

"I Will be With You", Part II

Numbers 22

Last week we began our study in Num. 22 reminding ourselves where we were in the wilderness narrative. As of Num. 20:1, we are now in the last year before they entered the Promised Land. They are no longer wandering; they have rounded the eastern side of the Dead Sea and by Num. 22 have reached the northeastern side of the Dead Sea and the Jordan River. Israel's story will pause here until the book of Joshua. Just as Ex. 19 - Num. 12 only covered the first year and a half at Mt. Sinai, after Israel left Egypt, Num. 20 - Joshua 2 covers only the 40th year all around Mt. Nebo. Why so much space to such a small time period? Preparation. From Ex. 20-Num. 12 they were being prepared to enter the land. But they blew it and wandered for 38 years. From Num. 20 – Joshua 2, we are now dealing with the new generation, who again are now preparing to enter the land of Canaan. Deuteronomy means second law. Much of Deuteronomy is a refresher of the laws Israel needed to obey once they got into the land. Even the 10 commandments are repeated in Deuteronomy.

So this new generation is going to face some challenges because, God promised they would get into the land of Canaan. And when God makes a promise the enemy will work very hard to try and nullify God's promises. Many of God's promises are made to Israel, so not surprisingly, Israel is always being attacked. Because Satan believes if he can wipe out Israel then he can defeat God, thus nullifying the promises of God. But God can't be defeated.

Another successful lie the enemy has found to be useful in making Christians live defeated lives is to cause us to doubt God's promise to always be with His people. While God assures us He never leaves us nor forsakes sometimes we doubt His presence because of unpleasant circumstances in our life and because we don't 'feel' like He's with us. God calls us to live by faith and not by how we feel. To believe what His Word says even when we can't see His promises in front of us

This is what Ch. 22-24 is really all about – the presence of God with His people. Let's review what we've covered so far. Balak, the King of Moab, is watching a million or two Israelites go around him southeast of the Dead Sea and he is worried. They have heard what Israel did to Arad when Arad attacked Israel and what they did to the Amorites when they attacked Israel. We read that they are 'terrified', and 'filled with dread'.

Balak believes he needs spiritual help with this battle so he hires Balaam, a godless prophet who's all about making a profit, based on his practice of divination and consulting the gods (who, don't exist, and so he is unaware that he is actually communicating with demons). We said last week there are four things this passage shows us about God that we need to constantly be reminded of, if we're to assure ourselves God is always with His people. God made a promise to Israel through Moses, that He would go with them and bring them into the land, and He will intervene when the enemy interferes with His plans.

Balak sends for Balaam who lives hundreds of miles away north along the Euphrates River. In Balak's message to Balaam in v.6 he says of Israel *"they are too powerful for me"*. While Balak's fear is understandable, we already know that Israel did not attack anyone first. They approached Edom and the Amorites initially asked them to let them pass peaceably. Edom did not and God told Israel to not engage their half-brother in war but when the Amorites refused them passage, they attacked Israel and God said for Israel to defend themselves, which they did. Here is the first thing we learned last week that

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

Many people fear Israel or Jesus' followers for no legitimate reason. They fear Israel because Satan incites the world against Israel. They are afraid of genuine Christians simply because we worship God and Jesus and that threatens their way of life. And as a result they fear or reject God. But God is a compassionate God, giving life to all, sending the rain and sun on all (as Jesus pointed out) and giving people a life so that they might find Him.

Balaam, did not know God but He knew of Him. But to Balaam, Yahweh was just another god. Balaam practiced the occult and consulted anyone's gods for a fee. He practiced divination. He assumes he could talk to Israel's God he spoke to many gods. And these 'gods' answered, which were actually demonic spirits. Balak hired Balaam to curse Israel which he thought would secure him victory. Balak believed that physical battles could be won in the spiritual realm – true – but he didn't realize he was already on the losing side. Balaam's attempts to change God unsuccessfully, which reminds us

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

We saw last week three different ways people try to manipulate God, but nothing works.

