

Balak's Persistence Numbers 22:36-24:25

Slide 1

Sometimes we say things that really get us into trouble. Becky's sister, Misty, gave me some good advice the other day about things that you should never say to a police officer. Statements like:

- "You're not going to check the trunk, are you?"
- "I thought you had to be in relatively good physical condition to be a police officer."
- "Your eyes look glazed; have you been eating doughnuts?"

Well, Balaam should have been given such good advice, because as much as he wished, he found it impossible to say anything that would please Balak.

This heathen king was attempting to persuade Balaam to curse the Israelites, whose only fault was they had parked too close to Balak's domain while getting ready to take possession of the Promised Land.

In our previous lesson, we focused on the invitation Balaam received from Balak, where Balak made a very tempting offer if Balaam would just come and curse Israel for him.

Balaam wanted to accept Balak's offer, so he didn't pay close attention when God forbade him to go, nor did he listen to his donkey, either.

Only when Balaam saw the Angel of the Lord did he offer to turn back, but God allowed Balaam to continue, on one condition: he was to speak only the words that God gave him.

As we study Balaam, remember that while he is a false prophet, the words he speaks are the words of God. Just as God can speak through a donkey, He can also speak through a man like Balaam.

Slide 2

An individual I knew used to say that his mother was the most gracious woman he ever knew. He claimed that she could always find something good to say about everyone.

He said, *“If you asked her about the devil, she was sure to say, ‘Well, he’s persistent.’”* That’s one thing we could say about Balak. He was both “persistent” and “consistent.”

That’s a nice way of saying that he was a stubborn individual who refused to listen or learn.

That’s why, as I read through these chapters in Numbers, I was amazed that Balak, regardless that he never seemed to get the message, never gave up.

This was in spite of the fact that it was God speaking to him, and He even repeated the message, several times.

Balak was willing to pay Balaam any amount if he would just put a curse on Israel. Yet he’s not willing to heed Balaam’s admonition, that anyone who curses Israel would themselves be cursed.

Balak was persistent. This was seen in his refusal to accept Balaam’s response when he declined the first invitation to come and curse Israel.

And not only was Balak persistent; he was an anxious man. He wanted these Israelites off his property. This is seen in Numbers 22:36 when he went to meet Balaam as soon as he reached Moab.

In fact, Balak was taking no chances. When the delegation finally arrived, he immediately took Balaam and the delegation up the mountain to one of Moab’s many pagan alters.

There he offered sacrifices for Balaam's success. Like a pagan prayer meeting!

Now, understand that Balak wasn't hiring Balaam to persuade his heathen "gods" to curse the Israelites and their God. I suspect that Balak has already attempted this and failed.

Balaam was brought in as a kind of spiritual consultant, with the hope that he could somehow communicate with Yahweh and induce Him to curse His own people Whom He had blessed.

Balak behaves like a Mafia "godfather," who's trying to *"make Balaam and God an offer they can't refuse."*

On the one hand, Balak employs flattery and bribery to persuade Balaam, and on the other hand, there's the implied threat that harm will come to him if Balak doesn't get what he demands.

Balak looks upon God as being weak-willed, so he expected to change the God's will by persisting to press Him to curse Israel.

Like the child who believes if he throws a tantrum long enough his parents will let him do what he wants.

So, Balak builds seven alters, moving from one to another, making one sacrifice after another, as though the quality and quantity of his offerings could manipulate God.

Balak was willing to join together with Balaam and whatever "god" would get him what he wanted. He's the classic polytheist.

He looked upon the gods as some people look on vitamin pills—if one is good, then several must be better.

Balak was more than willing to unite himself with other prophets and other gods, as long as he got his way. His motto was, *“The more the merrier.”*

Balak’s approach was the opposite of God’s instructions to Israel. God repeatedly warned the Israelites not to embrace any other gods or to incorporate any of their religious practices their worship.

Their safety and security came from standing alone, in keeping themselves separate from the heathen nations around them, and in worshipping God alone.

Balak couldn’t grasp how offensive his “worship” was to the God of Israel. If he was trying to get God’s attention, he succeeded but not in the way he wanted.

Slide 3

As you study Numbers, the more you’ll see the differences between Balak and Balaam. Even though both men were pagans, each responded differently to divine revelation.

Balak makes no progress at all. He’s exactly the same man at the end of the story as he was at the beginning.

Balaam, however, makes a great deal of progress in his understanding of God, and in the way he spoke as a prophet. Consider these examples of Balaam’s progress.

