

# BIBLE BRIEFING

## “*Crossing Over... with Balaam*”

NUMBERS 22:1 – 25:18

### Introduction

No one could defeat the children of Israel... ***Except themselves!***  
Chapters twenty-two through twenty-five record their personal meltdown into immorality and idolatry.

A lot of the story centers around Balaam. He is a mysterious soothsayer. To set the stage, read 24:1, where you're told Balaam “***used enchantments.***” He was a sorcerer, a diviner; he was in touch with the demonic.

Some people are troubled that God speaks to Balaam; that God allows him to bless the Jews. Well, *God speaks to Satan!* Read the opening chapters of the Book of Job if you really want to be shocked.

Numbers 22:1 Then the children of Israel moved, and camped in the plains of Moab on the side of the Jordan *across from* Jericho.

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

Numbers 22:3 And Moab was exceedingly afraid of the people because they *were* many, and Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel.

Numbers 22:4 So Moab said to the elders of Midian, “Now this company will lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field.” And Balak the son of Zippor *was* king of the Moabites at that time.

Numbers 22:5 Then he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which *is* near the River in the land of <sup>the</sup>the sons of his people, to call him, saying: “Look, a people has come from Egypt. See, they cover the face of the earth, and are settling next to me!

Numbers 22:6 Therefore please come at once, curse this people for me, for they *are* too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall 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.”

Numbers 22:7 So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the diviner's fee in their hand, and they came to Balaam and spoke to him the words of Balak.

Conventional warfare was out of the question. Moab and Midian needed demonic help. They sent a delegation to the “diviner.”

Numbers 22:8 And he said to them, “Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you, as the Lord speaks to me.” So the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam.

Numbers 22:9 Then God came to Balaam and said, “Who *are* these men with you?”

Numbers 22:10 So Balaam said to God, “Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, *saying*,

Numbers 22:11 ‘Look, a people has come out of Egypt, and they cover the face of the earth. Come now, curse them for me; perhaps I shall be able to overpower them and drive them out.’”

Numbers 22:12 And God said to Balaam, “You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they *are* blessed.”

Here is where you might begin to have a problem. Balaam acts like he knows the Lord; and God speaks to him.

As the story unfolds, it will become clear that Balaam is most definitely not saved. The fact that God speaks to him is a wonder of God’s grace and mercy. He is wrong from the start – willing and wanting the loot for prophesying.

Numbers 22:13 So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, “Go back to your land, for the Lord has refused to give me permission to go with you.”

The subtle inference is that he wanted to go, but God wouldn’t let him. It opens the door to the possibility of persuasion.

Numbers 22:14 And the princes of Moab rose and went to Balak, and said, “Balaam refuses to come with us.”

Numbers 22:15 Then Balak again sent princes, more numerous and more honorable than they.

Numbers 22:16 And they came to Balaam and said to him, “Thus says Balak the son of Zippor: ‘Please let nothing hinder you from coming to me;

Numbers 22:17 for I will certainly honor you greatly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Therefore please come, curse this people for me.’”

Numbers 22:18 Then Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, “Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more.

Numbers 22:19 Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the Lord will say to me.”

Here is a key insight into Balaam. He already knew what God had said. He was motivated by greed to hear something different. Balaam was definitely a hireling who was interested primarily in money. To him, God was just another force, or power, to be manipulated. Balaam may have been like those today who think there are neutral spiritual forces to be discovered, then used for your own good.

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

Knowing God's will in the matter, Balaam should have refused even to consider this second offer, but the hireling soothsayer was still hoping to find some way to circumvent God's will. There is a permissive will of God. You don't want to be in God's permissive will – especially when you know His perfect will.

In light of the fact that Balaam even considered the new offer, his speech is just so much pious talk. With his lips, he professed to obey the Lord, but in his heart he coveted the money and hoped God would change His mind.

Numbers 22:21 So Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab.

God instructed him to go with the princes *only if they came to call him the next morning*. The Lord cautioned Balaam, "Do only what I tell you." But the next morning, Balaam didn't wait for the men to come to him; he saddled his donkey and went to the place where the delegation was camped, determined to do his own will. This determination, along with the covetousness in Balaam's heart, made the Lord angry. Balaam was acting like the horse and the mule. (Psalm 32:9): He was running ahead of the Lord and at the same time stubbornly refusing to obey God's clear directions.

Numbers 22:22 Then God's anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the Lord took His stand in the way as an adversary against him. And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants *were* with him.

Numbers 22:23 Now the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the way

and went into the field. So Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back onto the road.

Numbers 22:24 Then the Angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, *with* a wall on this side and a wall on that side.

Numbers 22:25 And when the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, she pushed herself against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck her again.

