

# The Book of Numbers

## Lesson 12

### Chapters 22:1-22

As we ended the last lesson, Israel had defeated Og and all his forces at the Battle of Edrei. Og was an interesting man whom the Holy Spirit saw fit to address again in the retelling of this story in the book of Deuteronomy. Here is the record that is found concerning Og in Deuteronomy.



Deut: 3:1 " Then we turned and went up the road to Bashan, and Og, king of Bashan, with all his people came out to meet us in battle at Edrei. <sup>2</sup> "But the LORD said to me, 'Do not fear him, for I have delivered him and all his people and his land into your hand; and you shall do to him just as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon.' <sup>3</sup> "So the LORD our God delivered Og also, king of Bashan, with all his people into our hand, and we smote them until no survivor was left. <sup>4</sup> "And we captured all his cities at that time; there was not a city which we did not take from them: sixty cities, all the region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan. <sup>5</sup> "All these were cities fortified with high walls, gates and bars, besides a great many unwalled towns. <sup>6</sup> "And we utterly destroyed them, as we did to Sihon king of Heshbon, utterly destroying the men, women and children of every city. <sup>7</sup> " But all the animals and the spoil of the cities we took as our booty. <sup>8</sup> " Thus we took the land at that time from the hand of the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, from

the valley of Arnon to Mount Hermon <sup>9</sup> (~~Sidonians call Hermon Sirion, and the Amorites call it Senir~~): <sup>10</sup> all the cities of the tableland and all Gilead and all Bashan, as far as Salecah and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan. <sup>11</sup> (~~For only Og king of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaim. Behold, his bedstead was an iron bedstead; it is in Rabbah of the sons of Ammon. Its length was nine cubits and its width four cubits by ordinary cubit.~~)

Og was the last of the Amorite kings on the east side of the Jordan River that the Israelites had to defeat. Not spoken of here but addressed soon in the Scripture, one half of the tribe of Gad and one half the tribe of Manasseh will ask Moses for these plots in the Promised Land and will receive them. The Israelites will conquer 60 of Og's fortified cities and take total control of the land from the Arnon River in the south to Mount Hermon in the north. Notice that verses 9 and

11 are in parentheses; we have marked them out for this study. Much has been made by many commentaries concerning Og and his size, all without a sure, traceable, authority of fact. The problem is found in the word “Rephaim” of verse 11. It is a tragic translation error and it stems from a mistranslation in Deuteronomy 2:10-11 which states **“The Emims dwelt therein in times past, a people great, and many, and tall, as the Anakims; which also were accounted giants, as the Anakims; but the Moabites call them Emims.”** The word “giants” in this passage is not the word *Raphah*, which means giants, it is the word *Rephaim* (or *Raphaim*) which is the name of the group of people. So much speculation and disagreement abound about Og and his size as well as his people that we dare not join in the folly. The Deuteronomy 3:11 passage may be true in saying that Og and his people were the last of the remnant of the *Rephaim* meaning the last of the original people who lived east of the Jordan. Even the bedstead is disputed by the various commentators. Surely there may be some truth to the size of the bed or else verses 9 and 11 would not have been written as margin notes in some preacher’s copy that were eventually incorporated into the text, but they most definitely were not part of the original manuscript. To the commentators who make so much of the size of his bed, my question is “Where is the proof that he slept alone?” He was an Amorite and they customarily had several wives; because he was the king, no doubt he had a few wives and all slept with him. But even that is speculation!

The only thing we can incorporate from the passage is that *Edrei*, which meant a *great mass or force*, under the command of Og can be the assumption of the number of Amorites who lived in the mass of land and the 60 cities that he controlled – massive in number.

## Camp at Plain of Moab Opposite Jericho

**Num 22:1** Then the sons of Israel journeyed, and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan *opposite* Jericho.

We have lost all sense of timing. From the Arnon River to Mount Hermon the path was just over 120 miles long and as much as 80 miles wide or 9,600 square miles to cover and conquer and included at least 60 battles in the 60 cities and then the skirmishes that had to have taken places in the minor villages and along the various roads. At some point, Israel backtracked from the north to the south to Moab’s original land and camped on the east side of the Jordan, most likely no more than 10 miles due east from Jericho.

## Balak, King of Moab

**Num 22:2** Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. **22:3** So Moab was in great fear because of the people, for they were numerous; and Moab was in dread of the sons of Israel. **22:4** Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this horde will lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field." And Balak the son of Zippor was king of Moab at that time.

The Israelites had done nothing to the Moabites, yet, Balak, the Moabite king, was in great fear of them because of their success against Og, Sihon and all their inhabitants. And so, we see that Balak spoke to “to the elders of Midian” to express his concern about the ability of the Israelites.

The land of Midian was southeast of Moab and extended past Mount Sinai. Moses' wife and father-in-law were Midianites. However, Mount Sinai was really on the edge of Midian's land to the south and the two nations (Israel and Midian) seemed to tolerate each other through the 40 years. But now that the nation of Israel had trespassed on their land and conquered the Amorites for 120 miles, the Midianites would surely be fearful of Israel in a short time. Therefore, they joined the Moabites to antagonize Israel and we will soon see the LORD punish them with the deaths of 24,000 people in Numbers 25.

### Balak Sends Messengers to Balaam

Num 22:5 So he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor, at Pethor, which is near the River, *in* the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying, "Behold, a people came out of Egypt; behold, they cover the surface of the land, and they are living opposite me. 22:6 "Now, therefore, please come, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me; perhaps I may 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." 22:7 So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the *fees for* divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam and repeated Balak's words to him. 22:8 He said to them, "Spend the night here, and I will bring word back to you as the LORD may speak to me." And the leaders of Moab stayed with Balaam.

It has long been taught that Balaam's home in Pethor was located on the west bank of the Euphrates River just south of the great and historic city of Carchemish in ancient Aram (Syria of the past - modern-day Turkey). If so, that meant that the dispatch back and forth from Balak to Balaam was nearly 300 miles each way. What a trip for the small band of insignificant elders of Moab to traverse. However, the Bible does not give the location of the biblical Pethor except that its name means *near the river*. Here we also see that the land was inhabited by Balaam's people. This adds nothing to the location of Pethor. Therefore, the commentaries stood for many decades with the thought that Pethor was located on the west bank of *the River* Euphrates almost due west of the ancient city of Haran, named by Abraham's father in tribute to Abraham's deceased brother. Why? It has long been accepted that any reference in the Scripture to *the River*, with no name attached, indicated either the Euphrates or the Nile depending on the geography of the textual contents of the passage. In this passage, Balak's home is located halfway between the Euphrates



Recovered plaster with text mentioning Balaam *the seer* found at Tell Deir Alla near the junction of the Jordan and Jabbok Rivers

and the Nile; therefore, the reference could have meant either. We have no clue in the Scripture as to whether Balaam lived near the Euphrates or the Nile.

However, in 1967, an extra-biblical Aramaic text on plaster was found in Tell Deir Alla on the east side of the Jordan River Valley in an ancient sanctuary near the Jabbok River. It identifies Balaam, son of Beor, as a *seer of the gods*. The following is the transcription of what is readable by lines. The brackets [ ] indicate where text is missing in a line.

- (1) The sayings of Balaam, son of Beor, the man who was a seer of the gods. Lo! Gods came to him in the night and spoke to him
- (2) according to these words. Then they said to Balaam, son of Beor, thus: "Let someone make a [ ] hereafter, so that what you have heard may be seen!"
- (3) And Balaam rose in the morning [ ] right hand [ ] and could not eat and wept
- (4) aloud. Then his people came in to him and said to Balaam, son of Beor, "Do you fast? [ ] Do you weep?" And he
- (5) said to them, "Sit down! I shall inform you what the Shaddaying have done. Now come, see the deeds of the gods! The gods have gathered
- (6) and the Shaddayin have taken their places in the assembly and said to Sh[ ], thus: "Sew shut the skies with your thick cloud! There let there be darkness and no
- (7) perpetual shining and no radiance! For you will put a seal upon the thick cloud of darkness and you will not remove it forever! For the swift has
- (8) reproached the eagle, and the voice of vultures resounds. The stork has the young of the NHS-bird and ripped up the chicks of the heron. The swallow has belittled
- (9) the dove, and the sparrow [ ] and [ ] the staff. Instead of ewes the stick is driven along. Hares have eaten
- (10) [ ]. Freeman[ ] have drunk wine, and hyenas have listened to instruction. The whelps of the
- (11) fox laughs at wise men, and the poor woman has mixed myrrh, and the priestess
- (12) [ ] to the one who wears a girdle of threads. The esteemed esteems and the esteemer is esteemed. and everyone has seen those things that decree offspring and young.
- (15) [ ] to the leopard. The piglet has chased the young
- (16) of those who are girded, and the eye. . ."

In 1989, a tablet was found at the same location bearing the name of Pethor. Because of the location of Tell Deir Alla at the intersection of the Jordan River and the Jabbok River, we might conclude that this was the location of Balaam's home rather than the Euphrates. In other words, when our text says "at Pethor, which is near the River, in the land of the sons of his people," it is speaking of either the Jordan or Jabbok River instead of the Euphrates. In addition, "the sons of his people" could be intended to mean Balak rather than Balaam. Furthermore, the distance for the back and forth trips of the Moabite elders was then only 20 miles at the most.



#### Transliteration and Translation

- (1) mkk / btym / dry / cym
- (2) w'yn / ngr / mksmy / wysym
- (3) z'm



- (1) "The houses have fallen in heaps of ruins,
- (2) and the spring has poured out covering them,
- (3) and a curse has been placed."

Tablets From Tell Deir 'Alla, William H. Shea, 1989 AD



## God and Balaam

**Num 22:9** Then God came to Balaam and said, "Who are these men with you?" **22:10** Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent *word* to me, **22:11** 'Behold, there is a people who came out of Egypt and they cover the surface of the land; now come, curse them for me; perhaps I may be able to fight against them and drive them out.'" **22:12** God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed."

Here we see that no matter where you go, God has a people. It is common to think that when Jacob moved to Egypt some 470 years before that Canaan Land was left without a people who would still worship the true God. No so! To think that, we would have to forget that Abraham had seven sons besides Isaac all of whom knew Abraham's God. We would have to forget that before he died, Abraham gave each of his younger six sons a blessing and sent them off to the east to make homes for their own families. We must not forget that Lot had two sons, Moab and Ammon who knew Abraham and all his sons and knew Abraham's God. Here are the names of Abraham's sons: Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. Do you see the name Midian in that bunch? Yes, he is the father of the Midianites. This group joined the descendants of Moab and Ammon to call on Balaam. All these folks knew Abraham and his God. The land may have been run over with the Canaanites and their abominable worship of Chemosh, but in their lands, there were still a few, a remnant, of those who knew the true God. Balaam knew the true God. His family had not made the 470-year journey through Egypt but nevertheless, he had a personal relationship with the true and living God.

Moreover, Balaam knew what he needed to do with the request of his visitors – take it to the LORD in prayer. That night, God answered Balaam.

## Balaam Refuses Balak's Request

**Num 22:13** So Balaam arose in the morning and said to Balak's leaders, "Go back to your land, for the LORD has refused to let me go with you." **22:14** The leaders of Moab arose and went to Balak and said, "Balaam refused to come with us." **22:15** Then Balak again sent leaders, more numerous and more distinguished than the former. **22:16** They came to Balaam and said to him, "Thus says Balak the son of Zippor, 'Let nothing, I beg you, hinder you from coming to me; **22:17** for I will indeed honor you richly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Please come then, curse this people for me.'"

Balak then pulled out his "more numerous and more distinguished" elders to send to Balaam to basically beg him to "curse the people" of Israel.

## Balaam's Reply to Balak

**Num 22:18** Balaam replied to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, either small or great, contrary to the command of the LORD my God. **22:19** "Now please, you also stay here tonight, and I will find out what else the LORD will speak to me."

Balaam was still working on the original instruction of the LORD when he made this outlandish statement, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, either small or great, contrary to the command of the LORD my God." But Balaam would not make a move without talking to the LORD about it again. Another night would be needed to entreat the LORD.

## God and Balaam

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

This time the LORD gave Balaam permission to go with the men; however, there was a catch. We must notice something extremely important in this verse or we will never understand the next two verses. The LORD said to Balaam, "**If the men come to call you, rise up *and* go with them.**" Do you see the "If?" Balaam was to wait for the men to come to him again to ask him to go with them. Furthermore, the LORD said, "but only the word which I speak to you shall you do." Some take this to mean that the LORD was allowing Balaam to go with the men, not to curse Israel, but to say to Balak the things the LORD would instruct him to say, but that was not what this verse means. When the LORD said, "**but only the word which I speak to you shall you do,**" He was referring to the first part of the verse, "**If the men come to call you.**" In other words, Balaam was not supposed to move until the men came again to ask him to go with them. What did Balaam do in the morning?

## Balaam Joins Leaders

**Num 22:21** So Balaam arose in the morning, and saddled his donkey and went with the leaders of Moab.

When the morning arrived, Balaam saddled up his donkey and hits the trail with the Moabites. What is missing in this action? Balaam did not wait for the Moabite elders to do their part! He disobeyed God! What would God do?

## God's Anger with Balaam

**Num 22:22a** But God was angry because he was going, and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the way as an adversary against him.

