



Sermon Discussion Questions
November 3, 2024
In the Wilderness

AVOID A DATE WITH A DONKEY

Numbers 22

1. **Opening Discussion Questions:** (in a group setting you may not want to use all of these)
 - a. Over the years, many movies and TV shows featured talking animals. Is there one that you found particularly enjoyable? What characteristics of the animal most captured your attention?
 - b. Many of us, particularly when we were young and more susceptible to peer pressure, have been “coerced” into doing something that we knew we really shouldn’t. In hindsight, this often leads to an amusing antidote. Is there such an event you could share in your life, or one that has been told to you by your parents or grandparents?
 - c. Did your mother, or some other adult, ever caution you that “actions speak louder than words” while you were in your formative years? Did you take it to heart or was it just one of those quaint old sayings you could ignore?
2. **Sermon Outline/Key Points**
 - a. Balaam Could See the Future but His Donkey Saw the Present.
 - i. Afraid of the Israelites, King Batak sought supernatural help.
 - ii. Initially, Balaam was wise.
 - iii. Then Balaam asked again after a better offer.
 - iv. His donkey saw what Balaam couldn’t, and saved his life (for a while)
 - b. Don’t Ask God for a Different Answer When He’s Already Clear.
 - i. Balaam’s first mistake was going back to God when He’d already been clear.
 - ii. God, His Word, and His will are unchanging.
 - iii. Commit to obey God’s revealed word and will in the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - c. Keep Your Motives Pure Over Time.
 - i. God saw Balaam’s rotten heart.
 - ii. We’re saved and renewed by grace but our heart and motives matter and are easily corrupted.
3. **Study/Discussion Points:**
 - a. *Sunday Afternoon*
 - i. As soon as possible after listening to the sermon set aside some time to ponder these questions prayerfully:
 - ii. What one thing most stood out to you in this sermon?
 - iii. What new truth did you learn or of what truth were you reminded?
 - iv. After listening to the sermon, is there a Scripture passage you feel led to meditate on or commit to memory this week?
 - v. What is one thing you feel God is leading you to do after hearing this message?
 - vi. Did God convict you of a need to make any changes in your life and walk with Him?
 - b. *Monday:*

- i. This week's focal passage, Numbers 22 is well known but one which often causes considerable confusion and has been subject to many different interpretations throughout church history.
 1. Start by reading the entire chapter as you would any story, looking to understand the events but not focusing too much on details.
 2. Next go back and read it carefully looking for as many specific details as you can find. Make a list of keywords (names, places, events, etc.) and, to the extent you can identify them, motivations for the actions of the key participants in the account.
 3. After doing both of these readings, write down any questions you have about the passage or that you would like to be able to ask the participants.
- ii. If you have access to a good Bible atlas locate the region of Moab (east of the southern half of the Dead Sea) and Midian (east of the Gulf of Aqaba at the north end of the Red Sea). Locating Pethor, Balaam's home, may be more difficult but it would have been in southeast Turkey a little north of the Syrian border. Note the distances involved. What does this suggest about the timeframe over which the events of Numbers 22 must have taken place?
- iii. Read these passages: Genesis 19:36-37, Genesis 25:2, Exodus 3:1 & 18:1-12, and Deuteronomy 2:9.
 1. How were the Moabites related to the Israelites?
 2. How were the Midianites related to the Israelites?
 3. What did Moes know that would have saved the King of Moab a lot of trouble if he had known it too?
 4. Why should the Midianites have avoided aligning with the Moabites?

c. **Tuesday:**

- i. Read Numbers 22:1-6.
- ii. What does verse 1 tell us about the status of the Israelites' 40-year journey through the wilderness (see Numbers 33:48-54)? What is God preparing them to do next?
- iii. Review the events recorded in Numbers 21, especially verses 31-35. What reason did the King of Moab have to be concerned? What emotions were the people experiencing according to verses 2-3?
 1. What can you say about the nature and quality of decisions made when such emotions are controlling thoughts and actions?
 2. How is Moab's reaction a fulfillment of prophecy (see the song of Moses and Miriam in Exodus 15, especially verses 14-16)?
 3. Since prophecy is being fulfilled, what can we say about who is controlling (orchestrating) these events before we even get into details? How does this opening portion of chapter 22 already illustrate the relationship between God and His chosen people?
- iv. What is King Balak's response to the perceived threat to his country and his rule? What are the two places he turns to for help? Even with those two "allies" what is he ultimately depending upon according to the middle portion of verse 6? What does Isaiah 40:27-31 tell Balak and us is a better strategy?

