

Balaam Numbers 22-25; 31

Setting

The Israelites 40 years in the wilderness are nearly over. At this time Moab & Midian were one nation with kings alternately ruling from each nation. The Moabites were idolaters.

Originally Midian was a son of Abraham by his wife Keturah (Gen 19:33-38)

Moab was the incestuous offspring of Lot through his eldest daughter.

Both would have known the teaching of Abraham about Jehovah God, and had rejected it for generations.

Israel had been refused passage through Edom and was travelling another way towards Canaan. On the way they defeated the king of the Amorites.

When the Israelites turned up on the Moabite border King Balak (whose name means devastator – and had a reputation for ruthlessness & cruelty) he and his people were worried.

These nations Moab & Midian sent for the services of one prophet called Balaam (Deut 23:4) from Abraham's home area – Mesopotamia . Would he please ask Jehovah God to curse the Israelites that he had been blessing so obviously (to others).

Balaam quickly discovered Gods will. He was to decline the offer of serving King Balak in this way.

But offered great wealth, he prays again, hoping to twist Gods arm. Balak keeps upping the offer and Balaam wants the money. He knows Gods direct will but eventually God concedes and allows Balaam to go under his permissive will.

Balaam failed the test, so God decided to try and teach obedience another way.

Called to direct the destiny of a whole nation, he was unable to control the destiny of one donkey.

Numbers 22 contains one of the most bizarre stories in the entire Bible. It features a donkey speaking fluent Hebrew, the only biblical account of an animal speaking, as well as showing more insight than a prophet

Numbers 22:21-35

Only when confronted by fear was Balaam prepared to consider giving up. *³⁴Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned. I did not realize you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now if you are displeased, I will go back."*

Balak was determined to curse Israel, Balaam was determined to win the riches of Moab – neither would succeed.

Even after talking with a donkey and a confrontation with a sword-bearing angel, Balaam continued to accept the hospitality of rich King Balak.

Three times Balaam tried to curse Israel – but each time out came blessings. 23:7-10; 24:1-10;

“His final prophecy is a magnificent vision of Israel’s ascendancy and the messianic glory” ATG p44

Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I brought you to curse my enemies, but you have done nothing but bless them!" Numbers 23:11

Not the end of the story

Militarily, Israel was doing well. Their enemies were terrified (22:3), and the man summoned to put a curse on Israel had instead spoken God's blessing (24:8-9). But the Israelites were vulnerable to sexual temptation.

Balaam had not given up hope of the money, in spite of the displeasure of Balak. He advised the king that God would be displeased with Israel if they sinned (Num 31:16) – and how better than to do it the way cars are sold – with pretty women. Moabite women offered sexual favors, then invited the foreigners to local religious services. It is an old method of subverting God's people, and it still works.

The zeal of Phinehas the high priests son eventually brings God’s judgement plague, to an end, but not before another 24,000 had died.

God, in his desire for holiness enters a death sentence against the Midianites who had declared themselves enemies of God and his people by their actions.

And finally

Moses last act as leader before he dies is to take on the Midianites. 12,000 men at arms go into battle and with God's help win.

BUT – even though they killed the five kings of Midian, and all their military forces, they included in the plunder they brought back the very same women that had seduced them into sin previously.

For generations the Midianite and Moabite people had rejected what they knew of Jehovah God. This was to be their time of judgement for the tribes of Canaan and the surrounding area.

Genesis 15:13-16

13Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. 14But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. 15You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. 16In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

Death of Moses

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Conclusion

Balaam learnt on pain of death when the Israelites finally attacked Moabites that you cannot serve God and money. How ironic that Balaam ignored the prophecy God had given him about the invincibility of Israel. He knew God's will but desperately wanted to serve both God and money. He knew God but wanted to enjoy the rewards of the world.

Israel learnt, but not for long, that God places great importance on practical holiness, and the need for his people to separate themselves from unholy ways.

Some have called Balaam the Judas of the Old Testament, and certain parallels do emerge. Both men came close enough to truth to appear sincere and faithful. For a time, both seemed to serve the true God. But, motivated by ambition and greed, they renounced God and turned against him, with catastrophic results.

The Bible devotes one-eighth of its pages to the story of Moses' time (a bulk of material two-thirds the length of the entire New Testament). And when Jesus came as the great Liberator who set all humanity free, the New Testament reached back to Moses for a comparison (Hebrews 3:1-6).

To his great disappointment, Moses could not lead his people into the new land, for reasons mentioned in 32:48-52. But God allowed him a final look over all the Promised Land. And, in a very unexpected way, Moses did realize his dream of setting foot in the Promised Land.

Over a thousand years later, he returned with the prophet Elijah and visited with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17; Mark 9; Luke 9). Moses had learnt that God is faithful and will do what he says. We too can rely on the promises of God.

God has promised a future for Israel – that no force on earth, whether Babylonian, Roman, Nazi Germany or Palestinian can prevent. May we note and heed today the true prophecy of Balaam.

Numbers 23:19-20 God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? I have received a command to bless; he has blessed, and I cannot change it.

24:9 "May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed!"

READ PSALM 122

Homework

Part of a Bigger Battle

Seven books of the Bible refer to Balaam. The importance given to his story implies that it stood as a key event in the Israelites' relationship to pagan cultures. 2 Peter 2;15; Jude 11; Revelation 2:14

Deut 23:4 from Abraham's home area – Mesopotamia
Nehemiah 13:2; Micah 6:5

What was Balaams WAY Num 22-24

What was Balaams ERROR

What was Balaams DOCTRINE (Num 25, 31) “Our God will never curse his own people. The only way our enemies deprive us of Gods blessing is to lure us into sin with them. This was the deadly doctrine of Balaam. It can be a fatal lesson now as it was when Israel fell for it” ATG p46