

- Remember two lessons ago, we looked at how God punished the Israelites with wandering in the desert for one year for each day the spies were in the land of Canaan (40 years), and we talked last week about how Aaron and Miriam both died. We are still in that last year (year 39) and remember that last week we also studied how Moses would not be able to lead the Israelites into Canaan because God punished him for disobeying him in the way he brought water from the rock.
- Remember also that last lesson at the very end of class we found out about how the Israelites wanted to go through Edom to get to the Promised Land, but the Edomites refused to let them go through so they had to go around (**Numbers 20:14-20**).



- This lesson starts with them about to go into the Promised Land, but they are all the way over at the other side of the Jordan River and they need to go in that way, since they can't take the more direct route. They are across the Jordan River from a place called Jericho. (see map) (**Numbers 22:1**) They obviously really wandered around a piece since they couldn't go through Edom.
- There was a King called Balak over a bunch of people called the Moabites who were called that because they lived in a land called Moab. He was worried because he saw that there were a lot of them and that they had already laid into a people called the Amorites (**Numbers 22:2-4**). By the way, in case you are wondering where those people came from, they are descended from Emer, the fourth son of Canaan, **Genesis 10:16**.
- So Balak knows there is a prophet called Balaam. He has an idea that if he had Balaam lay a curse on Israel he might win. So he send out some senior guys with some money to acquire Balaam's services. (**Numbers 22:5-7**).
- Balaam receives the men, listens to them, and asks them to stay the night while he asks God for guidance. (**Numbers 22:8**)
- Balaam in fact asks God for guidance. God says "don't go with them" so he doesn't. (**Numbers 22:12-13**)
- So Balak tries again, and this time Balak sends even higher ranking folks, and offers him more money. Balaam says "don't care how much money he offers me" but once again offers to let them spend the night while he talks with God about it. (**Numbers 22:15-19**)

- This time, God says “Go, but only say what I tell you to say.” So the next morning he saddles up his donkey and gets ready to go with them. (Numbers 22: 20-21).
- God was angry because he went and sent an angel of the Lord to block his way. (Numbers 22:22). Notice that God was not angry at Balaam, but rather he was angry because he was going. God sometimes uses His anger as a teaching opportunity, so He was not mad at Balaam (he even told him to go), He was mad at the circumstances under which we was being asked to go.
- Balaam is riding on his donkey and passing close to some walls. There are a couple of men with him. An Angel of the Lord appears in the road and only the donkey can see him, so as donkeys will do, he keeps trying to move aside. The first time it happens they are not close to the wall yet so the donkey veers off in the field. Since Balaam can't see the Angel of the Lord, Balaam strikes his donkey to get him back on the path, that's just what you do. The second time it happens, the donkey is in the walls now, so when he turns aside and he traps Balaam's foot against the wall. Balaam still can't see the Angel of the Lord, so he strikes the donkey again. Finally the path is too narrow so when it happens again, the donkey just kind of lays down so Balaam hits him again.” (Numbers 22:23-27).
- God opened up the mouth of the donkey and he actually spoke to Balaam and said “hey why have you hit me these three times? What did I ever do to you?” (Numbers 22:28)
- Balaam responded (as if it was perfectly reasonable to be carrying on a conversation with a donkey) “if I had a sword I would do a lot worse, believe me.” (Numbers 22:29).
- The donkey kept talking and said “have I ever done this to you before?” Then God made it so Balaam could see the Angel of the Lord (Numbers 22:30-31). Then he basically said “if the donkey hadn't moved I would have killed you and let the donkey live.” (Numbers 22:32-33).
- Balaam confesses his error, and God still wants him to go, but orders him again to say only the things God will want. (Numbers 22:34-35).
- When he saw Balaam, Balak said: “hey I've been trying to get you to come.” (Numbers 22:36-37).
- Balaam said “hey I can only say what God wants me to say.” (Numbers 22:38).
- Balak sacrifices sheep and oxen, and takes Balaam up to the high places of Baal (the God they worshipped) so he could see the people from the vantage point. (Numbers 22:39-41).
- Balaam basically tells Balak to build altars and make sacrifices in case God will “come to meet him” and reveal His word to him. That is exactly what happens, and God says that He will speak through Balaam, He just tells him to start talking. Balaam's first public statement results, and it glorifies God's promise to Israel (Numbers 23:1-10).

- Then Balak said “I asked you to curse them not bless them” and Balaam reminded him “I have to speak as God tells me.” (Numbers 23:11-12).
- The process basically repeats itself two more times, each time with Balak taking Balaam to a different place, as if he thought that might make for a different outcome. (Numbers 23:13-26) and (Numbers 23:2 to Numbers 24:11). Each time Balaam reiterates that he is only saying what God tells him too. Obviously, Balak is trying to apply a lot of pressure and even offering him bribes. Still, it’s futile to think that we can suppress God!
- Balaam does have one final go round. It is a little bit different from the first three. This time, Balak appears to have given up, at least we don’t read of him taking Balaam to a different place or making altar based sacrifices anymore. This time Balaam goes into a lot of detail about what is going to happen and how, so he isn’t blessing Israel as much as foretelling future events (we call that prophesying). (Numbers 24: 14-25).
- Israel begins to intermarry and turn away from God by adopting the gods of the land that they are in. (Numbers 25:1-3).
- God tells Moses, and then Moses tells the people, that all the people who were following this false god called Baal should be hanged in front of the people so that God would not be mad at them anymore. (Numbers 25:4-5). Apparently there was some kind of plague sent by God to kill the people, and the hanging was essentially a public display. We know this from later verses.
- God’s anger was turned from the people because Phineas, Aaron’s grandson, saw someone flaunting his marriage to a Midianite woman. He killed them both. Immediately the plague stopped, but it had already killed 24,000 people (Numbers 25:6-14). One public righteous act can make a big difference to God. Remember that as we live our lives we are basically on display. (Matthew 5:14-16)
- God did instruct the Israelites to harass the Midianites as a result of all this. (Numbers 25:16).

Questions:

1. What land or what people refused Israel passage?
2. What is the difference between Balak and Balaam?
3. How many times did Balak try to get Balaam to come see him?
4. Why did Balak want Balaam to come see him?
5. What did Balaam tell people who offered him riches to come see him?
6. Who did Balaam consult for his refusal or permission to go see Balaam?
7. What animal did Balaam ride?

8. Who appeared on the road in front of Balaam's animal?
9. What did Balaam do to the animal for wandering off the path?
10. What body part of Balaam's got trapped?
11. What did the animal do that is unusual?
12. What did God tell Balaam to say?
13. What is the name of the God that Balak was worshipping?
14. What does Balaam tell Balak to do in order to try to get God to come talk with him?
15. How many times does Balaam give public testimony?
16. What is different about the last time Balaam gives public testimony?
17. What is the name of the person who turns God's wrath away by killing Baal worshippers?
18. How many people died as a result of Israel turning away to worship other Gods?