

Study Guide for Numbers 21-25

As noted in earlier reading study guides, “Good Bible study involves 3 steps: observation, interpretation and application.” The following study questions are designed to assist you with the first step only: observation. Later in the week, you will get an email with questions to assist you in interpretation and application.

As you work through the following questions, you are encouraged to mark up the text that follows. Good Bible study inevitably involves reading a passage more than once. Marking up the text enables you to build on what you learn with each successive reading.

Be creative when marking key words or phrases (as in #1 and #2 below). Key words or phrases could simply be underlined or double-underlined or circled or boxed with a pen. Or you could be colorful and use highlighters or colored pencils. Symbols above the words work also. Do whatever suits your fancy! The idea is just to make the words stand out so when you read the passage a second time you will notice that particular word again and begin to see its significance within the passage.

Keep in mind that the goal of observation questions or exercises is simply to spend time handling the text. We want to turn it over, view it from every possible angle, hold it at arm’s length, and examine the details, sort of like what a geologist would do upon picking a rock for the first time. The more we handle the text, without specifically trying to decide what it means, the better prepared we will be to interpret it and apply it when the time comes to do that. Observation can seem tedious at first. Sometimes it may even feel like busy work, but rest assured – its rewards are great!!

1. **Read Numbers 21-25** and mark the following words or phrases in some distinctive way –

- “the Lord spoke to Moses” (or any variation of this phrase)
- “he took up his discourse and said” (or any variation of this phrase)
- “saw,” “look,” “looked,” “see,” “eyes,” “beheld,” and “observed” (mark all in the same way)
- Notice all the people groups in these chapters. Many of them are “. . .ites.” Each time you encounter a new people group, write the name of the group in the left margin of the text. If you find any alternate names or any significant information about how they are related to other people groups, note that also. Use exact words from the text as much as possible.

2. **Read Numbers 22-24 again** and mark . . .

- Every reference to Balak or Balaam, each in some distinctive way. Mark also the pronouns referring to either Balak or Balaam (he, him, I, you, etc). The idea here is to make sure we are clear on who is speaking and who is doing what. Sometimes the pronouns can get confusing! And the fact that both names start with “Ba . . .” doesn’t help any! Consider using a symbol for each name and its pronouns (or two colors of highlighters).
- Every reference to Israel in some distinctive way. Also mark in the same way any words or phrases that refer to Israel, such as “the people,” “this horde,” “they,” “them.” Try to determine just from the text (apart from your previous knowledge of the Bible) whether “Jacob” might be another name for Israel.
- “whatever the Lord speaks, that I will speak” (and all variations of this phrase – there are lots!)
- “bless, or “blessed” (possibly an up arrow?)
- “curse, or “cursed” (possibly a down arrow?)

3. **Read Numbers 25 again**

- Mark every reference to the man Phinehas in some distinctive way (include pronouns such as “he” and “him”)
- See if you can answer the who-what-when-where-and-why questions included at the end of chapter 25. Try to use exact words from the text as much as possible.

2. **Read Numbers 21-25 one more time** and draw a line between verses where a new topic is introduced. Feel free to consult the paragraph divisions in your own personal Bible as a starting place, but don’t be bound by what you find there. Keep in mind that sometimes even chapter divisions are not put in the best places. As you read, notice that the phrase “the Lord spoke to . . .” often introduces a new topic . . . but not always! Try to summarize each paragraph in 20 words or less using exact words from the text as much as possible. If any of the words you marked in Questions 1 or 2 are used in a particular paragraph, try to include one or more of them in your summary. The first paragraph is done for you.

King of Arad took captives from Israel, the Lord heeded
Israel's voice and Israel destroyed Canaanite cities

Numbers 21

King of Arad
(Canaanites)

1 When the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the Negeb, heard that Israel was coming by the way of Atharim, he fought against Israel, and took some of them captive.

2 And Israel vowed a vow to the Lord and said, "If you will indeed give this people into my hand, then I will devote their cities to destruction."

3 And the Lord heeded the voice of Israel and gave over the Canaanites, and they devoted them and their cities to destruction. So the name of the place was called Hormah.

4 From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way.

5 And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food."

6 Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.