1. Balaam learned that those whom Balak merely called “a people” were “God’s people.”

Numbers 23:20-23, *“I have received a command to bless; he has blessed, and I cannot change it. “No misfortune is seen in Jacob, no misery observed in Israel. The LORD their God is with them; the shout of the King is among them. God brought them out of Egypt; they have*

the strength of a wild ox. There is no divination against Jacob, no evil omens against Israel. It will now be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'See what God has done!'"

2. Balaam admitted his sin in going with Balak's emissaries and offered to go back.

When Balak summoned Balaam, he really wanted to go and curse the Israelites since he would've been rewarded with a generous fee.

But God instructed him not to go (22:6, 12), so Balaam declined the invitation, but without conviction, thereby leaving the door open for future negotiations.

When a better offer was proposed, again Balaam sought God's council. God granted him permission, but it displeased God greatly when Balaam went.

This was first communicated by Balaam's donkey, as she repeatedly turned off the path. Then it was conveyed more clearly and forcefully when the donkey spoke to Balaam.

Then, when Balaam's eyes were opened, he saw the Angel of the Lord standing in his way, with drawn sword. Balaam quickly admitted his guilt and offered to turn back.

Numbers 22:34-35, "Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned. I did not realize you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now if you are displeased, I will go back." The angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but speak only what I tell you." So Balaam went with Balak's officials."

3. Balaam learned that those whom Balak wanted him to curse were those whom God had blessed.

Numbers 22:6, 12, *“So now, please come and curse this nation for me, for they are too powerful for me. Perhaps I will prevail so that we may conquer them, and drive them out of the land. For I know that whomever you bless is blessed, and whomever you curse is cursed”*
“But God said to Balaam, “You must not go with them; you must not curse the people, for they are blessed.”

Numbers 23:7-8, *“Then Balaam spoke his message: “Balak brought me from Aram, the king of Moab from the eastern mountains. ‘Come,’ he said, ‘curse Jacob for me; come, denounce Israel.’ How can I curse those whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce those whom the LORD has not denounced?”*

Slide 4

This is where we see, in Balaam’s words to Balak, an indication of some movement in the right direction.

He told Balak that he had no power, in and of himself, to speak anything for God. He also informed Balak that whatever God put in his mouth, that he must speak.

In the beginning, Balaam wasn’t entirely candid in what he said, but in the end, he spoke plainly and forcefully to Balak.

Remember, Balaam didn’t fully disclose to God all that Balak had communicated to him through the delegation he had sent.

Likewise, Balaam didn’t tell Balak all that God had spoken to him. But after the ordeal with his donkey and the Angel of the Lord, Balaam was careful to say all that God revealed to him.

Balaam finally comprehends the complete “otherness” of God when compared to the “gods” he has dealt with previously. Specifically, Balaam began to grasp the sovereignty of God.

Numbers 23:18-19, *“Then he spoke his message: “Arise, Balak, and listen; hear me, son of Zippor. God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?”*

When Balaam learned how God’s will was supposed to be sought, he ceased to employ his pagan methods and used those that pleased God.

Numbers 24:1, *“Now when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not resort to divination as at other times, but turned his face toward the wilderness.”*

At first, God *“put the words in Balaam’s mouth,”* as He did with the donkey. But later God’s Spirit came upon Balaam, so that he spoke in the Spirit.

Numbers 24:2-3a, *“When Balaam looked out and saw Israel encamped tribe by tribe, the Spirit of God came on him and he spoke his message:...”*

In the end, in spite of the fact that he had already been fired and told to leave, Balaam spoke the words of God to Balak. He didn’t care that, by so doing, it put his life in jeopardy as seen in Numbers 24:10-25.

Slide 5

Conclusion

The Israelites are at the borders of the Promised Land. Soon, they’ll possess the land under Joshua.

Throughout Israel’s history, the neighboring nations surrounding Israel were intimidated by the presence of God’s people and His blessings upon them.

Like Balak, the kings of these nations sought to bring about Israel's downfall. Israel's safety and security—and their blessings—are a gift from God, based upon His covenant with them.

As they trusted in God, He protected them and gave them prosperity, even in the face of opposition from their neighbors.

Though they didn't see it at the time, it would become increasingly apparent that the blessings of God would ultimately be realized through one person—the Messiah.

He's the reason why God can bless an unworthy people. Israel's blessings are wrapped up in the Messiah.

Whether one was an Israelite or a Gentile, every person must choose to submit to Jesus or oppose Him.

To submit to Jesus is to experience God's blessings. To oppose Him is to fall under the curse of God.

Israel's future, as well as ours today, rests in our response to Jesus Christ.