Numbers 22:26 Then the Angel of the Lord went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left.

Numbers 22:27 And when the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam's anger was aroused, and he struck the donkey with his staff.

Numbers 22:28 Then 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?"

Numbers 22:29 And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have abused me. I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!"

Numbers 22:30 So the donkey said to Balaam, "*Am* I not your donkey on which you have ridden, ever since *I became* yours, to this day? Was I ever disposed to do this to you?"

And he said, "No."

Who was the real "dumb animal?" God gave the donkey speech to show Balaam and his two servants it is possible to act worse than a dumb animal. The donkey had spiritual instincts and insights; why not Balaam? He was driven by his greed.

I've heard lots of explanations why Balaam didn't think it strange the donkey was speaking. Here's a thought. Satan spoke through a serpent when he deceived Eve, and it's possible that in the past Satan's demons had spoken to Balaam through animals.

Or perhaps Balaam was familiar with psychedelics. Many an animal – real or imaginary – spoke to me while I was on mescaline!

Numbers 22:31 Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand; and he bowed his head and fell flat on his face.

Numbers 22:32 And the Angel of the Lord said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because *your* way is perverse before Me.

Numbers 22:33 The donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times. If she had not turned aside from Me, surely I would also have killed you by now, and let her live."

Numbers 22:34 And Balaam said to the Angel of the Lord, "I have sinned, for I did not know You stood in the way against me. Now therefore, if it displeases You, I will turn back."

His words, "I have sinned," were not evidence of sincere repentance. Pharaoh, King Saul, and Judas Iscariot, all uttered these words but didn't turn to God for mercy. Listen to David or the Prodigal Son if you want to hear real confession.

Balaam said , "if it displeases you, I will turn back." *Of course it displeased the Lord!*

Numbers 22:35 Then the Angel of the Lord said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak." So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

In His permissive will, God allowed Balaam to continue on his journey, but He cautioned him to speak only the messages that God gave him. God would use Balaam to reveal great truths to and about Israel. Balaam would receive four oracles, four prophecies, that would stymie Balak.

Numbers 22:36 Now when Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went out to meet him at the city of Moab, which *is* on the border at the Arnon, the boundary of the territory.

Numbers 22:37 Then Balak said to Balaam, "Did I not earnestly send to you, calling for you? Why did you not come to me? Am I not able to honor you?"

Numbers 22:38 And Balaam said to Balak, "Look, I have come to you! Now, have I any power at all to say anything? The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak."

Numbers 22:39 So Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kirjath Huzoth.

Numbers 22:40 Then Balak offered oxen and sheep, and he sent *some* to Balaam and to the princes who *were* with him.

The king offered sacrifices to his god Baal and probably gave Balaam some of the inner parts of the animals to use for divination.

Numbers 22:41 So it was, the next day, that Balak took Balaam and brought him up to the high places of Baal, that from there he might observe the extent of the people.

Numbers 23:1 Then Balaam said to Balak, "Build seven altars for me here, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams."

Numbers 23:2 And Balak did just as Balaam had spoken, and Balak and Balaam offered a bull and a ram on *each* altar.

Numbers 23:3 Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stand by your burnt offering, and I will go; perhaps the Lord will come to meet me, and whatever He shows me I will tell you." So he went to a desolate height.

The next morning, Balak took Balaam to Bamoth Baal ("the high places of Baal") where they could see the camp of Israel and offer more sacrifices to Baal. Balaam used these sacrifices as part of his sorcery and soothsaying and didn't simply wait for God's promised message.

Numbers 23:4 And God met Balaam, and he said to Him, "I have prepared the seven altars, and I have offered on *each* altar a bull and a ram."

Numbers 23:5 Then the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth, and said, "Return to Balak, and thus you shall speak."

Numbers 23:6 So he returned to him, and there he was, standing by his burnt offering, he and all the princes of Moab.

Numbers 23:7 And he took up his oracle and said:

"Balak the king of Moab has brought me from Aram,  
From the mountains of the east.

'Come, curse Jacob for me,  
And come, denounce Israel!'

Numbers 23:8 "How shall I curse whom God has not cursed?  
And how shall I denounce *whom* the Lord has not denounced?"

Numbers 23:9 For from the top of the rocks I see him,  
And from the hills I behold him;  
There! A people dwelling alone,  
Not reckoning itself among the nations.

Numbers 23:10 "Who can count the dust of Jacob,  
Or number one-fourth of Israel?  
Let me die the death of the righteous,  
And let my end be like his!"

Numbers 23:11 Then Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, and look, you have blessed *them* bountifully!"

Numbers 23:12 So he answered and said, "Must I not take heed to speak what the Lord has put in my mouth?"

