

Numbers Chapter 22

Numbers 22:1 "And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan [by] Jericho."

With their control of Transjordan secured, Israel moved unimpeded to the plains of Moab in preparation for assaulting Canaan.

This was the area that had belonged to Moab.

The area here, was actually part of the Jordan valley. The Jordan river flowed by the city of Jericho.

Verses 22:2 - 24:25

The narrative changes to center on Balaam, a pagan prophet.

His oracles reassert the faithfulness of the LORD to the Abrahamic Covenant and His purpose to bless Israel.

In (22:2-40), the events leading to Balaam's words are recorded.

This is followed in (22:41 – 24:24), with the words of his prophecies (and the conclusion is in 24:25).

Numbers 22:2 "And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites."

The word "Amorites" being particularly pointed, shows, as Aben Ezra observes, that Sihon and Og are both meant.

And that there were not among the kings of the land of Canaan any so great as they.

Wherefore when Balak, who was the present king of Moab, saw what Israel had done to them, that they had conquered them, and seized upon their kingdoms.

He reasoned within himself, and said, (as Jarchi represents him), that if they could not stand before Israel, much less could he and his people.

And the rather, since those kings Israel had subdued were too powerful for the king of Moab, and had taken part of his country from him, and yet Israel was too strong for them.

Balak was the king of Moab, and he saw quickly what was happening to all the Amorites that Israel came into contact with.

It does not say it, but his fear has become great that Moab will be next.

Numbers 22:3 "And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they [were] many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel."

“Moab was sore afraid”:

The Moabites were descendants of Lot (see Gen. 19:36-37).

Balak, their king, had seen how the Israelites destroyed the Amorites.

Not knowing that Israel was forbidden by God to attack Moab, he was terrified that the same end awaited him and his people (Deut. 2:9).

Now, we see the cause of his fear.

There were close to three million of the Israelites.

Balak knew he had no chance in a battle against them.

Numbers 22:4 "And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, Now shall this company lick up all [that are] round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor [was] king of the Moabites at that time."

“Midian”:

The Midianites were descendants of Abraham through Keturah (see Gen. 25:1-4), who lived south of Moab’s border.

When Moab communicated to the elders of Midian that they were in danger of being destroyed by Israel as well, they joined with Moab in an alliance to defeat Israel.

The Midianites were descended from Abraham and Keturah.

In a very distant fashion, they were related to the Israelites.

Both groups of people were descended from Abraham.

What he is saying, is that the Israelites are having no difficulty taking whatever lies before them.

Numbers 22:5 "He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which [is] by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me:"

“Balaam” was the false prophet hired by the king of Moab to curse the Israelites during their wilderness journey.

His name appears 50 times in (Num. chapter 22-24).

He is also mentioned in (Deut. 23:4-5; Joshua 13:22; 24:9-10; Neh. 13:2; and Micah 6:5).

He is classified as a “soothsayer” (Joshua 13:22), who cooperated with both the Midianites and Moabites against Israel.

Balaam is the epitome of a false prophet and hireling (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11).

He tried unsuccessfully to lure the Israelites into the cult of Baal-peor (25:1-5; 31:16).

Balaam was later killed by the Israelites (31:8).

In the New Testament, he is the symbol of avarice and false religion (Rev. 2:14-15; see 2 Peter. 2:15; Jude 11).

Balaam was from Pethor, perhaps near Mari, where the existence of a cult of prophets whose activities resembled those of Balaam have been found.

Balaam practiced magic and divination (24:1), and eventually led Israel into apostasy (31:16).

Later Scripture identifies Balaam as a false prophet.

“Pethor”:

Is usually identified with Pitru of the Assyrian inscriptions, a town on the Euphrates some 12 miles south of Carchemish.

It appears that Balak is speaking for himself and for the elders of Midian, when he sends a message to Balaam.

The Nicolaitans (spoken of in Revelation), and the Balaamites are thought by some to be the same people.

One was just as evil as the other.

Balaam was thought to be able to bring good or bad, upon people by pronouncing it.

It appears Balak was superstitious.

The river spoken of is probably the Euphrates.

He implies these are Egyptians.

It is not possible however, that Balaam would not have heard who they are.

It seems to Balak they cover the face of the earth, because there are close to three million people.

Numbers 22:6 "Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they [are] too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, [that] we may smite them, and [that] I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest [is] blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed."

“Curse me this people”:

Knowing that Israel was too strong to defeat militarily, Balak called for Balaam to come and curse Israel.

