important reason why this donkey should act so out of character after all this time, and Balaam should have recognized that the donkey had seen something he didn't that caused it to act as it did.

And he does--verse 31: "Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. And he bowed down and fell on his face." The angel had been there all the time, but his appearance had been blocked by Balaam's sinful intentions, restrained by the Providence of God until he had been sufficiently humbled by the donkey, or hidden until Balaam's heart was prepared to see what even the donkey could see. So, whether it was like Elisha's servant who couldn't see that the Assyrian army that encircled Jerusalem was itself encompassed by the heavenly host of horses and chariots of fire until the Lord opened his eyes--Second Kings, chapter six--, or how the men of Sodom were blinded so they couldn't even find the door to Lot's house, so it was with Balaam until the Lord unveiled his eyes to the reality before him.

Immediately, "he bowed down and fell on his face." For the first time--possibly in his entire life--the terror of Jehovah God overwhelms him. Had it not been for the instinctive protection of the donkey or the dread and terror that caused it to stop in its tracks, the outcome would certainly have been far different.

Then it's the angel who speaks next--verse 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 oppose you because your way is perverse before me. The donkey saw me and turned aside before me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, surely just now I would have killed you and let her live.'" The angel explains the donkey's actions, that it saw and responded

to the appearance of the angel three times now. Had his donkey not turned away, Balaam would be dead.

The angel accused Balaam of pursuing a course of action that was “perverse,” “reckless,” or “contrary,” depending on your translation. It’s an uncommon word in our Old Testaments with a very clear and weighty meaning of hostile opposition, reckless defiance, violent resistance, or rushing headlong--in this case--to destruction. God had not approved of the journey that Balaam had begun because He knew Balaam intended to do the will of Balak and probably wanted curse the Israelites. In Second Peter, chapter two, verse sixteen, Peter refers to Balaam’s attitude as “the madness of the prophet.” “Your donkey,” the angel said, “saved your life.”

And how did Balaam respond? Verse 34: “Then Balaam said to the angel of the Lord, ‘I have sinned, for I did not know that you stood in the road against me. Now therefore, if it is evil in your sight, I will turn back.’” Balaam confesses that he has sinned, but what sin does he confess? His confession was limited to what we find in the second part of the first sentence: “I did not know that you stood in the road against me.” He only apologizes for not being aware of the angel’s presence. He doesn’t search deeply into the nature of his own sin. He doesn’t acknowledge his mistreatment of his donkey. He doesn’t confess his failure to honestly pass on the Lord’s words to Balak and his messengers. And he doesn’t address his underlying motive of responding to Balak’s invitation to be paid for his work of cursing the Israelites.

Ultimately, his contrition springs from fear not obedience when he says, “if it is evil in your sight, I will turn back.” “Not that I agree with you that I’ve done anything wrong beyond failing to notice you, but, if you think I’ve done evil, okay, I’ll turn back.” Perhaps he had come to understand that the God of Israel was far more aware and mightier than he had ever imagined, but there’s no real change of heart. Balaam acknowledged the angel’s authority, but he’s

in no way moved to do the right thing. He feels no obligation to alter his course beyond going back to Pethor and starting over.

One commentator writes, “It is the sullen acquiescence of a foiled adventurer, who at the very outset is made to understand the terms and narrow limits of his power. He has his knowledge, his vision. When he set out, he intended to use them, if possible, under such conditions as would secure his own liberty. He is now made to understand that he is not free. The angel with the drawn sword will be in Moab before him, ready to cut him down if he should do or say anything opposed to the mind of the God of Israel. He is cowed, [but] not converted.” “‘I have sinned: I will get me back again,’ [says Balaam]. Yes. But will it be to lay other and more cunning plots for [self-promotion], and recover the lost ground by some daring stroke? Then it will be also to meet other angels, and, at the last, the minister who bears the sword of doom.”

Failing to understand, accept, or heed any deeper message from the angel beyond his failure to see him now standing before him, Balaam is willing--although reluctantly--to go back home; however, the Lord still had a use for him--verse 35: “And the angel of the Lord said to Balaam, ‘Go with the men, but speak only the word that I tell you.’ So Balaam went on with the princes of Balak.”

Permitting him to go should have shown him that it was not the journey itself that was displeasing to God, but the greed and intentions that motivated him to head toward Balak’s throne. Resenting but unable to resist the will of God, Balaam will do what God has required him to do. Maybe--just maybe--he could find a way to save his reputation as a prophet and still do what Balak was going to pay him so generously to do. However, this last encounter with a fearful donkey and a fearsome angel should have sharpened his conscience and sobered his mind so that he might pay closer attention to the Word of the Lord when it would come. If Balaam had a mind that was teachable, he would have

proceeded with extreme caution and with a very different spirit and very different intentions than those he had brought to this encounter with the angel.