We can't do it through money

Balaam was a prophet for hire who talked to spirit world and believed he could change the way the gods worked. Pagan thinking always teaches that the more attention you give to your god, then you can control it or the outcome. Which is really bribery. Balaam doesn't know the true God. He comes to Yahweh with this mindset. He wants money for what he does and thinks he knows how to manipulate gods. The bible tells us that Balaam was in it for the money in 2 Pet. 2:15

Sadly, a few Christians have used their financial health to manipulate churches to do things their way. God is not involved in any of that. God doesn't respond to our excessive sacrifices or attention (like the prophets of Baal against Elijah) or even longer prayers to change His mind.

Balaam of course, dealt with the demonic but

Neither does the demonic change God's will

Balaam practiced divination, which means he consulted mediums and did strange things to attract the attention of the so-called gods of the world. God says there is no such things as other gods. So any so-called communication or contact with other gods are Satanic influences masquerading as gods.

God and Satan are not equal super-powers. Jesus already defeated Satan at the cross (Heb. 2:14-15). The book of Revelation ends with Satan being tossed into the eternal lake of fire. God has already won. His plan is unchanging.

Balak and Balaam give a great illustration for our cancel culture today. We live in a world where people genuinely believe if they just say the past never happened or just say they are

something different that they are or just say there is no God, then that makes it true. Balaam thought he could overturn God's words but he could not. So no, we can't change God or His words

Just by using their words

God's promises are always true. He said to Jeremiah concerning His future promises for Israel in 33:24

²³ The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: ²⁴ "Have you not noticed that these people are saying, 'The Lord has rejected the two kingdoms he chose'? So they despise my people and no longer regard them as a nation. ²⁵ This is what the Lord says: 'If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed laws of heaven and earth, ²⁶ then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his sons to rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and have compassion on them.' "

You would think this was written in our day! '... *'Have you noticed that people are saying "The Lord has rejected Israel? As a result He rejects them as a nation."* ' ' I hear that from some Christians. You can't change God's Words. You can't change the narrative because of personal preferences, biases or antisemitic attitudes.

Now we come to the humorous account of Balaam and his donkey. The question that comes from this section is, why was God angry at Balaam when He told him to go the second time Balaam sought Him out?

First, we have to remember the Scriptures clearly state Balaam was a false prophet who practiced divination for the purpose of making money. He lived for the wages of unrighteousness; or as the ESV translates 2 Pet. 2:15

Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing,

Second, God directly forbade Balaam from going the first time. Balaam obeyed God, until the second entourage came back. The second entourage was made up of more important leaders, who probably offered more money too.

¹⁵ Then Balak sent other princes, more numerous and more distinguished than the first. ¹⁶ They came to Balaam and said: "This is what Balak son of Zippor says: Do not let anything keep you from coming to me, ¹⁷ because I will reward you handsomely and do whatever you say. Come and put a curse on these people for me."

¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ Now stay here tonight as the others did, and I will find out what else the Lord will tell me."

It should have ended at v.18, but he defies God by asking again, even though God forbade him to go. God lets him go to show his displeasure and to make a fool of Balaam. Sometimes God answers our selfish prayers to teach us a lesson. Sometimes we deliberately disobey God and He allows us to suffer the consequences of our decisions. God shows that He controls all of our lives, even the circumstances surrounding our good and bad choices. This is really encouraging and reminds us God is with us once again. Here we are reminded:

God is Sovereign and Can Use Anything to Cause Us to Listen to Him (22:21-40)

Balaam disobeyed God and now he is going to go and curse Israel for money. Even though God said you can't curse them, he goes, thinking somehow he can change God's ways or mind. God controls all things and proves this in a most humorous way.

Balaam gets up early in the morning (eager to go and make some money?), but God's anger burns so He sends the 'angel of the Lord'. Some feel He's the pre-incarnate Jesus. I'm not sure but the 'angel of the Lord' is a scary warrior-like angelic being who doesn't show up a whole lot in Scripture but when He does, it's serious.