7 And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people.

8 And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live."

9 So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

10 And the people of Israel set out and camped in Oboth.

11 And they set out from Oboth and camped at Iye-abarim, in the wilderness that is opposite Moab, toward the sunrise.

12 From there they set out and camped in the Valley of Zered.

13 From there they set out and camped on the other side of the Arnon, which is in the wilderness that extends from the border of the Amorites, for the Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites.

14 Therefore it is said in the Book of the Wars of the Lord,

"Waheb in Suphah, and the valleys of the Arnon,

15 and the slope of the valleys

that extends to the seat of Ar,

and leans to the border of Moab."

16 And from there they continued to Beer; that is the well of which the Lord said to Moses, "Gather the people together, so that I may give them water."

17 Then Israel sang this song:

"Spring up, O well!—Sing to it!—

18 the well that the princes made,
that the nobles of the people dug,
with the scepter and with their staffs.”

And from the wilderness they went on to Mattanah,

19 and from Mattanah to Nahaliel, and from Nahaliel to Bamoth,

20 and from Bamoth to the valley lying in the region of Moab by the top of Pisgah that looks down on the desert.

21 Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, saying,

22 “Let me pass through your land. We will not turn aside into field or vineyard. We will not drink the water of a well. We will go by the King's Highway until we have passed through your territory.”

23 But Sihon would not allow Israel to pass through his territory. He gathered all his people together and went out against Israel to the wilderness and came to Jahaz and fought against Israel.

24 And Israel defeated him with the edge of the sword and took possession of his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, as far as to the Ammonites, for the border of the Ammonites was strong.

25 And Israel took all these cities, and Israel settled in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all its villages.

26 For Heshbon was the city of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab and taken all his land out of his hand, as far as the Arnon.

27 Therefore the ballad singers say,
“Come to Heshbon, let it be built;
let the city of Sihon be established.

28 For fire came out from Heshbon,
flame from the city of Sihon.
It devoured Ar of Moab,
and swallowed the heights of the Arnon.

29 Woe to you, O Moab!
You are undone, O people of Chemosh!
He has made his sons fugitives,
and his daughters captives,
to an Amorite king, Sihon.

30 So we overthrew them;
Heshbon, as far as Dibon, perished;
and we laid waste as far as Nophah;
fire spread as far as Medeba.”

31 Thus Israel lived in the land of the Amorites.

32 And Moses sent to spy out Jazer, and they captured its villages and dispossessed the Amorites who were there.

33 Then they turned and went up by the way to Bashan. And Og the king of Bashan came out against them, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei.

34 But the Lord said to Moses, "Do not fear him, for I have given him into your hand, and all his people, and his land. And you shall do to him as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon."

35 So they defeated him and his sons and all his people, until he had no survivor left. And they possessed his land.

Numbers 22

1 Then the people of Israel set out and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan at Jericho.

2 And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.

3 And Moab was in great dread of the people, because they were many. Moab was overcome with fear of the people of Israel.

4 And Moab said to the elders of Midian, "This horde will now lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field." So Balak the son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time,

5 sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the people of Amaw, to call him, saying, "Behold, a people has come out of Egypt. They cover the face of the earth, and they are dwelling opposite me.

6 Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed."

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 gave him Balak's message.

8 And he said to them, "Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you, as the Lord speaks to me." So the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam.

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

10 And Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, saying,

11 'Behold, a people has come out of Egypt, and it covers the face of the earth. Now come, curse them for me. Perhaps I shall be able to fight against them and drive them out.'"

12 God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed."

13 So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, "Go to your own land, for the Lord has refused to let me go with you."

14 So the princes of Moab rose and went to Balak and said, "Balaam refuses to come with us."

15 Once again Balak sent princes, more in number and more honorable than these.

16 And they came to Balaam and said to him, "Thus says Balak the son of Zippor: 'Let nothing hinder you from coming to me,

17 for I will surely do you great honor, and whatever you say to me I will do. Come, curse this people for me.'"

18 But Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of the Lord my God to do less or more.

19 So you, too, please stay here tonight, that I may know what more the Lord will say to me."

20 And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men have come to call you, rise, go with them; but only do what I tell you."

21 So Balaam rose in the morning and saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab.

22 But God's anger was kindled because he went, and the angel of the Lord took his stand in the way as his adversary. Now he was riding on the donkey, and his two servants were with him.

23 And the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road, with a drawn sword in his hand. And the donkey turned aside out of the road and went into the field. And Balaam struck the donkey, to turn her into the road.

24 Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on either side.

