

Numbers 22:1-12. *The Israelites March through Moab.* The Israelites were making their way through Moab and had arrived north of the Dead Sea on the northern plains of Moab, bivouacking for taking on Jericho, their first city to be taken to honor the Lord God Yahweh.

Prince Balak of Moab, however, was distressed. The Israelites were overwhelmingly numerous. They're going to take everything with them as they forage their way through our country. So Prince Balak sent folks to summon a famous pagan prophet named Balaam who lived near the Euphrates.

Balak called on Balaam to put a curse on the Israelites; for Balak knew Balaam's curses and blessings were powerful. A serious fee for divination was involved. Balaam was intrigued—stay the night and I'll tell in the morning what Yahweh says to me.

God was neither deaf nor mute—"Who are these men with you Balaam?" They're messengers from Prince Balak of Moab. They want me to curse the hordes of Israelites who've covered the land. With my curse, Balak hopes, he'll be able to subdue them.

God was not pleased. You leave them alone for are blessed, nor are you to go with them. Do not put a curse on "those people." They are blessed.

Q About was King Zippor and his son Balak so concerned?

Q Why did the Lord God not want Balaam to curse the Israelites?

NUMBERS 22:1-12

Then the Israelites traveled to the plains of Moab and camped along the Jordan across from Jericho [Hebrew: "Jordan of Jericho;" possibly an ancient name for the Jordan River]

²Now Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites, ³and Moab was terrified because there were so many people. Indeed, Moab was filled with dread because of the Israelites.

⁴The Moabites said to the elders of Midian, "This horde is going to lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field."

So Balak son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, ⁵sent messengers to summon Balaam son of Beor, who was at Pethor, near the Euphrates River, in his native land. Balak said:

"A people has come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the land and have settled next to me. ⁶Now come and put a curse on these people, because they are too powerful for me. Perhaps then I will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the country. For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed."

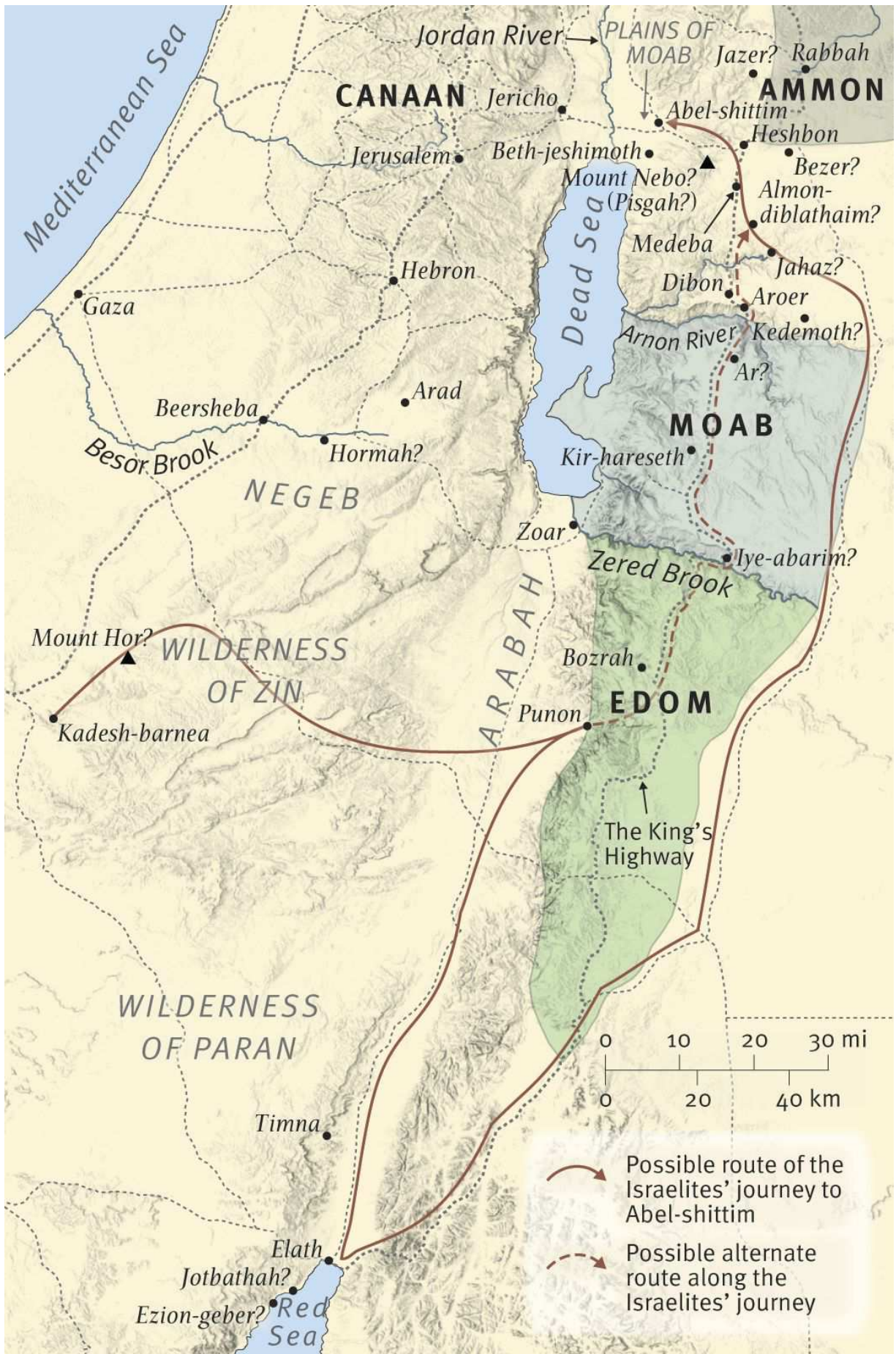
⁷The elders of Moab and Midian left, taking with them the fee for divination. When they came to Balaam, they told him what Balak had said.