A curse was a spoken word that was believed to bring misfortune upon the one it was spoken against.

Balak acknowledged that Balaam had the reputation of pronouncing curses that actually worked.

Balak has heard that Balaam has great powers.

Being a superstitious man, he seeks supernatural help from Balaam.

He believes if Balaam says the word, he can prevail against this large mass of people.

Balaam was a man who proclaimed power by God.

He was a heathen diviner.

He thought himself to have the gift from God.

Numbers 22:7 "And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand; and they came unto Balaam, and spake unto him the words of Balak."

By which it appears that they were princes and nobles.

For such the elders were, that were sent on this errand to Balaam.

And that they were some of both people, Midian and Moab, that went upon it (see Num. 22:14).

Which shows, that if they were not one people, under one king, which yet seems likely.

Nevertheless, they made a common cause of it, and joined in this expedient to save their country.

"With the rewards of divination in their hands":

Not that diviners were sent along with them to Balaam, as Aben Ezra interprets it.

That he might not deceive them, and put them off, by saying it was not a fit and proper day or hour to go out and curse.

Which these men would be able to refute.

But if they were skilled in the art of divination as well as he, what need was there to send to him, when they had such at hand?

Nor instruments of divination, as Jarchi, which so famous a soothsayer could not be thought to be without.

But, as we rightly render it, the rewards of divination, which were either fixed or left to the generosity of those that had recourse to such persons.

And were presents which they brought them, in order to engage them to use the utmost of their art for them.

And this sense is confirmed by the Apostles Peter and Jude (see 2 Peter 2:15).

"And they came unto Balaam":

At Pethor.

"And spake unto him the words of Balak":

Told him the errand they were sent on to him by the king of Moab.

Balak is trying to hire Balaam to curse the Israelites for him.

Superstitious people did not understand the spirit world, and they assumed that Balaam would sell his services to Balak.

A true man of God could not be bought for such a job.

Numbers 22:8 "And he said unto them, Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the LORD shall speak unto me: and the princes of Moab abode with Balaam."

"As the LORD shall speak unto me":

Throughout these chapters Balaam himself used the name "LORD", i.e., Israel's God (22:13, 18-19; 23:3, 12; 24:13).

In (22:18), he even called the LORD, "The LORD my God".

In this verse, it must be assumed that Balaam expected the God of Israel to speak to him.

As a pagan prophet, he would anticipate making contact with the gods of any people.

Balaam thought he would hear from God in a dream or a vision, about this situation.

He wants the money, so if he does not hear from God, he will go.

Numbers 22:9 "And God came unto Balaam, and said, What men [are] these with thee?"

"God came unto Balaam":

Israel's God did communicate to Balaam.

However, rather than using the term "LORD", which indicates a covenant relationship, God consistently used the word "God" when He spoke to him (22:9, 12, 20).

Though Balaam used the word "LORD", the biblical text makes it clear that he did not have a relationship with Israel's God.

We see from this, that God truly does speak to him.

Of course, God knows who they are, He wants Balaam to examine who they are with this question.

Numbers 22:10 "And Balaam said unto God, Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, hath sent unto me, [saying],"

In answer to the question he put to him.

"Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, hath sent unto me":

These men, and a message by them.

"Saying":

As follows.

We see from this answer of Balaam; he is aware that evil Balak of Moab has sent these men.

Numbers 22:11 "Behold, [there is] a people come out of Egypt, which covereth the face of the earth: come now, curse me them; peradventure I shall be able to overcome them, and drive them out."

In this, and the following part of the verse, he faithfully and punctually relates the words of Balak to him by his messengers.

As well knowing he could not deceive the omniscient God, or hide anything from Him.

Though he could deceive men; and conceal the truth from them, to serve a purpose (see notes on Num. 22:5-6).

Up until this time, Balak has not mentioned the fact that these are God's chosen people.

He speaks of them, as if they are Egyptians.

The request from Balak is for Balaam to curse these people, so he can defeat them in battle.

Numbers 22:12 "And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they [are] blessed."

“They are blessed”:

Balaam could not curse Israel because the LORD had determined to give them blessing only.

Note God’s clear command and expressed will, “Thou shalt not go” (and from verse 13 he knew it)!

God reveals to Balaam that these are His chosen people, and Balaam is not to curse them.

Numbers 22:13 "And Balaam rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Balak, Get you into your land: for the LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you."

With the impression of the dream upon his mind, and of what had passed between God and him in it.

"And said unto the princes of Balak":

Which shows what the elders were that were sent.

Of what honor and dignity.