25 And when the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she pushed against the wall and pressed Balaam's foot against the wall. So he struck her again.

26 Then the angel of the Lord went ahead and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left.

27 When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam. And Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff.

28 Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"

29 And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a fool of me. I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you."

30 And the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Is it my habit to treat you this way?" And he said, "No."

31 Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. And he bowed down and fell on his face.

32 And the angel of the Lord said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to oppose you because your way is perverse before me.

33 The donkey saw me and turned aside before me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, surely just now I would have killed you and let her live."

34 Then Balaam said to the angel of the Lord, "I have sinned, for I did not know that you stood in the road against me. Now therefore, if it is evil in your sight, I will turn back."

35 And the angel of the Lord said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but speak only the word that I tell you." So Balaam went on with the princes of Balak.

36 When Balak heard that Balaam had come, he went out to meet him at the city of Moab, on the border formed by the Arnon, at the extremity of the border.

37 And Balak said to Balaam, "Did I not send to you to call you? Why did you not come to me? Am I not able to honor you?"

38 Balaam said to Balak, "Behold, I have come to you! Have I now any power of my own to speak anything? The word that God puts in my mouth, that must I speak."

39 Then Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kiriath-huzoth.

40 And Balak sacrificed oxen and sheep, and sent for Balaam and for the princes who were with him.

41 And in the morning Balak took Balaam and brought him up to Bamoth-baal, and from there he saw a fraction of the people.

Numbers 23

1 And Balaam said to Balak, "Build for me here seven altars, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams."

2 Balak did as Balaam had said. And Balak and Balaam offered on each altar a bull and a ram.

3 And Balaam said to Balak, "Stand beside your burnt offering, and I will go. Perhaps the Lord will come to meet me, and whatever he shows me I will tell you." And he went to a bare height,

4 and God met Balaam. And Balaam said to him, "I have arranged the seven altars and I have offered on each altar a bull and a ram."

5 And the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth and said, "Return to Balak, and thus you shall speak."

6 And he returned to him, and behold, he and all the princes of Moab were standing beside his burnt offering.

7 And Balaam took up his discourse and said,

"From Aram Balak has brought me,
the king of Moab from the eastern mountains:

'Come, curse Jacob for me,
and come, denounce Israel!'

8 How can I curse whom God has not cursed?

How can I denounce whom the Lord has not denounced?

9 For from the top of the crags I see him,

from the hills I behold him;
behold, a people dwelling alone,
and not counting itself among the nations!

10 Who can count the dust of Jacob

or number the fourth part of Israel?

Let me die the death of the upright,
and let my end be like his!"

11 And Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, and behold, you have done nothing but bless them."

12 And he answered and said, "Must I not take care to speak what the Lord puts in my mouth?"

13 And Balak said to him, "Please come with me to another place, from which you may see them. You shall see only a fraction of them and shall not see them all. Then curse them for me from there."

14 And he took him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

15 Balaam said to Balak, "Stand here beside your burnt offering, while I meet the Lord over there."

16 And the Lord met Balaam and put a word in his mouth and said, "Return to Balak, and thus shall you speak."

17 And he came to him, and behold, he was standing beside his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab with him.
And Balak said to him, "What has the Lord spoken?"

18 And Balaam took up his discourse and said,
"Rise, Balak, and hear;
give ear to me, O son of Zippor:

19 God is not man, that he should lie,
or a son of man, that he should change his mind.
Has he said, and will he not do it?
Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

20 Behold, I received a command to bless:
he has blessed, and I cannot revoke it.

21 He has not beheld misfortune in Jacob,
nor has he seen trouble in Israel.
The Lord their God is with them,
and the shout of a king is among them.

22 God brings them out of Egypt
and is for them like the horns of the wild ox.

23 For there is no enchantment against Jacob,
no divination against Israel;
now it shall be said of Jacob and Israel,
'What has God wrought!'

24 Behold, a people! As a lioness it rises up
and as a lion it lifts itself;
it does not lie down until it has devoured the prey
and drunk the blood of the slain."

25 And Balak said to Balaam, "Do not curse them at all, and do not bless them at all."

26 But Balaam answered Balak, "Did I not tell you, 'All that the Lord says, that I must do'?"

27 And Balak said to Balaam, "Come now, I will take you to another place. Perhaps it will please God that you may curse them for me from there."

