

## Into the Promised Land - Joshua's Story

### Lesson #21 - "A Significant Encounter During the Final Part of the Journey"

#### • H A N D O U T •

► As we begin this study lesson, Israel is once again on the march.

► Israel had skirted Edom and were making their way northward, up the eastern side of the Jordan River. Moving from camp to camp, Israel finally set up camp at the Arnon Wadi on the east side of the Dead Sea. This Wadi marked the border between the Moabites and the Amorites.

For the first time in a very long time, there was joy in Israel's camp. In fact the last time we heard Israel singing was back at the Red Sea [ref: Exodus 15]. The song they sang was "Spring up, O well! Sing about it".... It expressed thankful joy for the ways God provided water for them in the desert where there was no water. The scripture passage refers to the "Book of the Wars of the Lord." Presumably this was an ancient collection of "songs that praised God in times of war." Sadly, these songs are lost to us.

Since they camped at the edge of the land of the Amorites, Moses sent messengers to Sihon, King of the Amorites asking for permission to pass through their land, promising they would not disturb the land or drink any water from their wells. But, just as Edom had done, the Amorite King said no! But the King didn't just leave it there. He also attacked Israel. Then the Lord once again gave Israel favor and the Amorites were defeated. Israel entered the land and secured it. It had taken the wilderness wandering to accomplish what God wanted Israel to do when they first arrived at this place, 40 years before.

They turned north toward Bashan, located on the east of the Sea of Galilee. [Today, this area is the Golan Heights.] As soon as Israel entered Bashan territory, King Og attacked Israel. But the Lord spoke to Moses and told him: "Do not fear him, for I have delivered him into your hand. You shall do to him as you did to King Sihon of the Amorites."

And so Israel defeated King Og.

Q: Israel began this journey to the Promised Land as committed complainers. No matter how much God did for them, it never seemed to be enough. But, this new generation seems to have turned a corner in their trust in God. What has changed?

#### Israel moved camp again, to the plains of Moab by the River Jordan, across from Jericho.

► Forty years ago, God judged Israel and sent them wandering in the desert because they had rebelled against Him. Now, 40 years later, with many miracles, blessings, and victories behind them, as well as the loss, one by one, of the first generation, Israel has, again, reached the edge of the border of Canaan.

Because they have defeated those who have come against them, Israel has gained a reputation of being a powerful people, among the surrounding territorial nations. These victories have greatly unnerved the kings of these nations, and they are afraid of Israel. This fear sets the stage for the next Biblical drama:

• ► **BALAK and BALAAM** • Their story is captured in Numbers Chapters 22 thru 24. [This is a narrative summary rather than a verse by verse study.] Balak was the king of Moab and Balaam was a greedy prophet of God whose heart was not right with God. [Because Balaam did hear from God and God did give him some true prophecies to utter, we cannot classify him as a false prophet. But he was certainly not a righteous man. Balaam had a reputation of being powerful diviner, but he ended up betraying Israel and was responsible for leading them astray – all because of his love of money. The New Testament soundly condemns Balaam and uses him as a negative example. [2 Peter 2:15-16 • Jude 1:11]

► The story opened in Midian, in the vicinity of Moab, along the Euphrates River. King Balak heard what Israel had done to the Ammonites, so when Israel arrived in his territory he was filled with dread. He gathered his leaders together and said: "This horde is going to lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field." Following this meeting, Balak came up with a solution. He sent messengers to the prophet, Balaam. [The text calls these messengers "princes." They were Moabites and Midianites, who were allied together against Israel] Balaam was told that a vast number of powerful people, who had come out of Egypt, were now threatening him in his territory. King Balak's message to Balaam said, "As a prophet of God, whomever you curse

*will be cursed.*” Therefore, Balak wanted to pay Balaam to put a curse on Israel, whom he had described as the powerful people who had come out of Egypt. The King reasoned that once Balaam cursed them, he would be able to defeat them and drive them out of the country.

Balaam responded by saying he needed to first get God's permission to this.

Q: Who were the Moabites?

Q: Who were the Midianites?

Q: Why did Balak say that “whomever Balaam blessed would be blessed, and whomever he cursed would be cursed”?

Q: Why would Balaam need to get permission from God before accepting the assignment to curse Israel?

► Balaam invites the messengers to spend the night while he inquires of the Lord. Balaam said he would tell them in the morning how the Lord responded to his request.

Balaam sought the Lord and the Lord answered him. The next morning Balaam told the messengers he could not go with them, nor could he curse Israel because they were a blessed people.