And may include both those of Moab and of Midian.

"Get you into your land":

As soon as you can.

Set forward on your journey, it is to no purpose to stay here.

"For the LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you":

He only relates one part of the answer he had from the LORD, respecting his going with them.

But says not a word of his being forbid to curse Israel, and of the reason given why he should not.

Had he reported this, in all probability it would have prevented any further application to him.

And so any attempt to get this done, which Balaam seemed aware of; and therefore, by concealing this, hoped for fresh solicitations and entreaties.

And that in time the LORD might be prevailed on to let him go and curse them.

He having a covetous desire of riches, honor, and preferment, in Balak's court.

Balaam does just as God had commanded him to do.

The answer is no.

He will not go and curse these blessed of God.

He tells the men to tell Balak, the LORD will not allow him to do this.

Numbers 22:14 "And the princes of Moab rose up, and they went unto Balak, and said, Balaam refuseth to come with us."

And the princes of Midian also, immediately without entering into a parley with him, to persuade him to go with them.

Perceiving by his answer that it would be to no purpose, and that he was determined to do as the LORD directed him.

"And they went unto Balak, and said, Balaam refuseth to come with us":

As Balaam told them less than what God had said to him, so they related less to Balak than what Balaam had said to them.

Saying nothing of the LORD's refusing to let him go with them, but represent it as a piece of pride and obstinacy in Balaam.

And which Balak was left to understand.

And it seems as if he did understand it as a piece of policy in Balaam.

To get a larger offer of money or honor, or both, from him, and which the following account seems to confirm.

They brought back the news to Balak, that Balaam would not come.

Numbers 22:15 "And Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honorable than they."

More in number, and greater in quality.

Princes of the first rank in his court.

Supposing that Balaam thought he was not treated with respect enough, they being princes of the meaner sort, and but few, that were sent unto him before.

Which he imagined was the reason, at least one reason, why he refused to come with them.

Persons of Balaam's character in those days being highly revered.

Now he sends men of greater renown in the land to try to persuade Balaam to go.

Numbers 22:16 "And they came to Balaam, and said to him, Thus saith Balak the son of Zippor, Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me:"

Though men of such rank and dignity, they did not decline the embassy, being sent by their king.

Nor did they think it below them to wait upon this soothsayer.

"And said unto him, Thus saith Balak the son of Zippor":

Representing their master, and addressing the diviner in his name, as his ambassadors.

At the same time doing honor to Balak that sent them, of whom they speak respectfully, and to Balaam, to whom they were sent.

"Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me":

No business, though ever so important, that might be upon his hands.

Nor any want of respect to him he might imagine.

Nor if the rewards offered were not thought sufficient.

Nor any persuasions of men to the contrary.

And if it could be thought he knew anything of the prohibition of God, that may be included.

So urgent was he upon his coming to him.

This is a more urgent request, that Balaam come and curse the Israelites.

He has offered a larger purse for Balaam.

This is like temptation that comes to us sometimes.

We refuse the first offer to sin, but as the temptation gets greater, it is harder to refuse.

Numbers 22:17 "For I will promote thee unto very great honor, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people."

In his court, by making him some great officer there, perhaps his prime minister.

So that as before he laid a bait for his covetousness, sending him large presents, and rewards of divination.

Here, for his pride and ambition, promising him court preferment.

Though Aben Ezra interprets it of mammon or riches, of which he could give him an immense sum.

"In honoring I will exceedingly honor thee"; or load thee with wealth and riches.

And so Balaam seems to understand it, since in his answer he says, "if Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold".

Both civil honor and worldly wealth may be taken into the account.

Since they are both heavy and weighty things, and very desirable and ensnaring.

"And I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me":

Give him what money he should ask of him.

Put him into whatsoever place and office he should desire.

And though he was a sovereign prince, would be at his beck and command.

And do whatever he should direct him to do in his kingdom, as well as in what concerned the affair of cursing Israel.

As we find he afterwards did, with respect to sacrifices and rites relative thereunto.

"Come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people":

Renewing the request made in the first embassy with great importunity (Num. 22:6).

But using here a different word for "cursing".

There, as Munster observes, the word signifies to curse lightly.

Here, to blaspheme and utterly devote to ruin; to which may be added, to curse expressly and by name.

To pierce through and through, to deprive of all benefits, and to destroy utterly.

Balaam can ask as much as he wants.

No price is too much for Balak to pay Balaam to curse the Israelites.

Numbers 22:18 "And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more."

Who were not only princes of the land, but officers of state in the court of Balak.