⁸"Spend the night here," Balaam said to them, "and I will bring you back the answer the Lord God Yahweh gives me." So the Moabite princes stayed with him.

⁹God came to Balaam and asked, "Who are these men with you?"

¹⁰Balaam said to God, "Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, sent me this message: ¹¹'A people that has come out of Egypt covers the face of the land. Now come and put a curse on them for me. Perhaps then I will be able to fight them and drive them away.' "

¹²But God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed."

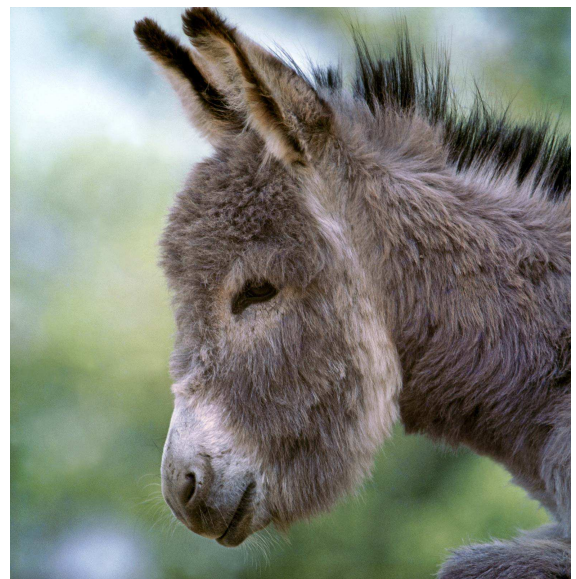


Numbers 22:13-21. *A Go-Ahead from Yahweh*. Well, the next morning found Balaam telling Balak's folk to go back home for the Lord God Yahweh has refused to let me go with you guys. After reporting this to Balak, he sent even more high status emissaries... Don't let anything stop you from coming to us—you will be rewarded handsomely, just come and put a curse on these people for me.

Balaam wouldn't budge. He responded with rhetorical excess and exaggeration—even if I were given Balak's palace, filled with silver & gold, I couldn't do more than what the Lord God Yahweh commands. Spend the night, and I'll find out what Yahweh will tell me. Sure enough, God came to Balaam and told him, go with these men, but do only what I tell you to do.

Next morning: Balaam got up, saddled his jenny and went with the Moab princes.

- Q Why did Balaam refuse the offer from Balak, even with a promise of fiscal reward?
- Q Why did Balaam, a pagan prophet, pretend he needed to talk to the Lord God?



NUMBERS 22:13-21

The next morning Balaam got up and said to Balak's princes, "Go back to your own country, for the the Lord God Yahweh has refused to let me go with you."

14So the Moabite princes returned to Balak and said, "Balaam refused to come with us."

