

“Arguing With a Donkey”

Numbers Chapter 22

Since Israel returned to Kadesh-Barnea this second time they have been being prepared by the Lord God to enter the Promised Land and engage in a campaign that should drive out or destroy the inhabitants of the land.

Between Kadesh and the Crossing Over they have had 4 encounters and this chapter reveals a 5th that is very interesting. Each battle shows a different level of opposition and rules of engagement.

EDOM

Numbers 20:14-21 Moses sent messengers to Edom asking permission to cross land. Edom refused. Israel asked again Edom refused a second time. Both refusals were given with a threat of attack. Edom was Israel's distant relative. Moses did not engage and went around.

ARAD

Numbers 21:1-3 A small southern king Arad attacked Israel and took some captive. The Lord said go get them back. I'll go with you. They did, He did and Arad was no more.

SIHON

Numbers 21:21-30 Moses sent messengers one time to Sihon asking permission to cross land. Sihon refused and came out attacking. The Lord gave them into Israel's hand and Israel conquered Sihon and the Amorites in this territory.

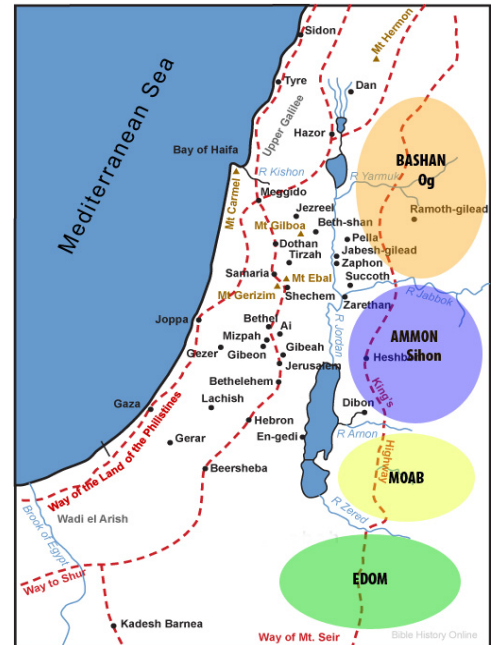
OG

Numbers 21:31-35 Og came attacking. Israel whooped them and wiped them out completely.

MOAB

Numbers 22 This chapter is about a king that wants to attack Israel and seeks a prophet to curse Israel. It fails. But here we see a battle take place and Israel doesn't know anything about it.

It makes me wonder how many battles the Lord fights for us and we know nothing about it.



Num 22:1 **1) Balak Fears & Seeks Balaam** vs 1-6

Then the sons of Israel journeyed, and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan opposite Jericho.

Num 22:2 Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.

Num 22:3 So Moab was in great fear because of the people, for they were numerous; and Moab was in dread of the sons of Israel.

Num 22:4 Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this horde will lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field." And Balak the son of Zippor was king of Moab at that time.

- Numbers 21:27-31 Israel sang a song after defeating Sihon king of the Amorites. It went "Therefore those who use proverbs say, "Come to Heshbon! Let it be built! So let the city of Sihon be established. "For a fire went forth from Heshbon, A flame from the town of Sihon; It devoured Ar of Moab, The dominant heights of the Arnon. "Woe to you, O Moab! You are ruined, O people of Chemosh! He has given his sons as fugitives, And his daughters into captivity, To an Amorite king, Sihon. "But we have cast them down, Heshbon is ruined as far as Dibon, Then we have laid waste even to Nophah, Which reaches to Medeba.""

- Basically Sihon whooped Moab and We whooped Sihon

- No wonder Balak feared Israel. And they are camped on Moab land.

Num 22:5 So he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor, at Pethor, which is near the River, in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying, "Behold, a people came out of Egypt;

behold, they cover the surface of the land, and they are living opposite me.

Num 22:6 "Now, therefore, please come, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me; perhaps I may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed."

- King Balak sent for Balaam a prophet explaining the problem that King Balak faces.
- Balak was asking the prophet Balaam to curse these people so they could engage Israel and defeat them in battle.