d. **Wednesday:**

- i. Read Numbers 22:7-14.
 - ii. While the first 6 verses of chapter 22 tell us why Balak summoned Balaam what new information about Balaam is provided in verse 7?
 1. What two things did Balak employ to get Balaam to do his bidding? What similarities are there in this two-pronged approach to how we are tempted today?
 2. How does it appear that Balaam made his living? Was it inherently wrong for Balaam to accept payment for his services (see 1 Samuel 9:5-10, disregard for this question the nature and means of Balaam)?
 - iii. Divination is the art of obtaining secret knowledge, especially of the future. It is a pagan counterpart of Godly prophecy depending upon demonic power. Read Deuteronomy 18:9-13, Ezekiel 22:27-29, and Jeremiah 29:7-9.
 1. What is God's judgment about divination?
 2. Which is most important, the name they use to describe what they do or the source of the message they give?
 3. Based on the dialogue God initiates with Balaam and Balaam's response (verse 13) how would you characterize Balaam?
 - iv. Carefully consider Balaam's answer to Balak's men in verse 13. What is your opinion of it? Was it honest? Was it complete? If he had included more of what God told him how might it have changed the course of events?
 - v. Without reading further in the story, if Christians today responded to God's leading with as much commitment as Balaam did in verse 13 how different do you think the church in America would be?
- e. Thursday:*
- i. Read Numbers 22:15-20
 - ii. Balak, like politicians today, was unwilling to take "no" as an answer. What did he do in response to Balaam's refusal?
 - iii. Given the distances (about a 600-mile round trip) the emissaries had to travel what do you think (pure speculation since we are not told) Balaam may have been thinking about during the long period between visits?
 1. How does this same factor often play into our yielding to temptation?
 2. If Balaam had had New Testament scriptures and followed Paul's instruction in Philippians 4:8, how might it have changed the outcome?
 - iv. Verse 20 is key to understanding the next events. Read it in several translations, if possible, then focus on the ESV translation of what God tells Balaam: "If the men have come to call you, rise, go with them; but only do what I tell you."
 1. Since Balaam already knew Balak's men had come to get him before he went to bed what must the conditional phrase "If the men have come to call you, rise" mean?
 2. What seems to be missing from the next morning's events since Balaam immediately prepared to depart? Is it possible that he understood the "if" to be "since" (as it is often translated) and didn't wait to see if Balak's men would be his "alarm clock"?

f. *Friday:*

- i. Read Numbers 22:21-35
- ii. This is the best-known portion of the story but immediately creates difficulty since a quick reading of the account seems to suggest that God is angry with Balaam for going despite seeming to tell him to do so.
 1. How does the line of reasoning in yesterday's closing questions provide one possible explanation to eliminate that difficulty?
 2. What other explanation can you think of to explain God's anger? Given that Balaam had to be on a several-week-long journey what might he have been doing that would anger God? How might 1 Timothy 6:10 apply?
 3. What judgment does 2 Peter 2:14-16 provide?
- iii. The fact that God uses a donkey to speak to Balaam before opening his eyes is often cited as an obvious error in the Bible. But for God, it is not a problem. How does Jesus show us this in Luke 19:39-40? What is the only other instance in the Bible where an animal talks (see Genesis 3:1-5)?
- iv. What is your opinion of Balaam's confession once God opens Balaam's eyes? A quick reading may make it sound like a good and righteous response since he admits to sinning but when you look closely, what does he seem to be considering the sin to be? Given that the Angel of the Lord has just told Balaam he would have been killed had it not been for the donkey's actions, how does the "if" in the final clause of Balaam's confession make the whole thing seem disingenuous?

g. *Saturday:*

- i. Read Numbers 22:36-41 to finish the chapter, but not the story. You may want to read chapter 23 for the continuation and to prepare for next week's sermon which will pick up with chapter 24.
- ii. What did Balaam warn Balak that he would do? What extremely important detail did Balaam leave out (see Number 22:12b)? What does this suggest Balaam may have been trying to do even while speaking God's message?
- iii. Although God used Balaam to speak the truth as a prophet Balaam ultimately rejected God and became a stumbling block for Israel. Read 2 Peter 2:15-16, Jude 11, and Revelation 2:14. What does it seem Balaam is most remembered for – his obedience or his disobedience?

4. **Application:** Balaam's story should show us very clearly, as does that of Judas Iscariot, that there is more to spirituality than what we say and do. Jesus made this clear in Matthew 15:8-9, quoting Isaiah 29:13, that it is our heart attitude that matters. Why we are doing something for God is more important than just the fact that we are doing it. Spend time this week carefully examining your motives for serving and if you find any impure motives confess them.

5. **Prayer Points:**

- a. Adoration – Psalms 8:1 and 29:1-2
- b. Confession – Proverbs 28:13 and 1 John 1:8-10
- c. Thanksgiving – Psalms 95:1-2 and 100:4-5
- d. Supplications –Matthew 21:22 and John 16:19