

**God's People in the Wilderness: Studies in the Book of Numbers**  
**Numbers 22: Summoning Balaam**  
Park Street Church Christian Formation (Winter Term 2019)

Review

- A series of rebellions
- Death of Miriam at Kadesh
- Water from the rock and the holiness of God
- Passage around Edom
- Fiery serpents and the bronze serpent
- Victories over Sihon and Og (conquest of Transjordan) - "they took possession of his land" (21:35)

Preview

- Geography matters—again
- Shaping questions:
  - *Why is the Balaam incident so important?* [It merits three successive chapters as well as the following]
    - Concluding threads in Numbers (25 and 31:16)
    - Deuteronomy 23:5
    - Joshua 24:9-10
    - 2 Peter 2:15
    - Revelation 2:14
  - *Was Balaam a prophet of the LORD?*
- Overview of the narrative

Geography Review

- Geo-political Moab
- Moab had expanded "from the Arnon to the Jabbok"
- until Israel took Heshbon and the Plateau, plus . . .
- they took Bashan – battle at Edrei
- Then, Israel camped on the Plains of Moab across from Jericho (22:1)

Coalition Between Moab and Midian

- Because Israel had a strangle-hold on a reduced Moab,
- Moab made an alliance with nomadic Midianites.
- They together appealed to Balaam, whose reputation was widely known
- Pethor was *maybe* near the Euphrates; in Sajur Valley between Aleppo and Carchemish

### Messengers Sent by Balak, King of Moab

- The summons:
  - Come and curse this powerful and numerous people
  - And here is a fee
- Balaam's first response to the elders
  - Stay here while I consult the LORD
  - And God came to him . . .
- Was Balaam a prophet of the Lord? How can we know? What other data are necessary?

### Next

- God to Balaam – don't go and don't curse
- Moabite princes sent home
- More prestigious ones return with an apparently more lucrative offer
- Balaam's effusive refusal (22:18) followed by a grand pause – stay here and I will find out what else the Lord might say!
- God to Balaam – go, but only do what I tell you to do

### A Bizarre Journey

- Balaam set out
- God was very angry; Angel of the Lord stood in the road to oppose him, a drawn sword in his hand
- Irony: the donkey saw, but Balaam did not
- Donkey engaged in avoidance maneuvers

### The Character of Balaam

- "The Lord opened the donkey's mouth" and a conversation ensued between the donkey and Balaam
- "The Lord opened Balaam's eyes"; Balaam fell prostrate
- Angel of the Lord: "I came out to oppose you; the way is reckless; I would have killed you if the donkey had not turned away . . ."
- What was the nature of the "sin" that Balaam confessed?
- God's "permission" – "speak only what I tell you"
- Balaam dutifully echoes to Balak that command: "I must speak only what God puts in my mouth."
- Preparation for the oracles: sacrifices and a high place

### What Questions Remain? What Lessons Might We Learn?