

MARCH 15

Numbers 22:21-23:30

Numbers 22:21-41

Vs. 21-30 This section has given rise to lots of jokes because of the talking donkey. On the other hand, Balaam, from this point on, becomes infamous in the Bible. He's a bad guy. The images he brings up are of a false believer, someone who has infiltrated the company of faith. He actually does "believing" stuff, prays out loud, and is someone whom God actually speaks to and uses. But, here's the thing, it affects the people of God to be useless for God, or it leads them to bring God's judgment on themselves. We'll read what Peter says about Balaam, but Paul talked about people like this who infiltrated churches and actually had a following in the church. Gain and position was always the motivation of these people. He told Timothy these errant teachers made their way into households by capturing people easily swayed; they thought "godliness" was a means to gain. To the Philippians Paul warned them of brothers whose god was their belly. And in a very strong warning at the end of Romans, Paul said that people like this "do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites."

To get a better idea before you read about Balaam, read 2 Peter 2, Revelation 2:14 and Numbers 31:8 and 16. I'd recommend this because it gives insight into what is happening with Balaam and the events immediately following his return to Mari.

V. 22 Here is a case in point where knowing what is going on with Balaam helps. You would eventually figure all of this out by reading your one-year Bible every year. God is mad at Balaam *because he went*, but God told him to go. The issue is what is brewing in Balaam's heart. He's looking for a loophole, and God knows it.

V. 30 I suppose one application here is that if an animal you own ever begins talking and wins the argument, you are in trouble.

Vs. 31-35 Verse 32 expresses what God has seen. Balaam is going with the intent of finding a way to get rich. He wants to find a way to be paid. Notice that the angel's warning to Balaam in v. 35 is only to speak the word *He* tells him. Balaam will obey until he is off the clock and on his way home. Then he finds the loophole.

In observing, one question will be, "Who is *the angel of the Lord*?" What clues do you have in vs. 31-35 that this is actually God, the pre-incarnate Son of God? This also helps explain Numbers 23:4 & 16.

Vs. 36-41 Notice that Balaam tells Balak that he must speak the word that God puts into his mouth. This will be like a refrain, and knowing Balaam, you wonder if there was something sinister even in him saying this.

V. 40 The sacrifices are interesting, because, though pagan, they were similar to what God told Israel to do. Since the Fall it is probably built into the conscience of man that God must be appeased somehow. Also, God apparently told Adam how to sacrifice to cover his sin and come before Him. Abel must have had some instruction. This probably passed down through mankind.

V. 41 The place Balak took Balaam was for Baal worship. Not only were these "holy" places, but Balak was hoping to find a part of Israel that God didn't like and would curse.

Numbers 23

Vs. 1-6 Don't vs. 4-5 amaze you? It appears that God gave Balaam a prescribed way to come before Him. For Balaam it was probably more like a rite to get God to do something. I don't think Balaam really worshiped God. But notice, God not only speaks with Balaam, but it also appears He meets with him. If so, this would be the angel of the Lord.

Vs. 7-10 This is Balaam's first blessing of Israel.

Vs. 11-17 Balak was upset, but Balaam was holding to the rules, and Balak believed in the need of spiritual warfare against Israel so deeply that he begged Balaam to try again.

V. 14 Pisgah is also the ridge from which Moses would look over the Promised Land and take his last breath.

V. 21 This is interesting. Balak keeps taking Balaam to a different spot to find some part of the people that God is displeased with and will curse, but here it says that God doesn't find anything about them that displeases Him. God certainly has His own issues with the people, but for the sake of His promise to Abraham, they are beloved. He says this through Paul also, *As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers.* (Romans 11:28)

That's the same with us. God may have an issue, for the moment, with our behavior; but in Christ, we are absolutely and completely loved and accepted at every moment.

V. 23 God says He will not only protect Israel spiritually; but their success, like in Egypt, will be seen as His work.

Vs. 24- 30 I guess three times is a "charm" when you're trying to curse someone. *Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor.* That word, *Peor*, will become a bad word among Israel, but not because Balaam curses them. In fact Balaam can only bless Israel. But this will be the place where Balak uses a little trick Balaam will give him, and Israel will bring God's judgment upon themselves. At the foot of this mountain, 24,000 people will die, not because of a curse, but because Balaam knew God well enough to know what the people would have to do to get God to judge them.

Luke 1:57-80

V. 63 This gives you the idea that Zechariah was not only unable to speak, but that he was also deaf. I think that when the angel told him he would be silent, he meant that Zechariah would live in silence and be unable to speak. That's why they had to make signs to him; and that's why, when he writes *John*, they are amazed. He couldn't have heard that conversation.

Vs. 64-66 God used this entire situation. Now, with this amazing situation He had built (Elizabeth's barrenness all those years, Zechariah's deafness and dumbness, the unexpected "miracle" pregnancy), suddenly Zechariah's mouth is opened and tongue loosed. The people go out and spread the word, not extremely far, but far enough. The seeds are planted, and in 30 years John will come forth. So, what was the news that the neighbors pondered in their hearts and spread far and wide? It was what they recounted, not only the physical events of John's birth, but also what they heard in vs. 67-79.

Vs. 67-79 Notice that the focus is salvation and the forgiveness of sins. Who did Luke find who remembered that prophecy? If I had to guess, I would say Luke heard it from Mary, Jesus' mother, who was still there and heard it.

Notice how the promise to Abraham brings deliverance to Israel and salvation to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

V. 80 We have no clue where John grew up. He might or might not have been raised in a very separate Essene community. It says that he lived in a remote place, which might have been east of Hebron, toward the Dead Sea. He would still have gone to Jerusalem three times a year as all Jewish males were required, and he would have known his cousin Jesus, and maybe his cousins James and John, who later became his disciples and then Jesus' disciples.

I know this might seem like "Christmas in March," but it should still be inspiring for us to hear how God patiently worked to bring salvation to the world. As disciples in the harvest, we have

received this salvation. We are the fruit of God's love and patient working. We are the fruit of *the travail of His (Jesus') soul*, (Isa. 53:11, KJV) and Jesus is pleased at His work. What an incredible message to take into the harvest as we follow Him, making disciples, who make disciples.

Psalm 58

We're not that "into" judgment, so this psalm, and its very graphic pictures, might leave us cold. Verse 11 is the point of this. There is a reward for being close to God on this planet and God does, and will, judge mankind. This morning I was reading some of the parables of Jesus regarding the Kingdom, and along with the images we like, there is also the warning of the close of the age when the angels will come out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire where men will weep and gnash their teeth.

We work in the harvest now, while there is still time for people to respond to God. *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.* (John 5:24)

It's a good exercise to put things into sections to understand the flow of what the psalmist is saying.

Vs. 1-2 David is addressing those individuals who are making themselves judges over him and the people, spreading lies and mistreating the people. David is running from these individuals who are working for King Saul.

Vs. 3-5 David is declaring what they are like.

Vs. 6-9 David is asking God to judge them. If you read 1 Samuel 22, you'll see that these people deserved to have their teeth broken out.

Vs. 10-11 This is the hope of those who are oppressed for their faith and trust in God. I was reading today of Jesus saying that the day of the Son of Man would bring judgment on the earth. When you see Jesus sitting on the throne in Revelation and opening the seals, you understand that this will be a day of rejoicing for those who love God.

Proverbs 11:12-13

This is a good word for anyone trying to reach his neighbors or the people close to him. The closer you get, the more you learn. Knowing the love of God, and the grace we have been shown, gives us the spiritual wisdom to be silent, patient and forbearing, so we can build trust and keep showing them the love of Christ.