Balaam's donkey sees into the spiritual realm. Balaam is made to look like the donkey because he can't see into the spiritual realm yet makes his living as one who is supposed to see and talk to the so-called gods of the world (aka, demons). God is communicating to Balaam but he's too greedy to see. First the angel of the Lord stands in the road, but the donkey goes around. Balaam beats the donkey as punishment.

Then the angel stands in a narrow path with a stone wall on each side, and the donkey seeking to avoid the angel squeezes by but injures Balaam's foot in the process. Balaam beats the donkey again for not listening to its master.

Next the angel blocks the path and the donkey stops because he has nowhere to go, since God has prevented him from going. Balaam, the one who is spiritually blind and who is disobeying God, gets angry like God (same word used in v.22 when God was angry) and punishes the donkey for its disobedience. Are we getting the point yet?

Now God allows the donkey to talk sense into his donkey-of-an-owner riding his back, who is so angry and wanting to get going so he can make some money, that he talks back to the donkey. As someone who lived in the occult and probably heard and seen some strange things, maybe this wasn't strange to him but it should have been. He's making a donkey of himself as God allows the donkey to speak wisdom and explain what is really happening in the spiritual realm.

Balaam tells the donkey that it has made a fool of him but the reader is fully aware that the real donkey is Balaam who is acting the fool.

³¹ Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown. ³² The angel of the Lord asked him, "Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me. ³³ 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."

God is sovereign and can use anything to cause us to listen like,

When He spares us from the consequences of our poor choices (vv.21-33)

The word for 'reckless' is also translated perverse. It means an active deviation from what is moral. Balaam made an active deviation from God's word. He wasn't a believer anyway, but he did defy God's clear command. We as believers sometimes make reckless, immoral decisions contrary to God's clear commands. He demonstrates His sovereignty over us when He does discipline us for

our sinful choices but He also spares us sometimes from the consequences of those poor choices. Can we recall a time when we deliberately disobeyed God and we were forgiven by someone or we did not cause harm to ourselves or others when it should have? That's called grace. And if we're honest we receive a lot more than what we realize.

After God confronts Balaam about his sin, Balaam confesses his sin and God

When He graciously gives us a chance to repent (vv.34-40)

He is willing to go home but God says, 'No go. But only speak what I say.' God is going to use Balaam to bless Israel and frustrate Israel's enemies' plans. And when he arrives in Moab, he tells Balak and says

Well, I have come to you now," Balaam replied. "But can I say just anything? I must speak only what God puts in my mouth."

Balaam is given an opportunity to change his ways. Sadly, we'll find out he ultimately doesn't even though God is going to use him to bless Israel, which we'll talk more of in the next few weeks.

God is gracious and compassionate to us. He is always with us and wants us to repent when we deviate from His clear commands. Thank Him for grace and second chances. Act like God and show grace to others who hurt you giving them second chances.

The chapter ends with Balak getting ready to curse God through Balaam, making lots of sacrifices because he thinks that's how you get the god's attention – but they don't exist anyway. The last verse says,

⁴¹ *The next morning Balak took Balaam up to Bamoth Baal, and from there he saw part of the people.*

What people? Oh yeah, the Israelites who are totally unaware of any of this going on around them. Here's another reason why we know God is with us, because

**God is our Provider, Watching Over Us When
We are Oblivious to Harm (22:41)**

Remember this verse from last week from Jesus?

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. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

He knows what we need (not want) before we ask because He is sovereign. He knows what we need before we know what we need! God Himself only knows how many times He has spared us from harm in situations we were totally unaware of a threat. Thank you Lord! Or spared us in those close calls where we've made poor choices?

The whole Balaam narrative will reassure us of God's presence and power in His people's lives. Watching over us when we're unaware of danger. Providing for our needs. Using unusual circumstances or uniquely timed interactions with people to speak truth into our lives. It also reminds us we may get persecuted by people who are threatened by us, even though we've done nothing to threaten them.

God uses an unbeliever Balaam, to remind us of His grace in our lives when He spares us from the consequences of our poor choices and graciously gives us opportunities to repent and change. Thank Him when He opens your eyes to see His hand at work in your life. Repent when you need to. Share the same grace to others that He shows to us.

Eph. 4:31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

5:1 *Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

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