Num 22:7 **2) Balaam's Negotiations** vs 7-21

1st Offer

So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the *fees for* divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam and repeated Balak's words to him.

Num 22:8 He said to them, "Spend the night here, and I will bring word back to you as the LORD may speak to me." And the leaders of Moab stayed with Balaam.

- King Balak sent men to negotiate with Balaam with the authority to pay for his services.
- Balaam thinks on it and seeks the Lords advice.

God Speaks

Num 22:9 Then God came to Balaam and said, "Who are these men with you?"

Num 22:10 Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent *word* to me,

Num 22:11 'Behold, there is a people who came out of Egypt and they cover the surface of the land; now come, curse them for me; perhaps I may be able to fight against them and drive them out.'"

Num 22:12 God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed."

- Balaam explains the situation to God. It seems Balaam does not necessarily know who these people are. He calls them people who came out of Egypt. And there is a lot of them.
- God said do not go with them or curse those people from Egypt. The people are blessed.

Balaam's Refusal

Num 22:13 So Balaam arose in the morning and said to Balak's leaders, "Go back to your land, for the LORD has refused to let me go with you."

Num 22:14 The leaders of Moab arose and went to Balak and said, "Balaam refused to come with us."

- On the surface we are not seeing much wrong with Balaam. He says he can only do the Lord's will.
But
 - Seemingly he has a reputation know by the Canaanites.
 - He was a prophet for Hire.
 - He would bless, but he also cursed.
 - He entertained working for a Canaanite King. Why isn't he with God's People?
- Balaam sends King Balak's messengers home, but the language suggests some disappointment. "*the Lord has refused to let me.*"

2nd Offer

Num 22:15 Then Balak again sent leaders, more numerous and more distinguished than the former.

Num 22:16 They came to Balaam and said to him, "Thus says Balak the son of Zippor, 'Let nothing, I beg you, hinder you from coming to me;

Num 22:17 for I will indeed honor you richly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Please come then, curse this people for me.'"

Num 22:18 Balaam replied to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, either small or great, contrary to the command of the LORD my God.

Num 22:19 "Now please, you also stay here tonight, and I will find out what else the LORD will speak to me."

- King Balak sends better negotiators with a better offer.
- Balaam says it isn't about the money. That he could only do what the Lord command. But he'll ask the Lord again. Again Balaam entertains this offer.
- The Lord had already told him what his will was about this matter. But the people were more influential and the MONEY.

God Speaks

Num 22:20 God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men have come to call you, rise up *and* go with them; but only the word which I speak to you shall you do."

Num 22:21 So Balaam arose in the morning, and saddled his donkey and went with the leaders of Moab.

- God had previously told Balaam his will. But Balaam is asking again. If Balaam goes with the Moabites he will not be in the will of God.
 - God will many times tell his people "No" in prayer because He loves them
 - God will at times tell his people "Yes" in prayer because He needs to judge them, teaching them a great lesson. (*Kings in Israel was not God's will*)
- God said go with them but watch what you say.
- Balaam went with them. In the morning, Balaam couldn't wait to go... Outside of God's will.

Num 22:22 **3) Donkey Saves Balaam** vs 22-35

But God was angry because he was going, and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the way as an adversary against him. Now he was riding on his donkey and his two servants were with him.

Num 22:23 When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand, the donkey turned off from the way and went into the field; but Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back into the way.

Num 22:24 Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path of the vineyards, *with* a wall on this side and a wall on that side.

Num 22:25 When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she pressed herself to the wall and pressed Balaam's foot against the wall, so he struck her again.

Num 22:26 The angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn to the right hand or the left.

Num 22:27 When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam was angry and struck the donkey with his stick.