Unfortunately, this is as far as our focal text takes us today, but we need to know the rest of the story. When Balaam arrives at Balak's palace, the king meets him and shows him just a portion of the people of Israel encamped on the borders of Moab. Balaam tells Balak that he can only speak what God allows him to speak.

As the next chapter opens, we find Balaam instructing Balak to have seven altars built where sacrifices would be made before he calls upon the Lord. The Lord did speak to him, and Balaam--instead of pronouncing a curse upon the Israelites, pronounced a blessing upon them, much to Balak's displeasure, to say the least. Still, Balak is willing to give him another chance, so the king takes him to another location and repeats the sacrifice. Once again, when Balak asks about the Word of the Lord, Balaam blesses the people of Israel. Chapter 23 closes with Balak building yet a third set of altars with the expectation that Balaam would finally speak a curse upon the Israelites.

Of course, he doesn't. Balaam's blessing of Israel closes in verse eight of chapter 24 with these words, "God brings him out of Egypt and is for him like the horns of the wild ox; he shall eat up the nations, his adversaries, and shall break their bones in pieces and pierce them through with his arrows. He crouched, he lay down like a lion and like a lioness; who will rouse him up? Blessed are those who bless you, and cursed are those who curse you."

Verse ten: "And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam." Balak is enraged by Balaam's failure to do what he had asked and sends him away. But Balaam's not finished--or rather, the Lord's not finished using Balaam for His glory. For the remainder of chapter 24, we read of Balaam's prophetic curse upon Edom, Seir, the Amalekites, the Kenites, Kain, Asshur, and Eber, but only after the interesting, Messianic prophecy found beginning in verse fifteen: "And he took up his discourse and said, 'The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor,

the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God, and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down with his eyes uncovered: I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.” Quite a surprising thing to hear from the mouth of Balaam, but it was the Lord Who had given him the words to speak.

This incident is yet another reminder of Paul’s words in First Corinthians, chapter ten, verse thirteen that “these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.” In our New Testaments, Peter, John, and Jude all refer to Balaam and share their insights of what we should learn from this event in his life. Warning about the false prophets whose teachings were bringing in destructive heresies, Peter writes in Second Peter, chapter two, verse fifteen: “Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.”

Warning his readers about those “who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ,” Jude writes in verse eleven of his letter: “Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam’s error and perished in Korah’s rebellion.”

As the Lord Jesus dictates His letters to the seven churches in The Revelation, John records the message to the church at Pergamum that contains this warning in chapter two, verse fourteen: “But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.” This connection is clearly spelled out in Numbers, chapter 31, verse sixteen.

In the end, Balaam refused to surrender his self-importance and self-promotion. For a moment, he was able to see a flash of heaven's light that could have led him to truly repent and his destiny forever changed. He certainly felt that to curse Israel would be unsafe and to bless God's chosen people would be commendable; but that thought, like others of a more spiritual nature, did not enter deeply into his mind. It seems that Balaam could pronounce the Lord's blessing on the Israelites with a kind of halfhearted pleasantness, and then do everything he could to defeat his own prediction. Ambition ruled his heart to the end, for the last we hear of him is in chapter 31, verse eight after the list of the five kings of Midian killed by the Israelites as they made their way to the Promised Land, almost as a footnote to that story: "And they also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword."

Alexander MacLaren concludes his comments with these words: "[Balaam] tried to make the 'best of both worlds,' so he ran with the hare and hunted with the hounds, and this was how it ended, as it always does, as it always will. How death ends all the illusions, sternly breaks down all the compromises, reveals all the absurdities! ... Let this sad figure which looks out upon us with grey streaming hair and uplifted hands from beside the altar on Pisgah speak to us. How near the haven / it is possible to be cast away! Like Bunyan's way to hell from near the gate of the celestial city. Balaam said, 'Let me die the death of the righteous!' and his death was thus: 'Balaam they slew with the sword,' and his epitaph is 'Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness,' got them, and perished!"

Thank you for being part of our brief look at the journey of faith the Israelites followed as they made their way to the homeland God promised to them through Abraham. Next week, we turn to the closing verses of chapter 33 and verses thirteen through fifteen of chapter 34 where we learn of the Lord's instructions for the distribution of the Promised Land among the twelve tribes.

As always, as it's still a good thing to do, keep calm, trust in the Lord, and wash your hands! God bless you!

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