The messengers left and reported back to King Balak. But King Balak won't take no for an answer. He sends another group of officials, more numerous and more distinguished than the first messengers. His new message: “*Come and put a curse on these people for me.*” He also added: “*I will reward you, Balaam, handsomely*” – [TRANSLATION: More money created a need to rethink and recalculate.]

So, again Balaam invites the new messengers to spend the night and he would, again, inquire of the Lord. Actually, he said “*I will find out what else the LORD will tell me.*”

Q: The Lord had already given His answer to Balaam. Why would he say, “I will find out what else the LORD will tell me?”

**This time the LORD surprises us and His new response is totally unexpected.  
The LORD says okay – go – but Balaam can only say and do what God allows . . .**

Numbers 22:21-22a • Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab. But God was very angry when he went, and the Angel of the Lord stood in the road to oppose him.

Q: What is going on here? First God says no – don't go. Then He says go ahead and go. Then God gets angry with Balaam for going and sends The Angel to oppose him.

► There are three aspects to understanding this:

1. Sometimes:
2. Ultimately:
3. Giving Balaam the benefit of the doubt:

► The angel of the LORD, who stood on the road in opposition was invisible to Balaam. However, the donkey Balaam was riding to King Balak's location, could see the angel standing with a drawn sword, with absolute clarity. The donkey was terrified by the sight and she veered into an adjacent field. That angered Balaam and he began to beat the animal to get her back on the road. Once back on the road, the donkey again saw the angel. This time he was standing in a narrow path located between two vineyards with walls on both sides. The donkey tried to pass by pressing close to the wall, but Balaam's foot was crushed against the wall in the process. Again, Balaam began to beat the donkey again.

The angel moved and was now standing in a narrow place where there was no room to turn or pass on neither the right or left. The donkey lay down where she stood. Once more Balaam lost his temper and began to beat the donkey with his staff.

Q: What does the donkey represent in this story?

### Finally the Lord speaks, but it is not how one would expect . . .

► The LORD opened the donkey's mouth: "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?" Instead of expressing shock that his donkey had just spoken to him, rebuking him for his cruelty, Balaam angrily answered back without hesitation: "You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now."

The donkey replied, reasoning with Balaam, "Am I not your donkey, the same donkey which you have always ridden. Have I ever done this to you before?"

"No!" Balaam said.

At that moment the LORD opened Balaam's eyes. Then he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn.

Balaam fell down, with his face to the ground. The Angel said to Balaam "*I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before Me.*"

Q: Considering what the Angel said to Balaam and the fact that Balaam fell down in worship before the Angel, what should we understand about the identity of the Angel?

## The Angel of the Lord reveals what the action of the Donkey accomplished . . .

► The Angel of the Lord asks Balaam why he beat his donkey three times. Then he explained: *"The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If she had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now, but I would have spared her."*

Balaam 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."*

But the Angel of the Lord instructed Balaam to go with Balak's messengers, but He cautioned Balaam once again: *"You are to speak only what I tell you."*

Q: What did the donkey accomplish on Balaam's behalf?

Q: How does Balaam respond to this situation?

► The bottom line questions is:

## Balaam meets with Balak, the king of Moab . . .

► Balaam and Balak meet in Moab. The king complains about the excessive amount of time it took him to arrive. Balaam responds with a rather curt reply: *"Well, I am here now. But you need to know that I can say only what God puts in my mouth."*

King Balak took Balaam to one of the high places, Kiriath Huzoth, where he sacrificed cattle and sheep to the pagan god Baal. He gave Balaam pieces of the sacrifice. The next morning, Balak took Balaam up to Bamoth Baal, which is where Balaam saw the people he was being paid to curse.

Q: Why did the King give Balaam some pieces of the sacrifice?

**Once Balaam actually sees the people he has been paid to curse, he tells King Balak to prepare seven altars on which a bull and a ram will be offered.**

**Then Balaam left the King and waited alone in a barren height in hopes that the Lord would meet with him - which the Lord does - and gives him a message . . .**

Numbers 23:5-10 [NLT]• The Lord gave Balaam a message for King Balak. Then he said, "Go back to Balak and give him my message." So Balaam returned and found the king standing beside his burnt offerings with all the officials of Moab. This was the message Balaam delivered:

"Balak summoned me to come from Aram; the king of Moab brought me from the eastern hills. 'Come,' he said, 'curse Jacob for me! Come and announce Israel's doom.' But how can I curse those whom God has not cursed? How can I condemn those whom the Lord has not condemned? I see them from the cliff tops; I watch them from the hills. I see a people who live by themselves, set apart from other nations. Who can count Jacob's descendants, as numerous as dust? Who can count even a fourth of Israel's people?

