

## "I Will be With You", Part I

### Numbers 22

As we pick up the narrative in Numbers 22, we need to remember we are in the 40<sup>th</sup> year of Israel's journey. They are no longer wandering and are making their way around the east side of the Dead Sea going toward the northeast end of the Dead Sea at the Jordan River, not far from Jericho which is a few kilometers to the west of the Jordan.

They've had some successes and a few failures too. But even when they have failed God – like when they complained about the manna and God sent the serpents to bite them – they quickly repented. They won a couple of major military victories, when they were attacked by the Amorites and then defeated two significant kings, Og and Bashan. They are now entering territory where other nations dwell and they are requesting permission to pass through peaceably but no one has allowed that, which has resulted in those nations' defeat. God said He would get Israel into Canaan as they obeyed Him and God will intervene when someone interferes.

Like here in Ch.'s 22-24. Balak, the King of Moab, is watching them go around him southeast of the Dead Sea and he is worried. "That's a lot of people passing by our land", he's thinking and he doesn't like it. They have heard what Israel did to Arad when he attacked Israel and what they did to the Amorites when they attacked Israel. We read this in vv.2-3

*2 Now Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites, 3 and Moab was terrified because there were so many people. Indeed, Moab was filled with dread because of the Israelites. 4 The Moabites said to the elders of Midian, "This horde is going to lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field."*

But, before he attacks them physically, he's going to battle them spiritually. He hires Balaam, a prophet who's all about making a profit, but not a God-honouring prophet as we'll see. Ch. 22 is not about Balaam's talking donkey. It's a great and true narrative, but God is the focus here. There are four things we're going to see about God in this passage that we already know, but we need to constantly be assured by way of reminder that God will always be with His people. God made this promise to Israel through Moses, that He would go with them and bring them into the land because He wants to dwell with His people. Whether that's with believing Israel or the church, God wants us to know He will always be with us.

Balak and the Moabites heard about what Israel did to the Amorites. They were "*terrified*" and "*filled with dread*" to the point where they felt they were going to be "*licked up like grass*" as an ox eats grass. In Balak's message to Balaam in v.6 he says of Israel "*they are too powerful for me*". But why were they afraid? Was Israel really a threat to them? Didn't Moses, when he first approach the Edomites in 20:17 say,

*20:17 Please let us pass through your country. We will not go through any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well. We will travel along the king's highway and not turn to the right or to the left until we have passed through your territory."*

And when they refused, they went around them. And didn't Moses when he first approached the Amorites also say,

21:22 *“Let us pass through your country. We will not turn aside into any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well. We will travel along the king’s highway until we have passed through your territory.”* <sup>23</sup> But Sihon would not let Israel pass through his territory. He mustered his entire army and marched out into the desert against Israel. When he reached Jahaz, he fought with Israel. <sup>24</sup> Israel, however, put him to the sword

Israel defended themselves against the Amorites and won decisively with God’s help. Israel defeated Arad because they attacked Israel and with God’s help, they were victorious. I believe God was giving Israel’s neighbours the chance to be spared from defeat and death if they let them pass peaceably into the land but they chose to attack Israel. Here we have a reminder that

## **God is a Compassionate God and Many Fear Him and His People Without Reason (22:1-5)**

God did not give Moses a ‘go and attack those people’ order. They had approached their neighbours in a peaceable process to allow them to pass through to the promised land. The Moabites’ fears could have been appeased had they chosen to engage Moses in conversation first, based on the previous interactions with the Amorites and Edomites.

Yes but, what about God’s command to Israel when they enter the land of Canaan? That was totally unfair, right? Well, let’s see why God ordered this. When God judged Sodom and Gomorrah, He said this:

*Gen. 18:20 The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous*

Concerning the Amorites God warned Abraham in Gen. 15,

*In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.”*

God knows things we don’t. He could see that the sins of the Amorites would worsen, warranting judgment. God also knew that the Canaanites gods and lifestyle would become a snare for Israel. He said in

*Deut. 20:17 Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the Lord your God has commanded you. <sup>18</sup> Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God.*

*Ex. 23:23 My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. <sup>24</sup> Do not bow down before their gods or worship them or follow their practices. You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces. <sup>25</sup> Worship the Lord your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water.*

God sees the atrocities done to all his people down through the ages. If God were not holy He would not judge. For God to bring us into a perfect world, He must remove all sin from us and around us.

Many people fear Israel today for no legitimate reason. They do not have a mandate to destroy all infidels of their religion like some religions do. They are not perfect but the fear that people have of them is unwarranted. Just as many people fear Christians without reason, simply because we’re different and we worship God and Jesus and that threatens their way of life. This is nothing new and

we see it here in Numbers 22. God is a compassionate God. All life comes from God. No one exists without the hand of God on their life. So, people's fear of Him is unwarranted.

Balak knew of Balaam. Balaam lived in Pethor, which was located on the northwestern end of the Euphrates River in the land of Assyria. In 1967, in Jordan, archaeologists uncovered ancient tablets with the name 'Balaam son of Beor' three times in a paragraph and it talked about him bringing prophetic judgments. Not that we need that to prove his existence but fascinating how God allows proof to be found of His Word .