28 So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, which overlooks the desert.

29 And Balaam said to Balak, "Build for me here seven altars and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams."

30 And Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

Numbers 24

1 When Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he did not go, as at other times, to look for omens, but set his face toward the wilderness.

2 And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. And the Spirit of God came upon him,

3 and he took up his discourse and said,
“The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor,
the oracle of the man whose eye is opened,
4 the oracle of him who hears the words of God,
who sees the vision of the Almighty,
falling down with his eyes uncovered:

5 How lovely are your tents, O Jacob,
your encampments, O Israel!

6 Like palm groves that stretch afar,
like gardens beside a river,
like aloes that the Lord has planted,
like cedar trees beside the waters.

7 Water shall flow from his buckets,
and his seed shall be in many waters;
his king shall be higher than Agag,
and his kingdom shall be exalted.

8 God brings him out of Egypt
and is for him like the horns of the wild ox;
he shall eat up the nations, his adversaries,
and shall break their bones in pieces
and pierce them through with his arrows.

9 He crouched, he lay down like a lion
and like a lioness; who will rouse him up?
Blessed are those who bless you,
and cursed are those who curse you.”

10 And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he struck his hands together. And Balak said to Balaam, “I called you to curse my enemies, and behold, you have blessed them these three times.

11 Therefore now flee to your own place. I said, ‘I will certainly honor you,’ but the Lord has held you back from honor.”

12 And Balaam said to Balak, “Did I not tell your messengers whom you sent to me,

13 ‘If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I would not be able to go beyond the word of the Lord, to do either good or bad of my own will. What the Lord speaks, that will I speak’?

14 And now, behold, I am going to my people. Come, I will let you know what this people will do to your people in the latter days.”

15 And he took up his discourse and said,
“The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor,
the oracle of the man whose eye is opened,

- 16 the oracle of him who hears the words of God,
and knows the knowledge of the Most High,
who sees the vision of the Almighty,
falling down with his eyes uncovered:
- 17 I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near:
a star shall come out of Jacob,
and a scepter shall rise out of Israel;
it shall crush the forehead of Moab
and break down all the sons of Sheth.
- 18 Edom shall be dispossessed;
Seir also, his enemies, shall be dispossessed.
Israel is doing valiantly.
- 19 And one from Jacob shall exercise dominion
and destroy the survivors of cities!"
- 20 Then he looked on Amalek and took up his discourse and said,
"Amalek was the first among the nations,
but its end is utter destruction."
- 21 And he looked on the Kenite, and took up his discourse and said,
"Enduring is your dwelling place,
and your nest is set in the rock.
- 22 Nevertheless, Kain shall be burned
when Asshur takes you away captive."
- 23 And he took up his discourse and said,
"Alas, who shall live when God does this?"
- 24 But ships shall come from Kittim
and shall afflict Asshur and Eber;
and he too shall come to utter destruction."
- 25 Then Balaam rose and went back to his place. And Balak also went his way.

Numbers 25

- 1 While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab.
2 These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.
3 So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.
4 And the Lord said to Moses, "Take all the chiefs of the people and hang them in the sun before the Lord, that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel."

5 And Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you kill those of his men who have yoked themselves to Baal of Peor."

6 And behold, one of the people of Israel came and brought a Midianite woman to his family, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the whole congregation of the people of Israel, while they were weeping in the entrance of the tent of meeting.

7 When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose and left the congregation and took a spear in his hand

8 and went after the man of Israel into the chamber and pierced both of them, the man of Israel and the woman through her belly. Thus the plague on the people of Israel was stopped.

9 Nevertheless, those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand.

10 And the Lord said to Moses,

11 "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy.

12 Therefore say, 'Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace,

13 and it shall be to him and to his descendants after him the covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel.'"

14 The name of the slain man of Israel, who was killed with the Midianite woman, was Zimri the son of Salu, chief of a father's house belonging to the Simeonites.

15 And the name of the Midianite woman who was killed was Cozbi the daughter of Zur, who was the tribal head of a father's house in Midian.

16 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

17 "Harass the Midianites and strike them down,

18 for they have harassed you with their wives, with which they beguiled you in the matter of Peor, and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of the chief of Midian, their sister, who was killed on the day of the plague on account of Peor."

- Who was Phinehas?
- What did Phinehas do? (list all his actions)

- When did he do these things?
- Where did he do these things?
- Why did he do those things?
- What was the result of what he did?