Let me die like the righteous; let my life end like theirs."

Q: What was the essence of the message God gave Balaam to speak?

► Balak is not happy. He asks Balaam, “what have you done to me? You were brought here to curse my enemies but you have done nothing but bless them.”

Balaam explained that he was only speaking what the LORD has given him to say. He further explained by telling Balak that God is not a man and that he cannot lie. God has blessed Israel and Balaam cannot change that. The LORD is Israel's God and no sorcery or divination can change that.

Q: Balaam has fulfilled what God has given him to say and King Balak had no further recourse with Balaam. So the drama is finished, right?

► Balak takes Balaam to another “high place,” this time to the top of Peor that overlooks the desert.

This time, the king tries to be more persuasive, saying to Balaam: “perhaps it will please God that you may curse Israel from up here.” Unbelievably, Balaam responds by having King Balak build seven altars on which he sacrificed a ram and a bull on each. After that, Balaam looked at Israel camped in the desert and saw how they were encamped tribe by tribe.

At that moment the Spirit of God came upon Balaam and he uttered his oracle of blessing:

*"How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel! Water will flow from their buckets; their seed will have abundant water. Their king will be greater than Agag; their kingdom will be exalted. May those who bless you be blessed, and those who curse you be cursed!"*

Q: This oracle of blessing ends with a very familiar declaration. Where else in scripture do you find this declaration?

► By this time King Balak's anger was burning white hot. *"I summoned you to curse my enemies, but, instead, you have blessed them three times. Go Home! I said I would reward you, but the LORD has kept you from being rewarded."*

Balaam responded by reminding King Balak that he had cautioned him from the very beginning that he could not do or say anything of his own accord – good or bad – but had to do as the LORD commanded. Then he began to utter a prophetic oracle.

[The following scripture has been redacted to convey the essence of what Balaam prophesied:]

Numbers 24:17b; 19-20b; 22; 24-25 • *A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth. Edom will be conquered; Seir, his enemy, will be conquered, but Israel will grow strong. A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy the survivors of the city."*

*"Amalek was first among the nations, but he will come to ruin at last." ... You Kenites will be destroyed when Asshur takes you captive."*

*"Ah, who can live when God does this? Ships will come from the shores of Kittim; they will subdue Asshur and Eber, but they too will come to ruin."*

Q: King Balak hired Balaam to curse Israel, which God would not allow him to do. Yet, in his final prophetic utterance, Balaam delivered a type of curse. What is ironic about this curse?

Q: How should we understand “A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel?”

## EPILOGUE ...

► When Balaam finished proclaiming his final prophetic oracle, he got up and returned home. King Balak went on his own way as at the same time.

That should have been the end of Balaam's story. But, from Numbers 25, Moses makes a comment about Balaam that strongly suggests that Balaam didn't go straight home. He was probably angry that he did not get paid and after uttering the words the LORD gave him, he came up with an alternate plan that would force Balak into paying him. Of course, he knew he could not curse Israel outright, but he also understood that what Balak ultimately wanted was Israel's defeat and to be driven out of the land.

The new plan, which he told to King Balak, would make Israel bring a curse upon themselves. Balak followed Balaam's advice and Israel fell into the sin of worshiping Baal of Peor and committing fornication with the Midianite women.

In Revelation 2:14, Jesus was very clear, in his letter to the church in Pergamum, what Balaam had done: *“There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality.”*

The Apostle Peter said Balaam did this for the love of the money Balak had promised him. [ref: 2 Peter 2:15] and Jude echoed this same opinion by stating that Balaam sold his soul for financial gain. [ref: Jude 1:11]

Numbers chapter 25 opens with the statement that Israel started having immoral sexual relations with the Moabite women. By verse 15, Moses blames Balaam for this. God's response: God sent a plague and 24,000 men died.

Later in Numbers 31 it is recorded that the Lord sent the army of Israel against the Midianites. Balaam, who was apparently living with the Midianites at that time, was killed during that battle. In that same chapter of Numbers, Balaam was described as: *“the soothsayer, Balaam, who turned against the Lord and His people.”*

**What a sad epitaph for Balaam!**

Q: This story should give us pause about our relationship with money. What is the one truth the Bible teaches about money that is so applicable to Balaam's story?

► **Chapter 26 begins after the Plague of Judgment where 24,000 men died.**

**God tells Moses & Eleazar [Aaron's son & the new High Priest]  
to take a Census of the remaining children of Israel.  
This is where we will pick up the story next time . . .**



Next Time • Lesson #22

“Preparations for the Second Generation to Enter the Promised Land”