Balaam, as we'll see, was not a God-fearer. He was a profiteer who practiced the occult and consulted anyone's gods for a fee. He was learned in world religions. He practiced divination. His assumption that he could talk to the God of Israel and get an answer tells us demonic spirits spoke to him, that he interpreted as gods. The Moabites had their own gods and we even see the King of Moab in Elisha's day sacrifice his son to his god (2 Kings 3). Balak heard of Balaam's sorcery and sought to hire him so he could curse Israel (and their god) thus ensuring a victory. He actually believed that physical battles could be won in the spiritual realm – true – but he put his money (literally) on the wrong god. But this whole Balaam business reminds us too that

## **God is Unchanging and No One Can Manipulate God to Alter His Plans (22:6-20)**

Balaam gives us three illustrations of ways people think they can change God's ways but they can't.

### ***We can't do it through money***

Balaam was a prophet for hire. He talked to the spirit world and believed he could change the way the gods worked. But the God of Israel, whom he knew little of, was different. Notice how often a monetary exchange occurs here:

*<sup>7</sup> The elders of Moab and Midian left, taking with them the fee for divination. Do not let anything keep you from coming to me, <sup>17</sup> because I will reward you handsomely and do whatever you say. Come and put a curse on these people for me." <sup>18</sup> But Balaam answered them, "Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything great or small to go beyond the command of the Lord my God.*

<sup>37</sup> Balak said to Balaam, "Did I not send you an urgent summons? Why didn't you come to me? Am I really not able to reward you?"

The bible tells us that Balaam was in it for the money. Peter, speaking about false prophets, used Balaam to describe them

*<sup>2</sup> Peter 2:15 They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness.*

And Jude said of the same people,

*<sup>11</sup> Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion*

I've talked to many pastors over the years who have told me that they have been in churches where people have used their money as a way to manipulate the church or the pastor in doing things their way. Isn't every Bible-believing church God's church? If we withhold our money or use our money to influence decisions, are we not trying to manipulate the work of God? Money does not change God.

### ***Neither does the demonic***

Balaam practiced divination, which means he consulted mediums and did strange things to attract the attention of the so-called gods of the world. All of which, he was unaware, was just Satan and his demons who use whatever means they can to keep people away from the true God. Don't be fooled by the many religions of the world. You either worship the true God or you worship something, someone or any imagined god, totally made up by Satan. But Satan is not God's equal and it's not a battle between good and evil and if we pray hard enough, God will win. God has already won the battle at the cross through the resurrection of Jesus. Satan has been defeated but he's not going down without a fight.

We already read in v.7 that the elders of Moab took with them the fee for divination. A common practice. In vv.18-19 Balaam assumes he can go to Israel's God and get an answer from him. I can't prove it but I think he would have practiced his ungodly practices and God used them to address him, because that's where he was at. But God was going to show Balaam, he was moving in circles out of his control. In v.32 we are introduced to the angel of the Lord who speaks to Balaam and Balaam (scared!) has no problem talking back to him, because he is familiar with talking to spirits – not an angel though. And in v.40 when he arrives in Moab

*<sup>40</sup> Balak sacrificed cattle and sheep, and gave some to Balaam and the princes who were with him.*

He might have given some for them to eat but I'm guessing he used some of the animal parts in divination to talk to the God, because that's what he did as a rule. He'll make more sacrifices to get God's attention or talk to God.

But sometimes we bring that mindset into our practices. Earlier I said that we as believers think we can change God's mind or will because 'more people are praying'. Does God want us to pray? Absolutely. Does He call on a lot of people at times to pray in the Bible? Yes? Why? Because He's got a prayer-o-meter that has a line on it for how many people praying are needed to change His will? No! He wants us all to pray so that we are united together in the work of God and when He answers, more of us can praise Him and give Him glory for what He did. He can change things in the world with one person praying – James 5:16

*The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. <sup>17</sup> Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. <sup>18</sup> Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, & the earth produced its crops.*

Didn't Jesus Himself say in Matt. 6:7,

*And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him*

Be careful about pagan practice thinking that if we pray so many times we can change God's will, or if I miss a day of bible reading or praying God will zap me. God will change things as His will

permits and He wants us to partner with Him in the work, not manipulate His will to what we want.  
*“Not my will be done but yours”*

But there’s one more illustration of a way that people think they can change God’s Word

### ***Just by using their words***

Balak and Balaam think that using their own words, that their words have power over God’s words. Did you catch the phrase Balak used in v.6?

*<sup>6</sup> Now come and put a curse on these people, because they are too powerful for me. Perhaps then I will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the country. For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed.*

That eerily echoes God’s own words to Israel in Gen. 12:3 when God promised Abraham

*<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*

God has promised Israel He would give them their land and bless them and bless the world through them. Balak thought that he could simply change God’s words if an influential person makes up a different narrative. Since God has promised that these things will happen to Israel and through Israel, Satan will do nothing to thwart God’s plans. By simply using influential people in the world who use media to say a different narrative about Israel or followers of Jesus, they think that their words can overpower God’s words. But they can’t. Don’t believe the attempts of people outside the church or inside the church to deny God’s promises to Israel. He will curse those who curse them, not because Israel is perfect, but because God has a divine plan for the nation and a remnant of Israelites who will turn to Jesus one day.

God also has made promises to the Church, followers of Jesus, because we’re perfect? Hardly. But because he has a divine plan for us too, that will merge with the remnant of Jewish believers to fulfill God’s vision and promises in the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ. A lot of people think that their words can ‘unmake’ God’s words but they are powerless to do so.

This is what the rest of the Balaam narrative is all about. Balak wants to curse what God has blessed with the desired evil plan to defeat those whom God said will not be defeated. Why? Because God is with His people. We’ll have to finish the rest of Ch. 22 next week and see two more reasons why we can be assured, as Israel was and is assured, God has not abandoned His people. His Word is true. His Words will come true and nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please  
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