"If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more":

Which is well spoken, had it been from his heart.

He speaks very respectfully of God, calling Him by his great and incommunicable name Jehovah, the Being of beings.

Representing Him as the object of his worship and adoration, as he might be along with other gods, which was the practice of the Heathens in those times.

Particularly the Syrians, among whom Balaam lived.

So did Laban and others before him.

Likewise, he makes a profession of him, and claims an interest in him.

Which he might the rather do, to make himself look greater, as being the servant of the most high God.

For the Gentiles in those times, and indeed in later times, had a notion of one supreme God, superior to all the rest.

And this Jehovah Balaam claimed as his God.

He speaks very well of the word of God, to which he pretended so strict a regard.

That he would not transgress it in the least, for all that Balak could give him or more.

No, not for all the money in the world.

And yet his heart at the same time went after his covetousness.

And he was eagerly desirous and greedy of getting the advantages into his hands that were offered him.

For he hoped that God would change His mind, and alter His word, and give him leave to go and get the money, as appears by what follows.

Balaam wanted the money, but he was smart enough not to go against the command of God.

He tells them that no amount of money could cause him to go against the wishes of the LORD.

Notice, Balaam calls the LORD, my God.

Numbers 22:19 "Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the LORD will say unto me more."

As the former messengers had.

This shows his strong inclination to go along with them, and do what was desired of him, could he be permitted.

Otherwise he might and ought to have told the messengers at once that Balak needed not to have given himself and them so much trouble.

Since it was not in his power to do for him what he requested.

Nor would he attempt it, as being contrary to the will of God.

And therefore it would be their best way to return as soon as they could.

But instead of that, he desires them to stay that night, which must give them some hope of succeeding in their embassy.

"That I may know what the LORD will say unto me more":

He hoped He would change his mind, and say something to him different from, and contrary to what He had before declared unto him, which to suppose of God is great vileness and wickedness.

To such a pitch did his greedy desire after riches and honor work him up into.

He ought to have been satisfied with the answer already given him, and not to have inquired more.

He is so tempted, he goes back to God, to see if God will change His mind.

Numbers 22:20 "And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, [and] go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do."

This text must be read in light of the above verses and verse 22, "and God's anger was kindled because he went", and verse 32, "thy way is perverse before me".

The Hebrew conveys the idea of "rushing headlong or rapidly onward with great haste as that done without due deliberation".

This conveys Balaam's inner desire to get money, wealth, and fame; he had no desire to really know God's will in the matter (compare Job 16:11).

"The word which I shall say unto thee":

Because of his great desire for the material wealth that would come to him, Balaam desired to go to Balak.

He implored the LORD even after God had told him not to go.

God acceded to Balaam's request to let him go, but told him that he could speak only the true message from God.

This is just what Balaam wanted to hear.

He could get all of the reward, and not anger the LORD toward him.

Remember, the LORD did not tell him he could curse Israel, only that he could go.

Numbers 22:21 "And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab."

Early, not waiting for the call of the princes, which showed how eager he was to be gone, and how intent upon the journey.

"And saddled his ass":

Which, if he did himself, as Jarchi suggests, this is a further proof of the haste he was in.

Though, as he had two servants with him, it is more likely that they did it by his order.

The same is said of Abraham (Gen. 22:3).

It was usual for persons of note and figure, in those times and countries, to ride on asses (Judges 5:10).

“And went with the princes of Moab”:

In company with them, and with as good a will as they.

His heart and theirs being alike, as Jarchi notes.

Though it seems by what follows that by some means or another they soon parted company.

For when the affair of the ass happened, Balaam was alone, only attended by his two servants.

Balaam got what he wanted from God, and now he is on his way with the princes from Moab.

Numbers 22:22 "And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants [were] with him."

“Because he went”:

Even though God had given Balaam permission to go (verse 20), He knew that his motive was not right.

Thus the anger of the LORD burned against Balaam because God knew that he was not yet submissive to what He required.

The result of God’s confrontation with Balaam was a reaffirmation of the word given (in verse 20, repeated in verse 35), that he was to speak only the words that God wanted him to speak (that Balaam got the message is explicitly stated in verse 38).

“The angel of the LORD ... for an adversary against him”:

The Angel of the LORD was a manifestation of the presence of the LORD Himself.

He was equated with deity (see Gen. 16:7; 18:1-2; Exodus 3:1-6; see note on Exodus 3:2).

Here Balaam’s spiritual blindness was really accentuated and his powerlessness exposed.

He could not see the Angel of the LORD “presenting himself in battle array”, standing in his path, though his donkey could!

He saw no significance in the donkey’s actions, even though strange actions by animals were considered omens in Mesopotamia.

As a specialist in this sort of divination, he ought to have realized that the Deity had a message for him.

The situation was so grave that the pre-incarnate Christ Himself appeared before Balaam.

Balaam had his answer from the LORD, the first time he asked.

He should not have gone back, and asked the LORD about the same thing again.

It is a dangerous thing to pray, after we have our answer from God.

He may give us what we are praying for, instead of what we need.

The angel was standing in the road, and would not let the ass of Balaam pass.

God was stopping him and his servants from passing.

Whatever it took, God would not let Balaam curse the Israelites.

Numbers 22:23 "And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way."

Which Balaam did not.

His eyes being held from seeing him by the power and providence of God.

That he might be reproved and rebuked by his ass, to whom God gave power to see, more than to him, as Jarchi notes.

So that he had little reason to boast of his visions and revelations, and that he was the man whose eyes were open.

The angel stood in the very pathway on which the ass was carrying Balaam.

And his sword drawn in his hand; as threatening to destroy him.

And as if he was just about to push at him, and signifying hereby not only that he deserved to die, but what death he should die of.

Namely, by the sword, as he did (Num. 31:8).

"And the ass turned aside out of the way":

Out of the common road, to save its master and itself from a natural principle of self-preservation.

“And went into the field”:

Adjoining to, and that lay along the road side.

"And Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way":

With his staff, as in (Num. 22:27), to bring her into the common road again.

The ass saw the angel of the LORD and the sword in His hand, and she ran out in the field to escape.

Balaam did not see the angel of the LORD, so he hit the ass to try to make her get back on the road.

Numbers 22:24 "But the angel of the LORD stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall [being] on this side, and a wall on that side."

Which were in the field into which the ass went.

And before Balaam could turn her back, she got into a narrow path, between the vineyards, as the Targum of Jonathan states.

A footpath which lay between them, or a footpath where foxes ran and had their holes.

Who used to lie near vineyards and among them (see SOS 1:14).

However, it was a very narrow path, and here the angel placed himself, so that there was no passage for Balaam and his ass.

At least not without great difficulty and danger.

"A wall being on this side, and a wall on that side":

And therefore, there was no going out into the field as before, to avoid the difficulty and danger.

This being, as Jarchi observes, a stone wall that was on each side.

The angel of the LORD stood in the path this time, and there was nothing but walls to each side.

Numbers 22:25 "And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall: and he smote her again."

In the same position as before, with a drawn sword in his hand.

And being frightened again, and in a narrow path, and no way to turn aside.

"She thrust herself unto the wall":

To one of the walls, as close as she could, in order to get by the angel.

"And crushed Balaam's foot against the wall":

Running up so very closely to it.

"And he smote her again":

Having done it once before (Num. 22:23).

The times of smiting are observed, for the sake of what the ass after said, and for the confirmation of it.

The ass was so frightened, when she saw the angel of the LORD, that she ran against the wall to try to get away.

She banged Balaam's foot against the wall, when she was trying to get away.

Balaam became angry and hit her again.

Numbers 22:26 "And the angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place, where [was] no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left."

More narrow than the other, at a further distance.

"Where was no way to turn, either to the right hand or to the left":

It was so strait and close a place that the angel filled the whole breadth of it, that there was no passing him.

So that there was no getting forward nor backward.

Not forward, because the angel filled up the way, and there was no slipping by him.

Nor backward, because it could not turn itself to the right or left.

The third time the ass saw the angel of the LORD.

It was too narrow to go around, so she just fell under Balaam.

Numbers 22:27 "And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff."

The third time; for it seems that he was not always in sight, but disappeared as he removed from place to place.

And at every new place where he stood the ass saw him, though her master did not.

"She fell down under Balaam":

Upon her knees on the ground, not being able to go backwards nor forwards.

Nor to turn out of the way to the right or left.

"And Balaam's anger was kindled":

He was displeased and out of humor before, when it turned into the field, and when it squeezed his foot against the wall.

And therefore he smote it.

But now falling down with him, he was in a fume and fury, quite enraged.

"And he smote the ass with a staff":

Which he rode with, perhaps his divining staff (see Hosea 4:12).

It is not said what he smote it with before but probably with the same.

Aben Ezra says, at the first and second time he smote it with a small stick, or with a thong.

Now Balaam is really angry with the ass, and begins to hit her with a staff.

Numbers 22:28 "And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?"

"The LORD opened the mouth of the ass":

Balaam's donkey was able to see the Angel of the LORD with His drawn sword (see verse 23, 25, 27).

Realizing the danger to herself, she sought to avoid the Angel.

In doing this, she preserved Balaam as well.

Miraculously, the donkey was able to communicate with Balaam.

Some would like to say this was a vision or a dream, but I believe it really happened.

There is nothing impossible for God.

It would certainly get his attention for an ass to speak to him.

This is a very good question.

Numbers 22:29 "And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee."

Or rather "defiled me", as the word is rendered in (Job 16:15).

By running with him against a wall, and by lying down with him in the dust and dirt.

And so the Arabic version renders it, "because thou hast rolled me in the dirt."

The sense of mocking is not easy to be understood, unless it be that it exposed him to be mocked and laughed at by others.

By turning aside, and lying down, and being so unruly.

But then there were only his servants with him, to whom only he could be exposed in such a manner.

Which one would think would not have given him so much concern, and put him into such a passion.

The word sometimes is used for seeking occasion, and such a sense it may have here, as that it sought an opportunity or occasion to throw him.

And so to kill him, or at least to do him harm (see Dan. 6:4).

"I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee":

So enraged was he, and his passion was so great, that he was not at all frightened and amazed to hear the ass speak.

Though Josephus represents him as disturbed and astonished at it.

But some think, he being used to converse with spirits in the shapes of various creatures, it was no surprise to him to hear it speak.

What is even more miraculous than the ass speaking to Balaam, is the fact that Balaam talked to the ass.

He thinks this animal worthy of killing, because it made him look foolish in front of his servants.

Numbers 22:30 "And the ass said unto Balaam, [Am] not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since [I was] thine unto this day? was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay."

Made a reply to him, as if it understood what he said, and had the faculty of reasoning and discoursing, as well as of speaking, which is very amazing.

"Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day?"

Or rather, "ever since thou wast"?

Not ever since he was in being, but ever since he could ride, so Aben Ezra.

According to which, it seems that this was the first he rode upon, and which he had always been used to.

"Was I ever wont to do so unto thee?"

To start out of the way, or lie down with him, could any one instance be given of it?

Suggesting that she was a sure footed creature, and had always carefully and safely carried him, for which it appeals to him.

"And he said, nay":

She had never been used to serve him in such a manner as she had now, and therefore he might have concluded that something more than ordinary was the matter.

And it is much his conscience had not accused him that he was wrong in coming with the princes, taking the alarm from these circumstances.

Had he not been a hardened creature, or, at least, had he not been so eagerly bent on riches and honor.

The ass reminds Balaam, that she has been loyal to him, ever since he had gotten her.

She asks him if she had ever embarrassed him before, and he answers no.

This does not even seem to be shocking Balaam, that this ass is speaking to him.

Numbers 22:31 "Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face."

"The LORD opened the eyes of Balaam":

The LORD allowed Balaam to see things as they really were, especially those things that are not ordinarily visible to humans and to be submissive to His will as he went to Balak.

When Balaam's eyes of understanding are opened, and he sees the angel of the LORD, he falls on his face before the LORD.

He suddenly realizes his error.

Numbers 22:32 "And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, I went out to withstand thee, because [thy] way is perverse before me:"

When risen up and standing before Him.

"Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times?"

The brute creatures are not to be beaten without cause, nor to be misused and abused by men, even their owners.

"Behold, I went out to withstand thee":

The ass was not to be blamed, nor to be beaten for turning aside, or lying down.

It was I that stood in the way, and hindered its going forward, and this was done by me on purpose to oppose and stop thee.

"Because thy way is perverse before me":

The journey he took was not with his good liking and approbation, and especially seeing he went with an intention, if possible, to serve Balak.

And curse Israel.

The way of his heart was bad, which the LORD knew.

It was not directed according to his will, but swerved from it.

The Targum of Jonathan is, "it is manifest before me that thou seekest to go and curse the people, and the thing is not agreeable to me."

The LORD had allowed him to go, but had put the angel of the LORD to stop him on the way.

He was headed for destruction, if the LORD had not stopped him.

He is saying to Balaam, why did you not get the message that I was trying to stop you, when the ass would not go down the road?

Balaam wanted to go so badly, that he was overlooking all the warning signs God had sent him.

This is a lesson to us.

When we start somewhere, we should ask God to block the way, if we should not go.

Numbers 22:33 "And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive."

The ass saw the angel when Balaam did not, and that was the reason of its turning aside.

And it was well for him it did, and therefore he should not have smote it.

"Unless she had turned from me": If she had pushed on, endeavoring to make her way.

"Surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive": Had certainly and only slain him, and not the ass.

The angel of the LORD would have killed Balaam, if the faithful ass had not seen the angel of the LORD and turned away.

The ass saved Balaam's life.

Numbers 22:34 "And Balaam said unto the angel of the LORD, I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again."

That is, in beating the ass.

Not that he was sensible of his sin of covetousness, and of the evil disposition of his mind.

And of his wicked intention in going along with the princes to curse Israel, if possible.

And get Balak's presents and appointments.

"For I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me":

Signifying, that if he had known it, he should not have smitten the ass.

But submitted himself to the will of the angel.

"Now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again":

Which he spoke very coldly and faintly, not caring heartily to go back, unless forced to it.

For seeing a drawn sword in his hand, he might be afraid of his life should he persist in his journey.

And therefore feigns a readiness to go back, quitting it on condition that his going forwards was displeasing.

Whereas he knew it was, especially his going with an evil mind to hurt Israel if possible.

It appears, that Balaam did not realize he was sinning against the LORD.

He repents and offers to turn back, if that is what God wants.

Numbers 22:35 "And the angel of the LORD said unto Balaam, Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak. So Balaam went with the princes of Balak."

Which was not a command, but a concession, or rather a permission.

Leaving him to go if he would.

Suffering him to follow his own heart's lusts, and giving him up to them to his own destruction.

And besides, it was not his going barely that was displeasing to God, but his going with such a bad intention.

"But only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak":

Which expresses not only what he ought to do, but what he should be obliged to do.

Even to bless the people against his will, when his mind was to curse them, it being for his worldly interest.

And therefore it is suggested he had better not go at all, since he never would be able to carry his point.

Yea, would be brought to shame and confusion before Balak and his nobles.

The angel speaking in the same language as God did before to Balaam (Num. 22:20), shows that not a created angel, but a divine Person, is here meant.

"So Balaam went with the princes of Balak":

Whom after this he quickly overtook, or they him.

Or they met together at some appointed place, and proceeded on in their journey.

The LORD will let Balaam continue on, but with the message of God.

He will not curse the Israelites, as Balak wants him to.

Numbers 22:36 "And when Balak heard that Balaam was come, he went out to meet him unto a city of Moab, which [is] in the border of Arnon, which [is] in the utmost coast."

Messengers being sent to acquaint him with it, either by Balaam, or by the princes.

"He went out to meet him":

Overjoyed at the news that his princes had succeeded, and to show him respect, and do him honor.

And all to encourage him to do his utmost for him.

"Unto a city of Moab, which is in the border of Arnon, which is in the utmost coast":

By the situation of it, being on the border of the river Arnon.

Which river was in the extreme parts of Moab, and divided between the Moabites and Amorites.

It is generally thought to be the city Ar, called "Ar of Moab" (see Num. 21:13).

And the king coming to meet Balaam so far as the uttermost border of his dominions showed the greater respect to him.

He was so pleased to see Balaam come, that he went to the border of Arnon to meet him.

Numbers 22:37 "And Balak said unto Balaam, Did I not earnestly send unto thee to call thee? wherefore camest thou not unto me? am I not able indeed to promote thee to honor?"

Upon their meeting together.

"Did I not earnestly send unto thee to call thee?":

Or send the first messengers in a very pressing manner, with great importunity, to give thee an invitation to come to me.

And those men of rank and quality, with rewards of divination in their hands.

And yet the invitation was rejected.

And after them other messengers.

More in number and greater in dignity, with larger offers and promises.

And now indeed thou art come, but with much ado.

What is the meaning of all this?

"Wherefore camest thou not unto me?":

At first, without showing so much indifference and reluctance.

And which obliged me to send another message to thee.

"Am I not able indeed to promote thee to honor?":

To give thee wealth and riches, and put thee into high places of honor and profit?

Hadst thou any doubt in thy mind about it, either concerning my ability or will to do it?

Balak thinks that it was the wealth he offered Balaam, that brought him.

Numbers 22:38 "And Balaam said unto Balak, Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say any thing? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak."

“The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak”:

He would certainly learn this the hard way (compare Deuteronomy 23:5 and his frustration in Numbers 24:1).

Balaam tells Balak that the message he brings is not his, but God speaking through him.

He goes so far as to say, he has no power within himself.