The messages God gave to Balaam emphasized several basic truths about the people of Israel. This first one had as its theme that Israel was a **chosen** people.

Numbers 23:13 Then Balak said to him, "Please come with me to another place from which you may see them; you shall see only the outer part of them, and shall not see them all; curse them for me from there."

Numbers 23:14 So he brought him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bull and a ram on *each* altar.

Numbers 23:15 And he said to Balak, “Stand here by your burnt offering while I meet *the Lord* over there.”

The fact that Balaam participated in these pagan occult rituals shows the wickedness of his heart. He spoke the Word of God and longed for a righteous death, yet he thought nothing of using enchantments. He was a double-minded man whose chief desire was to make as much money as possible by marketing his skills.

Numbers 23:16 Then the Lord met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, and said, “Go back to Balak, and thus you shall speak.”

Numbers 23:17 So he came to him, and there he was, standing by his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab were with him. And Balak said to him, “What has the Lord spoken?”

The second oracle is from verse eighteen through verse twenty-four and emphasizes Israel as a **conquering** people.

Numbers 23:18 Then he took up his oracle and said:

“Rise up, Balak, and hear!

Listen to me, son of Zippor!

Numbers 23:19 “God *is* not a man, that He should lie,

Nor a son of man, that He should repent.

Has He said, and will He not do?

Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?

Numbers 23:20 Behold, I have received *a command* to bless;

He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it.

Numbers 23:21 “He has not observed iniquity in Jacob,

Nor has He seen wickedness in Israel.

The Lord his God *is* with him,

And the shout of a King *is* among them.

Numbers 23:22 God brings them out of Egypt;

He has strength like a wild ox.

Numbers 23:23 “For *there is* no sorcery against Jacob,

Nor any divination against Israel.

It now must be said of Jacob

And of Israel, ‘Oh, what God has done!’

Numbers 23:24 Look, a people rises like a lioness,

And lifts itself up like a lion;

It shall not lie down until it devours the prey,

And drinks the blood of the slain.”

Numbers 23:25 Then Balak said to Balaam, “Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all!”

Numbers 23:26 So Balaam answered and said to Balak, “Did I not tell you, saying, ‘All that the Lord speaks, that I must do’?”

Numbers 23:27 Then Balak said to Balaam, "Please come, I will take you to another place; perhaps it will please God that you may curse them for me from there."

Numbers 23:28 So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, that overlooks the wasteland.

Numbers 23:29 Then Balaam said to Balak, "Build for me here seven altars, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams."

Numbers 23:30 And Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bull and a ram on *every* altar.

Numbers 24:1 Now when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he did not go as at other times, to seek to use sorcery, but he set his face toward the wilderness.

Numbers 24:2 And Balaam raised his eyes, and saw Israel encamped according to their tribes; and the Spirit of God came upon him.

The third oracle will emphasize **contentment** in the land God was giving.

Numbers 24:3 Then he took up his oracle and said:

"The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor,

The utterance of the man whose eyes are opened,

Numbers 24:4 The utterance of him who hears the words of God,

Who sees the vision of the Almighty,

Who falls down, with eyes wide open:

Numbers 24:5 "How lovely are your tents, O Jacob!

Your dwellings, O Israel!

Numbers 24:6 Like valleys that stretch out,

Like gardens by the riverside,

Like aloes planted by the Lord,

Like cedars beside the waters.

Numbers 24:7 He shall pour water from his buckets,

And his seed *shall be* in many waters.

"His king shall be higher than Agag,

And his kingdom shall be exalted.

Numbers 24:8 "God brings him out of Egypt;

He has strength like a wild ox;

He shall consume the nations, his enemies;

He shall break their bones

And pierce *them* with his arrows.

Numbers 24:9 'He bows down, he lies down as a lion;

And as a lion, who shall rouse him?'

"Blessed *is* he who blesses you,

And cursed *is* he who curses you."

Numbers 24:10 Then Balak's anger was aroused against Balaam, and he struck his hands together; and Balak said to Balaam, "I called you to curse my enemies, and look, you have bountifully blessed *them* these three times!



Numbers 24:11 Now therefore, flee to your place. I said I would greatly honor you, but in fact, the Lord has kept you back from honor.”

Numbers 24:12 So Balaam said to Balak, “Did I not also speak to your messengers whom you sent to me, saying,

Numbers 24:13 ‘If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord, to do good or bad of my own will. What the Lord says, that I must speak’?

Numbers 24:14 And now, indeed, I am going to my people. Come, I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the latter days.”

The fourth oracle emphasized the **coming** of Jesus in the latter days.

