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**BIBLE STUDY**

**Refuge Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith, Inc.**

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**“BALAK AND BALAAM”**

**Numbers 22:1-12**

***Numbers 22:1 "And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan [by] Jericho."***

This was the area that had belonged to Moab. The area, here, was actually part of the Jordan valley. The Jordan river flowed by the city of Jericho.

“This new section details the interaction of Balaam and Balak with the nation of Israel. These chapters seem to be an independent unit. Still they are related to the wilderness travel itinerary in that Moab is another one of the nations located in the Transjordan that Israel had to confront en route to the promised land. While it has comical elements, a serious message is communicated here in relation to the Abrahamic covenant (Gn 12: 2-3). God’s promises to Israel are still intact, despite major rebellion on their part. a. Balaam’s Meeting with Balak (22: 1-41)

“III. Israel on the Edge of the Promised Land (22: 1–36: 13) A. God’s Faithfulness and Israel’s Unfaithfulness (22: 1–25: 18)

22: 1 Finally, the Israelites arrived near the Jordan River across from the city of Jericho. This is where the book of Deuteronomy opens, as well as the book of Joshua. But the next several chapters of Numbers follow the actions of two men named Balak and Balaam rather than covering the more famous events that were to come.

22: 1. The Israelites returned south to the plains of Moab, which became their staging area in the beginning of their conquest of Canaan. The mention of the camp being beyond the Jordan opposite Jericho (v. 1) noted their location, but it also foreshadowed the challenges that lay ahead, that of crossing the Jordan and conquering Jericho. The Israelites would be in this location until Jos 3: 1. It is specifically called Shittim in Nm 25: 1.

***Numbers 22:2 "And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites."***

Baalak was the king of Moab, and he saw quickly what was happening to all the Amorites that Israel came into contact with. It does not say it, but his fear has become great that Moab will be next.

***Numbers 22:3 "And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they [were] many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel."***

Now, we see the cause of his fear. There were close to three million ofthe Israelites. Balak knew he had no chance in a battle against them.

***Numbers 22:4 "And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, Now shall this company lick up all [that are] round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor [was] king of the Moabites at that time."***

The Medianites were descended from Abraham and Keturah. In a very distant fashion, they were related to the Israelites. Both groups of people were descended from Abraham. What he is saying, is that the Israelites are having no difficulty taking whatever lies before them.

***Numbers 22:5 "He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which [is] by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me:"***

It appears, that Balak is speaking for himself and for the elders of Midian, when he sends a message to Balaam. The Nicolaitanes {spoken of in Revelation} and the Balaamites are thought by some to be the same people. One was just as evil as the other. Balaam was thought to be able to bring good, or bad, upon people by pronouncing it. It appears, Balak was superstitious. The river spoken of is probably the Euphrates. He implies these are Egyptians. It is not possible, however, that Balaam would not have heard who they are. It seems to Balak they cover the face of the earth, because there are close to three million people.

***Numbers 22:6 "Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they [are] too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, [that] we may smite them, and [that] I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest [is] blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed."***

Balak has heard that Balaam has great powers. Being a superstitous man,he seeks supernatural help from Balaam. He believes if Balaam says the word,he can prevail against this large mass of people. Balaam was a man who proclaimed power by God. He was a heathen diviner. He thought himself to have the gift from God.

22: 2-6 Balak son of Zippor was Moab’s king (22: 4). He had seen what happened to the Amorites, and his people were terrified of the Israelites (22: 2-3). Therefore, the king decided to hire Balaam son of Beor to come and curse the people of Israel, so that Moab could defeat them (22: 6). Balaam was essentially a prophet-for-hire in an area where the false god Baal was worshiped. So Balak sent messengers to Balaam with a request: Please come and put a curse on these people. . . . I know that those you bless are blessed and those you curse are cursed (22: 5-6). Apparently, Balaam had a reputation for getting results through the words he spoke. But the Lord’s reputation is flawless: if he says something will happen, it will happen. This is important to understanding what happened next because God had promised Abraham many years before that he would, “make [him] into a great nation. . . . [He would] bless those who bless [Abraham], and curse anyone who treats [Abraham] with contempt” (Gen 12: 2-3). These promises would extend to the Israelites, Abraham’s blood descendants. Balak’s plan, then, was failed from the start. If God is determined to bless you, no one’s words to the contrary can overrule him.

