

Joshua 13:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the border of the children of Reuben was Jordan, and the border thereof. This was the inheritance of the children of Reuben after their families, the cities and the villages thereof.

Analysis

Balaam also the son of Beor, the soothsayer, did the children of Israel slay with the sword—Balaam (בְּלָאָם בֶּן-בָּעֵר) appears as a tragic figure: a prophet who knew God's will yet loved wages of wickedness (2 Peter 2:15, Jude 11). The term ha-qosem (הָקָסֵם, "the soothsayer/diviner") is striking—though Balaam prophesied truth in Numbers 22-24, his character was that of a pagan diviner seeking profit. His death by sword (cherev, חֶרֶב) during the Midianite war (Numbers 31:8) came because he counseled Midian to seduce Israel into Baal worship (Numbers 31:16, Revelation 2:14).

Balaam epitomizes religious hypocrisy: speaking God's truth while undermining God's people for personal gain. His inclusion here, in Reuben's boundary list, serves as memorial warning. Every time Reubenites rehearsed their territorial boundaries, they remembered Balaam's fate—a false prophet destroyed "**among them that were slain**", categorized with God's enemies, not His servants. Orthodoxy without obedience leads to judgment.

Historical Context

Balaam came from Pethor in Mesopotamia (Numbers 22:5), indicating his international reputation as a diviner. Ancient inscriptions from Deir 'Alla (8th century BC) mention "Balaam son of Beor, the man who saw the gods," confirming his historical existence. His death occurred during Israel's punitive expedition

against Midian (Numbers 31), shortly before crossing into Canaan, approximately 1406 BC.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does Balaam's ability to prophesy truth while having a corrupt heart warn against equating spiritual gifts with spiritual maturity?
2. What does Balaam's counsel to seduce Israel teach about indirect spiritual warfare when direct cursing fails?
3. Why might God have included Balaam's death in a land boundary list rather than only in battle narratives?

Interlinear Text

וְגַם יְלִי יְהוָה
H1961 And the border H1366 H1121 H7205 H3383 H1366

זֶה אֲתָה תְּמִלֵּת
H2063 thereof This was the inheritance H5159 H1121 H7205

לְמִשְׁפָחוֹת מִ
after their families H4940 H5892 H2691