Numbers 22:39 "And Balaam went with Balak, and they came unto Kirjath-huzoth."

From Ar of Moab, or, however, from the place where they met, to the royal city where Balak had his palace.

And seems to be the place following.

"And they came to Kirjath-huzoth":

Which Jarchi interprets a city full of streets.

A populous place, having a multitude of men, women, and children in the streets of it.

And the same writer suggests as if Balak's view in this was to move the pity of Balaam, that such a number of people might not be rooted out and destroyed.

Numbers 22:40 "And Balak offered oxen and sheep, and sent to Balaam, and to the princes that [were] with him."

Or "slew" them, either for sacrifice.

And if so Balak was the sacrificer, as it was common for kings to be priests.

And then Balaam, who was sent for, was the prophet, that was to observe and explain any omen at the time of sacrificing.

Or rather for a feast, as the following words seem to show.

Though it might be for both.

It being usual, when sacrifices were offered to idols, to eat part of them in a festival way.

In imitation of the peace offerings of the Jews (see Num. 25:2).

"And sent to Balaam, and to the princes that were with him":

Either part of it to them, or he sent for them to come, and partake of the feast, he and the princes of Moab and Midian, that had been to fetch him, and still attended him.

And this the king did in a way of rejoicing, being glad that Balaam was come.

And as expressing he was well pleased with the conduct of the princes, and their success.

As well as to keep Balaam in high spirits, hoping to have his end answered by him.

Verses 22:41 – 23:12

Balaam's first oracle emphatically stated that Israel could not be cursed (23:8).

She was unlike all the other nations of the world (23:9).

Balaam even wished to share in her blessing (23:10).

Numbers 22:41 "And it came to pass on the morrow, that Balak took Balaam, and brought him up into the high places of Baal, that thence he might see the utmost [part] of the people."

The day after the arrival of Balaam at Balak's royal seat.

And after the entertainment given him, and the princes, "on the morning" of that day, as the word signifies.

And perhaps early in the morning, the king eager to be about business, and get the people of Israel cursed if possible as soon as could be.

"That Balak took Balaam, and brought him up into the high places of Baal":

Where groves were planted, and altars erected to that "idol" and which the Targum of Jonathan calls the idol Peor.

The same with Baal-peor (Num. 25:3).

Which might be their god Chemosh, the same with Bacchus or Priapus.

"That thence he might see the utmost part of the people":

The whole host of Israel, even to the extreme part of it.

The camp of Dan, as the Targum of Jonathan, which brought up the rear.

He had him to those high places.

Both that he might have a better view of the whole body of the people, and know how they lay.

And to direct his curses at them.

And that success might attend the undertaking, these being places of religious worship.

Josephus says those high places were sixty furlongs or seven and one half miles from the camp of Israel.

Balak brings Balaam oxen and sheep for payment.

We do not see him accept them, however.

Balak takes Balaam to the high places where the majority of the people were gathered to worship Baal.

This will continue in the next lesson.

Numbers Chapter 22 Questions

1. The place in verse 1 is actually part of the _____ valley.
2. What was Balak afraid of?
3. Balak was the king of _____.
4. Who did Moab talk to about this problem?
5. The Midianites were descended from _____ and _____.

6. Who did Balak send a message to for help?
7. Who did he call the Israelites?
8. What is the river in verse 5?
9. Who were spoken of as the same people as the Balaamites?
10. What did Balak want Balaam to do?
11. Why had Balak gone to him for help?
12. How were they trying to acquire Balaam's help?
13. Who does Balaam seek permission to go from?
14. He speaks of the Israelites, as if they are _____.
15. Why did God tell Balaam not to go?
16. What does Balaam tell the men from Moab?
17. What does Balak do, when he gets the word that Balaam will not come?
18. How much money would it take to get Balaam for this job?
19. Why does Balaam go back to God the second time?
20. Why does Balaam go?
21. How did God feel about Balaam going?
22. What stopped the ass from carrying Balaam, where he wanted to go?
23. What did Balaam do to the ass?
24. How many times did the ass refuse to go, where Balaam wanted it to?
25. What did Balaam say, he should do to the ass?
26. This last time, what unusual thing happened?
27. What is even more unusual?
28. What does the ass remind Balaam of?
29. What happened, when Balaam's eyes of understanding were opened?
30. What does Balaam do in response?

31. What would have happened to Balaam, if the ass had continued on after seeing the angel of the LORD?
32. What did the LORD tell Balaam to do?
33. Where did Balaam find the majority of the people?