22: 2-6. The nation of Moab was fearful of having such a large Israelite presence in their midst, especially after the Israelites defeated the Amorites. Balak, the king of Moab, is mentioned several times in the Scriptures (Jos 24: 9; Jdg 11: 25; Mc 6: 5; Rv 2: 14). The Moabites had just recently been under the control of King Sihon of the Amorites (Nm 21: 26), and after Sihon had been defeated by the Israelites (21: 23-26) Moab was able to regain their independence. Balak of course would have wanted Moab to retain that status, and hence there is clear motivation for his subsequent actions. This concern about the Israelite presence was also of great concern to the Midianites, who were contacted by the Moabites. The Midianites were descendants of Abraham through Keturah (Gn 25: 1-2), and Moses was married to a Midianite woman (Ex 2: 16, 21). Whereas Moses had previously experienced good relations with the Midianites (Nm 10: 29), this incident was the beginning of conflict between Israel and the Midianites (25: 6, 14-18; 31: 2-10; Jdg 6: 1-8: 28). The Moabites had nothing to fear, because God never intended for the Israelites to possess the land of Moab (Dt 2: 9). The Moabites compared Israel to an ox, an image that was later attributed to God in Nm 24: 8. Israel’s larger numbers and recent victories in the area caused Balak to hire Balaam to curse Israel as an alternative warfare strategy. Where Balaam was from is uncertain. There are several geographical and ethnic designations associated with Balaam: Pethor … near the River (v. 5, often taken to mean the Euphrates), land of the sons of his people (22: 5, or “land of the sons of Amaw,” some versions read “Ammon”), Aram (23: 7), “mountains of the East” (23: 7) and Mesopotamia (Dt 23: 4, lit., “Aram Naharaim”). Most scholars claim he was from Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq), although it is challenging to assume that several 400-mile one-way trips were undertaken to secure Balaam’s services in this account’s time frame. Alternatively, he may have been from the Transjordan area (Syria), placing him much closer to Moab. At Deir Alla, in modern-day Jordan, an inscription (from around 850 BC) was found in 1967 that specifically mentioned a “Balaam, son of Beor,” so there is a strong association with Balaam in the Transjordan region.

***Numbers 22:7 "And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand; and they came unto Balaam, and spake unto him the words of Balak."***

Balak is trying to hire Balaam to curse the Israelites for him. Superstitous people did not understand the spirit world, and they assumed that Balaam would sell his services to Balak. A true man of God could not be bought for such a job.

***Numbers 22:8 "And he said unto them, Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the LORD shall speak unto me: and the princes of Moab abode with Balaam."***

Balaam thought he would hear from God in a dream, or a vision, about this situation. He wants the money, so if he does not hear from God, he will go.

***Numbers 22:9 "And God came unto Balaam, and said, What men [are] these with thee?"***

We see, from this, that God truly does speak to him. Of course, God knows who they are, He wants Balaam to examine who they are, with this question.

***Numbers 22:10 "And Balaam said unto God, Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, hath sent unto me, [saying],"***

We see, from this answer of Balaam, he is aware that evil Balak of Moabhas sent these men.

***Numbers 22:11 "Behold, [there is] a people come out of Egypt, which covereth the face of the earth: come now, curse me them; peradventure I shall be able to overcome them, and drive them out."***

Up until this time, Balak has not mentioned the fact that these are God's chosen people. He speaks of them, as if they are Egyptians. The request from Balak is for Balaam to curse these people, so he can defeat them in battle.