Numbers 24:15 So he took up his oracle and said:

“The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor,  
And the utterance of the man whose eyes are opened;

Numbers 24:16 The utterance of him who hears the words of God,  
And has the knowledge of the Most High,  
*Who* sees the vision of the Almighty,  
*Who* falls down, with eyes wide open:

Numbers 24:17 “I see Him, but not now;

I behold Him, but not near;

A Star shall come out of Jacob;

A Scepter shall rise out of Israel,

And batter the brow of Moab,

And destroy all the sons of tumult.

Numbers 24:18 “And Edom shall be a possession;

Seir also, his enemies, shall be a possession,

While Israel does valiantly.

Numbers 24:19 Out of Jacob One shall have dominion,

And destroy the remains of the city.”

Numbers 24:20 Then he looked on Amalek, and he took up his oracle and said:

“Amalek was first among the nations,

But *shall be* last until he perishes.”

Numbers 24:21 Then he looked on the Kenites, and he took up his oracle and said:

“Firm is your dwelling place,

And your nest is set in the rock;

Numbers 24:22 Nevertheless Kain shall be burned.

How long until Asshur carries you away captive?”

Numbers 24:23 Then he took up his oracle and said:

“Alas! Who shall live when God does this?

Numbers 24:24 But ships *shall come* from the coasts of Cyprus,

And they shall afflict Asshur and afflict Eber,

And so shall *Amalek*, until he perishes.”

Numbers 24:25 So Balaam rose and departed and returned to his place; Balak also went his way.

Balaam is not mentioned in the opening verses of Chapter twenty-five; but in 31:16 you learn it was he who suggested the following plan:

Numbers 25:1 Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab.

Numbers 25:2 They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.

Numbers 25:3 So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel.

The Moabites and Midianites convene a religious feast to honor Baal, and that they invite the Jews to attend. The feast, of course, would involve idolatry and abominable immorality and would be a flagrant violation of Israel's covenant with the Lord. But Moab was related to Israel through Abraham's nephew Lot, and the Midianites were the allies of Moab, so there was no reason why the Jews shouldn't be "neighborly." What Balaam couldn't do by appealing to the demons, he accomplished by appealing to the flesh and inviting the Jews to "enjoy themselves" at Baal Peor.

This is the first recorded occasion in Scripture of Israel worshiping Baal, but it certainly isn't the last. Baal was the chief of the Canaanite gods and was especially responsible for rain and fertility. The Canaanite fertility rites involved both male and female temple prostitutes and encouraged all kinds of sexual immorality. Both the idolatry and the immorality were forbidden by God's law.

Numbers 25:4 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the Lord, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel."

Numbers 25:5 So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor."

In First Corinthians 10:8, the apostle Paul remarked that 23,000 perished... So we assume that Moses and the leaders executed 1,000!

Numbers 25:6 And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the

congregation of the children of Israel, who *were* weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

Numbers 25:7 Now when Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw *it*, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand;

Numbers 25:8 and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel.

Numbers 25:9 And those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand.

Numbers 25:10 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Numbers 25:11 “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal.  
Numbers 25:12 Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace;  
Numbers 25:13 and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.’”

Numbers 25:14 Now the name of the Israelite who was killed, who was killed with the Midianite woman, was Zimri the son of Salu, a leader of a father’s house among the Simeonites.

Numbers 25:15 And the name of the Midianite woman who was killed was Cozbi the daughter of Zur; he was head of the people of a father’s house in Midian.

Aaron’s grandson Phinehas left the prayer meeting and went after the couple, killing both of them in the tent with one thrust of his spear. This stopped the plague, but not before 24,000 people had died (Deuteronomy 4:3-4).

Numbers 25:16 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Numbers 25:17 “Harass the Midianites, and attack them;

Numbers 25:18 for they harassed you with their schemes by which they seduced you in the matter of Peor and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a leader of Midian, their sister, who was killed in the day of the plague because of Peor.”

God declared that the Midianites were to be considered the enemies of Israel and had to be killed. The account of Moses’ fulfilling this order is in Chapter thirty-one. Balaam, the man who masterminded the feast, was killed at the same time.

Those who criticize the Lord because of these national massacres fail to understand that God had been patient with these wicked nations for centuries and had given them ample opportunity to repent. He had revealed Himself to them in creation, and they had heard of the Lord’s judgments against Egypt. Their religious practices were

abominably filthy, and the only way God could remove this cancer was to wipe out the entire civilization. Israel had an important task to perform for the Lord, and the presence of those wicked nations was only a temptation to the Jews to sin.

## Conclusion

Israel didn't know that Balaam was seeking to curse them from above. They didn't need to know! Balaam and the evil spirits he might be in touch with could not overthrow God's people.

In the end, you defeat yourself. The world and the devil can make their appeal; but it's your flesh that they appeal to.

Consider yourself crucified with Jesus and you won't defeat yourself.