

Old Testament History, Literature, and Theology

Lecture 16: Balaam, Numbers, and Deuteronomy Covenant Renewal

Author: Dr. Ted Hildebrandt | Session 16

Sponsored by Biblecallelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Keywords

Balaam, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Covenant Renewal, Hittite Treaties, Mosaic Authorship, Deir Alla, Promised Land

Abstract

This lecture covers the conclusion of the book of Numbers and the transition into Deuteronomy as a covenant renewal document. It explores the complex character of Balaam as a Judas-like figure whose prophetic oracles reflect divine truth despite his ultimate betrayal of Israel. The lesson then contrasts the transient wilderness experience with the permanence of 'place' in the Promised Land, emphasizing God's unmerited gift of covenant promises. Finally, Dr. Hildebrandt defends the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy by demonstrating that its structure—specifically its historical prologue and blessings—perfectly aligns with 1200 BC Hittite treaties rather than 700 BC Assyrian treaties.

Outline

I. Introduction & Course Logistics

- A. Quiz preview: Ruth and Judges upcoming assignments
 - 1. Required readings, memory verses, and article review
- B. Contextual transition: Wrapping up Numbers and entering Deuteronomy

II. Core Theological Lessons from the Book of Numbers

- A. Individual agency: One person can make a difference (Moses' intercession)
- B. The efficacy of prayer: Relational interaction and divine relenting (Naham)
- C. Faithfulness vs. Faithlessness: Israel's complaints contrasted with God's loyalty
- D. Forgiveness and consequences: Divine pardon coexisting with 40-year wilderness judgment
- E. Dynamic nature of God: Relational responsiveness over static determinism
- F. Complaint vs. Lament
 - 1. Complaint: Expression of frustration moving away from God
 - 2. Lament: Honest wrestling with God moving toward God
- G. Purification rituals: Red heifer ceremony (Numbers 19) and ritual cleansing

III. The Balaam Narrative (Numbers 22–24)

- A. Context and background
 - 1. Balak, King of Moab, hires Balaam from Mesopotamia out of fear of Israel
 - 2. Conquest of Amorite kings Og and Sihon creates Moabite panic

3. Geography: Wadi Arnon border, Edom (Esau), Moab (Lot), and Mt. Nebo
- B. Balaam's complex character: Saint and sinner
 1. Initial fidelity: Refuses gold/silver and insists on speaking only Yahweh's word
 2. The 'Judas of the Old Testament': Prophet turned apostate/traitor (Jude 11, Revelation)
 3. Extrabiblical archaeological confirmation: 800 BC Deir Alla inscription ('Balaam son of Beor')
 4. Central tension: Proclaiming God's word versus seeking financial gain
- C. The Donkey Narrative: Literary irony and divine warning
 1. The blind seer vs. the seeing donkey: Animal beholds the angel with drawn sword
 2. Threefold beating and miraculous speech of the donkey
 3. Function of narrative delay: Warning Balaam against greed and compromise
- D. Balaam's Four Oracles
 1. First Oracle: Inability to curse whom Yahweh has not cursed; blessing declared
 2. Second Oracle: God is not a man to lie/change mind; Yahweh as Israel's King
 3. Third Oracle: Ecstatic vision of an exalted Kingdom and human ruler greater than Agag
 4. Fourth Oracle: Messianic prophecy of the 'Star out of Jacob' and 'Scepter out of Israel'
 - a. Parallels star and royal scepter
 - b. Possible historical link to Mesopotamian Magi at Christ's birth
- E. Balaam's downfall and death
 1. Enticement at Baal-Peor (Numbers 25): Advising Moabite seduction to trigger divine judgment
 2. Execution of Balaam by the sword (Numbers 31:8, 16)

IV. Deuteronomy as Covenant Renewal

- A. End of the Pentateuch/Torah: Passing the baton from Moses to Joshua at Mt. Nebo
- B. Major thematic shifts
 1. Promise to Possession: From patriarchs receiving promises to descendants owning land
 2. Testing to Resting: Transition from 40 years of wilderness testing to Promised Land rest
 3. Transient to Permanent: From wandering in tents to settled homes and inheritance

V. Theological Framework of Land: Space vs. Place

- A. Brueggemann's distinction: Wilderness as 'Space' (chaos, hardship) vs. Land as 'Place' (home, belonging)
- B. Impact of 'where': Geographical and environmental context shaping spiritual identity
- C. The Land as Unmerited Gift
 1. Granted not for Israel's righteousness, but due to Canaanite wickedness (Deut 9:4)
 2. Inheritance of unearned assets: Cities, wells, houses, and vineyards (Deut 6:10-11)
- D. Land as Covenant Love: Divine selection of the fewest people (Deut 7:7)
- E. Centralization of Worship: 'Place where God puts His name' (Deut 12:5) foreshadowing Jerusalem

VI. Historical Memory and Spiritual Identity

- A. The constant danger of spiritual amnesia after prosperity and satisfaction
- B. The imperative of Zakar (remembering): Integrating past trial/bondage into praise and worship
- C. Inter-generational transmission of tradition (parent-child covenant heritage)

VII. Defense of Mosaic Authorship vs. Critical JEDP Theory

- A. The JEDP Hypothesis ('D' Document as 620 BC 'Pious Fraud' under King Josiah)
- B. Comparative Ancient Near Eastern Treaty Forms (Meredith Kline's research)
 - 1. 1200 BC Hittite Treaties: Include Preamble, Historical Prologue, Stipulations, Witnesses, Blessings & Curses
 - 2. 700 BC Assyrian Treaties: Lack Historical Prologue and Blessings (only Curses)
- C. Evidentiary Conclusion
 - 1. Deuteronomy contains both a Historical Prologue (ch. 1–3) and Blessings (ch. 28)
 - 2. Perfect structural match with 1200 BC Hittite treaties supports 2nd millennium BC Mosaic era origin