- God was angry with Balaam's choice.
- Interesting that Balaam possibly thought he had God's favor because "God Said". Balaam should have realized God originally said "NO" and that should have caused him to continue in prayer. Something was wrong. It wasn't God. It was Balaam's own heart.
- 2 Peter 2:15-16 " they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he received a rebuke for his own transgression, for a mute donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet."
- The donkey had more spiritual insight than the prophet. (verse 23)
- "The donkey is a perfect picture of a simple, unspectacular, yet obedient follower of God - sensitive to God's direction, a thorn to the disobedient, and a victim of the wrath of the disobedient." (Guzik)

Num 22:28 And the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"

Num 22:29 Then Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a mockery of me! If there had been a sword in my hand, I would have killed you by now."

Num 22:30 The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden all your life to this day? Have I ever been accustomed to do so to you?" And he said, "No."

- What a conversation. What is more amazing, that the donkey talked or that Balaam argued with him.
- God gave the Donkey the ability to speak. It was a rebuke to the prophet.
- The prophets heart is cruel. Striking the donkey 3 times and saying in effect "You are lucky I didn't kill you."
- It seems that the prophet loses the argument with the donkey.

Num 22:31 Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed all the way to the ground.

Num 22:32 The angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out as an adversary, because your way was contrary to me.

Num 22:33 "But the donkey saw me and turned aside from me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, I would surely have killed you just now, and let her live."

- The Lord opened the eyes of Balaam to see the Angel of the Lord.
- Clearly God's intentions were that He was displeased with Balaam.
- Displeased with his "way"
 - His cruelty to his animal
 - His way of going with the Moabites.
- "The Angel of the Lord" indicates that this may be an Old Testament appearance of Jesus. Another factor is the personal insult taken. Balaam's sin was against the Lord not an angel.

Num 22:34 Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing in the way against me. Now then, if it is displeasing to you, I will turn back."

Num 22:35 But the angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but you shall speak only the word which I tell you." So Balaam went along with the leaders of Balak.

- This is sad. Balaam can acknowledge that "he has sinned" but he doesn't understand how. He hasn't learned anything.
- Balaam asks again if he can go with the Moabites.
- God is at the same place too. His will is "NO" He has told him that but he gives him over to his deceitful heart.

Num 22:36 **4) Balaam and Balak Meet** vs 36-41

When Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went out to meet him at the city of Moab, which is on the Arnon border, at the extreme end of the border.

Num 22:37 Then Balak said to Balaam, "Did I not urgently send to you to call you? Why did you not come to me? Am I really unable to honor you?"

Num 22:38 So Balaam said to Balak, "Behold, I have come now to you! Am I able to speak anything at all? The word that God puts in my mouth, that I shall speak."

- Balak said, "What took you so long. Don't you know that I will pay good?"
- Balaam says "I'm here now. Let's get on with it. But the way I'm only going to speak what God tells me to speak."

Num 22:39 And Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kiriath-huzoth.

Num 22:40 Balak sacrificed oxen and sheep, and sent *some* to Balaam and the leaders who were with him.

Num 22:41 Then it came about in the morning that Balak took Balaam and brought him up to the high places of Baal, and he saw from there a portion of the people.

- Here and as well as the first three times Balaam prophesies in the next 2 chapters there are sacrifices offered.
- These sacrifices of Balak and Balaam should not be confused with the sacrificial system God gave Israel.

CANAANITE SACRIFICES

Offered to many different gods
Offered to get favor
Offerings given to curse or destroy others
What was offered man determined
Included Human sacrifices
Ultimate Goal was to bless man

LEVITICAL SACRIFICES

Offered to the Only true God - Only
Favor was that they could give offerings
Offerings given to prevent curse or destruction
God instructed what was offered when & how
Human sacrifices Prohibited
Ultimate Goal was to bless God

- The Babylonians were famous for hepatoscopy. This is the inspection of the entrails of sacrificed animals, especially the livers of sacrificed sheep and poultry. The inspection was a form of divination to discover the will of the gods. Different parts spoke concerning different deities and the shape and color would determine the reading.
- After offering, the next morning Balak and Balaam went up to the High places of Baal. We see Balaam is not concerned at all about his association. This god that god it's all the same to him.

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