***Numbers 22:12 "And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they [are] blessed."***

God reveals to Balaam that these are His chosen people, and Balaam is not to curse them.

22: 7-12 Balak sent elders of Moab and Midian to Balaam with fees for divination in hand (22: 7). It’s interesting that although Balaam practiced God-forbidden forms of sorcery, he refused to go with these men until he had received an answer from the Lord about it (22: 8). The implication seems to be that he intended to do whatever God told him to do, no matter how good the money was—which is exactly what he did at each point in the story. So that night God graciously condescended to appear to this sorcerer, who generally was not committed to living in a manner pleasing to him (see Rev 2: 14), and asked, Who are these men with you? (22: 9). Balaam relayed what he had been asked to do to Israel, and God warned him not to curse his people whom he had blessed (22: 10-12).

22: 7-14. Balak sent messengers and elders from both Moab and Midian to bring Balaam to hire him to curse Israel. Balak sought to secure him because he believed that those whom he blessed were blessed and those he cursed were cursed (22: 6), ascribing to Balaam what had been divinely promised to Abraham in Gn 12: 3. When the messengers relayed what Balak had requested, Balaam asked them to spend the night there so he could consult the Lord. In each of the scenes the Balaam narrative mentions divine instructions to Balaam about what he should say and references to divine encounters between Balaam and the Lord. These repetitions serve to unify the entire section of Nm 22–24. Confusion exists regarding Balaam’s spiritual status. Some assume he was a true believer since he used the personal name for the God of Israel (“ Yahweh,” 22: 8), and he sought to carry out what the Lord told him to do. On the other hand he was a diviner (Jos 13: 22), an office expressly forbidden in the law (Dt 18: 10), and he is negatively portrayed in the NT (2Pt 2: 15; Jd 11; Rv 2: 14). While Balaam’s character is not explicitly commented on in Nm 22–24, he is later shown to be a completely negative character, causing Israel “to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab” (Nm 25: 1-9; 31: 16). He even died as a result of his wickedness (31: 8). His negative character was not noted in Nm 22–24 because he had an important role in blessing the Israelites. The literary or thematic purposes of this section would not have been served if his negative traits were highlighted before the Lord used him as an agent of blessing. During the night God came to Balaam and asked him a rhetorical question about who sent the men to hire him. Several threefold repetitions in the Balaam account seem to be a clear literary device to heighten the absurdity of Balaam’s overall behavior: Balaam had three divine encounters (22: 10, 20, 22-35); a donkey avoided an angel three times (22: 23, 25, 27); and Balaam participated in three sets of sacrifices (23: 1, 14, 29). There is a shift in the use of the names for God in this section of Numbers. Balaam stated that he needed to have contact with the Lord (22: 8), and yet the text states that God met him. This may provide a clue as to how Moses portrayed Balaam. Balaam claimed to have direct contact with the Lord of Israel, but in reality this pagan diviner was far from having a personal relationship with the Lord. The words of Balak from vv. 5-6 are summarized, but there are a few differences (primarily the Hb. words for curse are different). Either the messengers changed the words slightly or Balaam did in reciting the instructions back to God. God graciously communicated with Balaam (as He did with other pagan authorities; Gn 20: 6-7), and warned him not to go with them or to curse Israel. In the morning Balaam’s refusal to go back with the messengers was conveyed to Balak.

**QUESTIONS**

1. The place, in verse 1, is actually part of the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ valley.

2. What was Balak afraid of?

3. Balak was the king of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

4. Who did Moab talk to about this problem?

5. The Medianites were descended from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

6. Who did Balak send a message to for help?

7. Who did he call the Israelites?

8. What is the river in verse 5?

9. Who were spoken of as the same people as the Balaamites?

10. What did Balak want Balaam to do?

11. Why had Balak gone to him for help?

12. How were they trying to acquire Balaam's help?

13. Who does Balaam seek permission to go from?

14. He speaks of the Israelites, as if they are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

15. Why did God tell Balaam not to go?