15Then Balak sent other princes, more numerous and more distinguished than the first. 16They came to Balaam and said:

"This is what Balak son of Zippor says: Do not let anything keep you from coming to me, 17because I will reward you handsomely and do whatever you say. Come and put a curse on these people for me."

18But Balaam answered them, "Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything great or small to go beyond the command of Yahweh my God. 19Now stay here tonight as the others did, and I will find out what else the Lord God Yahweh will tell me."

20That night God came to Balaam and said, "Since these men have come to summon you, go with them, but do only what I tell you."

21Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab.

Numbers 22:22-35. From Jenny's Mouth to Balaam's Ears. As it turns out, the Lord God was angry when Balaam went, for "the angel of Yahweh [Christ?]" stood in the road blocking Balaam's donkey. The donkey saw the angel of the Lord God Yahweh, with a drawn sword. She turned off the road and into a field. Balaam was not happy & beat her back to the road.

Then between two vineyards on a narrow path, the angel of the Lord God Yahweh again blocked the way; trying to avoid Him, she pressed against the wall, crushing Balaam's foot. Of course, he beat her again. [Men are often not the sharpest knives in the drawer.]

Then in a narrow place where there was no room to maneuver, the jenny lay down. Balaam was incensed, so he beat her with his staff. Then it got really strange... The Lord God Almighty allowed the donkey to speak: *What have I done to you to excuse you beating me three times?*

You've made a fool of me; if I had a sword, you'd be dead. Jenny was not impressed: *Am I not your donkey? The one you've always ridden? Have I ever done this to you before?*

Then the Lord God Almighty opened Balaam's eyes, and he also saw the angel of the Lord God Almighty standing there in the road, with a sword, ready to attack. Balaam may be a pagan, but he wasn't stupid—he bowed low & prostrated himself.

The angel asked, *Why have you beaten your donkey three times? I've come to oppose you because your journey is reckless. The donkey saw me. If she had not turned away, I would have killed you by now, but for the record, I would have spared her.*

Balaam confessed, I've sinned; I didn't real-

NUMBERS 22:22-35

But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the Lord God Yahweh stood in the road to oppose him. Balaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. ²³When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord God Yahweh standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand [see Joshua 5:13-15], she [i.e., a jenny] turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat her to get her back on the road.

²⁴Then the angel of the Lord God Yahweh stood in a narrow path between two vineyards, with walls on both sides. ²⁵When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord God Yahweh, she pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat her again.

²⁶Then the angel of the Lord God Yahweh moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. ²⁷When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord God Yahweh, she lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat her with his staff. ²⁸Then the Lord God Yahweh opened the donkey's mouth, and the jenny said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?"

²⁹Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now."

³⁰The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?"

"No," he said.

³¹Then the Lord God Yahweh opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord God Yahweh standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown [see Joshua 5:14].

³²The angel of the Lord God Yahweh asked him, "Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me [the precise translation of the Hebrew is problematic]. ³³The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If she had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now, but I would have spared her."

³⁴Balaam said to the angel of the Lord God Yahweh, "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."

³⁵The angel of the Lord God Yahweh said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but speak only what I tell you." So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

ize you were standing in the road opposing me. If you're displeased, I'll return. But, the angel of the Lord God Yahweh said to Balaam—*Go with the men, but speak only what I tell you.* So Balaam did as he was told.

- Q Why was the Lord God upset with Balaam for going when He had given him permission to do so (see verse 20)?
- Q Why did the Lord God Yahweh support Balaam going on to Moab anyhow?
- Q Why did Holy Spirit record this incident in the life a pagan prince and pagan prophet?
- Q What do you suppose happened when Balaam finally arrived in Moab and spoke with Prince Balak and King Zippor?

SEVEN DISTINGUISHED, IF NOT UNIQUE, WORDS FROM THE MOUTH OF A PAGAN

1. From the rocky peaks I see them, from the heights I view them. I see a people who live apart and do not consider themselves one of the nations.
2. Let me die the death of the righteous, and may my end be like theirs!
3. Must I not speak what the Lord God Yahweh puts in my mouth?
4. God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? I have received a command to bless; he has blessed, and I cannot change it.
5. The Lord God Yahweh their God is with them; the shout of the King is among them!
6. Did I not tell you I must do whatever Yahweh says?
7. May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed!