

Study Questions: Numbers 22:22-35

1) Why was God's anger aroused against Balaam even though God had permitted him to go (v.20, 22)?

God allowed Balaam to go **under constraint** ("only the word that I speak...", v.20), yet Balaam **went** with a heart bent toward gain and favor with Balak. The Angel interprets Balaam's inner trajectory: "your way is perverse before Me" (v.32). Later Scripture exposes the motive—**love of wages** (2 Pet 2:15 NKJV). God's anger targets the misaligned **intent** beneath outward compliance (Num 22:20, 22, 32 NKJV; 2 Pet 2:15 NKJV).

2) What is the significance of the donkey's three actions (turning aside, crushing the foot, lying down) in vv.23, 25, 27?

The escalating evasions **physically restrain** Balaam from judgment: the Angel states, "Unless she had turned aside from Me, surely I would also have killed you by now, and let her live" (v.33). The **threefold pattern** provides emphatic warning and witness, underscoring that God often protects His people by **blocking destructive paths** before they see the danger (Num 22:23, 25, 27, 31–33 NKJV).

3) What does the LORD opening the donkey's mouth teach about revelation (v.28)?

Revelation is **God's to give**; He can use any vessel to expose human blindness. The "seer" cannot see; the animal both **sees** and **speaks** by the LORD's enabling (vv.28–30, 31). This irony humbles spiritual pride and reminds us that God's truth is not constrained by human status or skill (Num 22:28–31 NKJV; cf. 2 Pet 2:16 NKJV; 1 Cor 1:27 NKJV).

4) What changes when the LORD opens Balaam's eyes (v.31)?

Sight produces **humbling**—Balaam bows and falls facedown, recognizing the nearness of judgment ("His sword drawn in His hand," v.31). True spiritual perception reorients posture before it corrects speech; fear of the LORD precedes faithful words (Num 22:31 NKJV; cf. Prov 9:10 NKJV).

5) How does the Angel of the LORD interpret Balaam's path (vv.32–33), and what does that reveal theologically?

The Angel calls Balaam's way "**perverse**" and declares death would have followed **but for** the donkey. Theologically, God confronts **crooked intent** even when the outward route looks permissible; there is a way that seems right that ends in death (Num 22:32–33 NKJV; cf. Prov 14:12 NKJV). Mercy (the donkey's restraint) precedes judgment, leaving Balaam without excuse.

6) Does Balaam's "I have sinned" amount to repentance (v.34)?

His confession is **hedged** ("if it displeases You, I will turn back," v.34) and quickly fades; he proceeds, needing God to **chain** his speech (v.35). Later, he **counsels** Israel's corruption for profit, proving the heart unchanged (Num 31:16; Rev 2:14). His end underlines counterfeit repentance:

Balaam dies in Israel's judgment on Midian (Num 31:8; Josh 13:22 NKJV). (Num 22:34–35; 31:8, 16 NKJV; Josh 13:22 NKJV; Rev 2:14 NKJV; cf. 2 Pet 2:15–16 NKJV.)

7) Why is the boundary on Balaam's speech (v.35) central to the narrative's outcome?

God's command—"Only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak"—**binds** the prophet's mouth to divine purpose. It guarantees blessing over Israel despite Balaam's motive (anticipating 23:8, 20) and displays God's fidelity: He **turns intended curses into blessing** for His covenant people (Num 22:35; 23:8, 20 NKJV; cf. Deut 23:5 NKJV; Num 23:19 NKJV).

8) How do later Scriptures reinterpret the donkey scene and Balaam's character?

They read the episode as **restraining mercy** toward a greed-driven prophet: the donkey's voice "restrained the madness of the prophet" (2 Pet 2:16). Balaam "loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Pet 2:15) and later **taught Balak** to ensnare Israel (Rev 2:14; Num 31:16). The talking donkey doesn't vindicate Balaam; it indicts him and heightens the justice of his death (Num 31:8; Josh 13:22 NKJV). (2 Pet 2:15–16 NKJV; Jude 11 NKJV; Rev 2:14 NKJV; Num 31:8, 16 NKJV; Josh 13:22 NKJV.)

Additional Context for Numbers 22:22-25: summary of Num 21 → Num 25

- **After two victories:** Israel defeats King Sihon (Amorites) and King Og (Bashan) (21:21–35) and camps in the plains of Moab, opposite Jericho (22:1).
- **Balak & Balaam:** Moab's king—King Balak—hires Balaam to curse Israel. Balaam resided in Pethor, 400-500 miles from Moab. En route, Balaam is checked by the Angel of the LORD (*the donkey incident*), and God permits him to go but only speak God's word (22). On three high places Balaam blesses Israel instead of cursing, affirming God's irrevocable favor and foretelling a coming "Star...Scepter" from Jacob and judgment on surrounding nations (23–24).
- **Baal-Peor:** Israel is seduced into sexual immorality and idolatry with Moab/Midian; God's plague kills 24,000 until **Phinehas** acts zealously, and God grants him a "covenant of peace" (25:1–13). God then commands hostility against Midian for this plot (25:16–18).

Balaam—read in light of later Scripture

- **Not a neutral seer but a cautionary tale:** The NT brands Balaam as one who "loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Pet 2:15) and "ran greedily...for profit" (Jude 11). Despite his relationship with the LORD, his heart was not aligned.
- **His real role in Israel's fall:** Though his oracles bless Israel, he later "taught Balak to put a stumbling block" before Israel—idolatry and sexual immorality (Rev 2:14). Numbers itself confirms this: "through Balaam's counsel" Israel was lured at Peor (Num 31:16).
- **His end:** Balaam dies when Israel strikes Midian (Num 31:8; Josh 13:22), underscoring that gifted speech without godly loyalty led to his judgment.

Framing the “donkey incident” in the context of the greater story

Here’s how to frame the donkey scene (Num 22:22–35) so it *connects with* the big lessons of Num 22–25 and the NT’s verdict on Balaam:

- **Parable of moral blindness.**

The “diviner” can’t see; the donkey does. That inversion exposes Balaam’s heart: gifted mouth, darkened motives. It prepares you to read his beautiful oracles as God’s words *despite* him, not proof of his integrity (cf. 2 Pet 2:15; Jude 11).

- **God’s sovereign restraint—before the fall at Peor.**

The Angel’s drawn sword three times blocks Balaam’s path; the donkey “restrained the madness of the prophet” (2 Pet 2:16). This dramatizes the theme that God can thwart external curses (chs. 23–24) even as Israel later collapses by internal compromise (ch. 25).

- **Gifts ≠ godliness.**

If God can put true words in a donkey’s mouth, Balaam’s accurate blessings don’t vindicate him. The scene undercuts any appeal to “but he spoke for God” and sets up the NT’s charge that he loved profit and misled God’s people (Rev 2:14; Num 31:16).

- **Mercy and unheeded warning.**

Balaam admits, “I have sinned” (22:34), yet continues on. The near-death warning makes his later counsel to seduce Israel (Num 31:16; Rev 2:14) fully culpable—and his death in judgment (Num 31:8; Josh 13:22) morally fitting.

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