

Balaam (Num. 22-24)

I. Meeting Balaam

- A. **Balak seeks Balaam's help.** Israel had just defeated some of the hostile peoples of the land. Because of this and the accounts of the Lord delivering them out of Egypt, Balak, the king of Moab, looked for supernatural help against them.
- B. **Understanding Balaam.** Here we are introduced to Balaam, whom Balak seeks for help against Israel. Balaam is an enigmatic figure because he appears to be a true prophet and to do what God requires of him, yet we find that God becomes angry with him and the Scriptures consistently use him as a negative example (**2 Pet. 2:15; Jude 11; Rev. 2:14**). However, although Balaam does speak only what the Lord instructs him to do, his desire to go against the Lord is clear by his willingness to continue to go back to the Lord for the purpose of cursing His people and his suggestion for how to make Israel transgress against the Lord (**Num. 31:16**). Because of this transgression, Balaam is killed as one of Israel's enemies (**Num. 31:8**).

II. The Oracles of Balaam

- A. **New perspectives on God's people.** The account of Balaam comes on the heels of Israel's wilderness wanderings. As readers, we have seen instance after instance of Israel's disobedience, leading to the death of the first generation. We see a people that is full of sin, battered, and seemingly on the brink of destruction. However, the Balaam account gives us two very different perspectives. The first is the perspective of the other nations, which do not see a weak people but rather a terrifying foe because the Lord fights for them. The second perspective is the Lord's. He has blessed the people and will not revoke His blessing (**22:12; 23:20**). God's blessing in the benediction at the end of Numbers 6 will not be revoked. Furthermore, Balaam prophetically declares that God does not behold iniquity in Israel (**23:21**). What an incredible declaration this is! This people that is so full of sin is regarded as without fault by the Lord. This is not on account of anything the people have done but because of all the Lord has done and will do for them.
- B. **Vision of the camp.** After his first two oracles, in which he could only see a portion of the people, he is brought to a high area where he sees the whole of the people camped according to the organization God gave them at the beginning of the book. They are accounted as lovely and described as an abundant garden planted by God (**24:5-6**). This should be a great encouragement to us all. Though we are full of sin and though the church often seems so weak, in Christ we are regarded as lovely, blessed, and beloved and in Christ we will overcome the world.
- C. **Vision of the king.** However, Balaam's oracles become even more remarkable. In seeing the whole camp of Israel, Balaam is granted an even greater vision. He sees not only Israel but Israel's king (**23:21; 24:7-9; 17-19**). He says this king shall be exalted. He, like His people, is brought out of Egypt and derives His strength from God. He is seen as afar off but His scepter will rise, and He will destroy the enemies of God's people. Even before the people enter the land and long before the people ask for a king, Balaam prophetically sees Christ. He shall come from His people and represent them. He shall defend them and vindicate them. None can stand against Him because God is His strength. All who bless Him are blessed and all who curse Him shall be cursed. God's purpose to give them a true king who is the king of kings did not simply begin in the days of Saul and David but was His intention from the beginning. Hosea calls these oracles to mind in **Hosea 11** and this connection between this Messianic king and His people is solidified in **Matt. 2:15**.

Israel's Sin at Baal Peor (Num. 25)

- I. *The Idolatry of the 2nd Generation.*** Israel's idolatry in this chapter is the 2nd generation's equivalent to the golden calf. While the Lord has just wondrously given revelation of His grace and favor, the people are back committing gross idolatry. The Lord sends a plague upon the people that kills 24,000 of them but that does not stop the idolatry. We see a man bring a woman in before the eyes of Moses and the people who are weeping at the entrance to the tabernacle. Given that Moses and these people are at the entrance to the tabernacle, mourning before the Lord, this means that this man is bringing this Moabite woman into the tabernacle itself.
- II. *Atonement.*** This also helps give us context concerning the action of Phineas. Phineas is not simply showing zeal for the Lord but is performing his duty as a priest to guard and cleanse the tabernacle. He kills the man and the woman for their sin and this act is the means of atonement for the people that stops the plague. He acts on behalf of the people as one in the line of the high priest and it is this act that effectively ends the wilderness wanderings for this is the last account of unfaithfulness on the part of Israel in Numbers and the Lord after this proceeds to count the people again in preparation for the people entering the land.

Getting Ready to Enter the Land (Num. 26-36)

The remainder of Numbers now focuses on specific preparations for entering the land. God commands the second census for the purpose of allotting the land according to the size of the various tribes. The ensuing chapters then go on to answer questions concerning inheritance, allotment, boundaries, and religious observance in the land.

Outline:

26 – Census to determine amount of land allotted

27-30 – Regulations for living in the land

31-32 – 2 ½ tribes choose to dwell outside the land

33 – Review of the Lord's guidance through the wilderness

34 – Defining the boundaries of the land

35-36 – Final instructions about the land

One of the interesting events that happens in preparation for entering the land is that some of the tribes decide that they want to settle on the eastern side of the Jordan River before entering the land. This is not like when the people refused to enter the land out of fear in **Num. 14**. The people want land for their livestock and see this land as suitable for that purpose. Nonetheless, the men of these tribes promise that they will accompany the rest of the people to conquer the land. God allows this for these tribes. This is a foretaste of the rest that they will receive when they are settled in the land. It also helps to remind us that the land of Israel is not everything. God can give them an inheritance even when it is technically outside the bounds of the land. This helps to illustrate that the true inheritance of God's people is not merely the land of Israel but is the whole world. Nonetheless, these people and we ourselves, are not experiencing the final fulfillment of God's promises at this time, therefore, provisions for how His people are to live in this life in light of these promises are necessary.