The answer as to why God was angry with Balaam is right there in the text. "**But God was angry because he was going....**" Balaam had transgressed the instruction of the LORD who had the whole thing planned out. The LORD had done His part! It was Balaam's turn to do his part – Balaam failed!

How tragic it is to be in God's will one moment and out of His will the next! How tragic it is to be in God's favor one moment and out of His favor the next! How tragic it is to fail to wait when God tells us to wait and we barrel ahead. Balaam might say "God said go if they ask!" That is a true statement, but why did Balaam not wait for them to ask? He had the clear word from the LORD as well as the warning, "Only do as I have told you" as we might paraphrase the LORD's

words. Could Balaam not remember the words of the LORD until morning? He just saddled up his donkey and headed down the road. Who would have thought that would be a sin? But it was! Balaam had proved to be an unfit servant for the LORD and He was angry because he was on his donkey on the way to meet with Balak.

This event is so important to God that it is mentioned twice in the New Testament. Peter connected Balaam's sin with New Testament false prophets as follows.

<sup>2 Peter 1</sup> But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. <sup>2</sup> And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; <sup>3</sup> and in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. <sup>4</sup> For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; <sup>5</sup> and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; <sup>6</sup> and *if* He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing *them* to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly thereafter; <sup>7</sup> and *if* He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men <sup>8</sup> (~~for by what he saw and heard *that* righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with *their* lawless deeds~~), *then* the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, <sup>10</sup> and especially those who indulge the flesh in *its* corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, <sup>11</sup> whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord. <sup>12</sup> But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed, <sup>13</sup> suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong. They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you, <sup>14</sup> having eyes full of adultery and that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children; <sup>15</sup> **forsaking the right way they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness,** <sup>16</sup> but he received a rebuke for his own transgression; *for* a dumb donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet. <sup>17</sup> These are springs without water, and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved. <sup>18</sup> For speaking out arrogant *words* of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, <sup>19</sup> promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. <sup>2 Peter 20</sup> For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. <sup>21</sup> For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered

to them. <sup>22</sup> It has happened to them according to the true proverb, " A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT," and, "A sow, after washing, *returns* to wallowing in the mire."

The Holy Spirit, through Peter, just gave us a little more information about Balaam. Even though he was a seer of God, he had sinned – he was willing to be prompted into the “**the wages of unrighteousness.**” Too willing! What did Balaam do? He did not follow the instruction of the LORD Whom he knew and had heard! He was too willing to do what he wanted to do instead of what the LORD wanted him to do. Balaam’s actions would lead to the “**the wages of unrighteousness**” that he deserved. For being unfaithful to the Word of God, Balaam deserved death as the wage of his sin. Peter’s text was introduced by the Holy Spirit to remind the Israelite Christians of the false prophets found in the Israelite history and warn them that false teachers would arise in the Christian Church that would do the same as the false prophets. In the days of Jeremiah, Hananiah was such a false prophet. He had been a teacher of the Word of God but when Nebuchadnezzar came to take the Southern Kingdom, Hananiah was on his own declaring what he wanted the LORD to do instead of entreating the LORD for His providence, will and way. Jeremiah said, “Amen, Amen” to Hananiah and stated that he, too, wished that Hananiah’s prophecy was correct, but then informed the Israelites that it was completely false. What were the wages for Hananiah’s unrighteousness? Death – within 30 days as spoken by Jeremiah and fulfilled by the LORD. Hananiah had had a relationship with LORD, even to the point of being a true prophet of Israel, but when he began giving false testimony about the LORD, he was quickly removed from his post. So, too, in the Church, there will be true teachers who will rightly divide the Word of God to the people; however, if and when they stray from the Word of God and tell their own theology and begin to explain away their own blatantly sinful action in the execution of their ministerial posts, the LORD will quickly conclude their ministries.

Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, Jude also references Balaam when speaking of false theologians in the Church.

**Jude 10** But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed.

<sup>11</sup> Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

Jude associates the sin of Balaam with that of Cain and Korah. We know Cain; angry with God’s decision to accept his brother’s offering over his, he killed his brother, Abel. We know Korah; angry with God, Moses and Aaron, he challenged the priestly order set by the LORD for the Israelites (Numbers 16) and 250 died with him in his rebellion. Here Jude calls Balaam’s sin, the “error of Balaam” because he “**rushed headlong**” to do what he wanted to do instead of following the specific direction of the LORD.

Where are you with God? Are you guilty of the same sin as Balaam’s? Has the LORD stood in your way because you are away from His way? What do you need to do today to correct your ways? The LORD is waiting to bless you when you follow Him!