

A Prophet Seeking Profit

By Al Felder

“Woe unto them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.” (Jude 11)

Balaam is mentioned in eight different books of the Bible. It is clear that the Holy Spirit intends for us to learn some lessons from this man’s life. Unfortunately for Balaam, his place in the Bible is a place of shame. He went from being a prophet of God to a prophet seeking profit.

The story of Balaam can be found in Numbers 22-24. At this time, the children of Israel were in their final year of their journey from Egypt to Canaan. The date for these events is somewhere around 1400 BC. The forty years of dwelling in the wilderness, due to their refusal to take the land as God commanded, was coming to an end. They had fought and conquered the Amorites, and were about to enter into the land of Moab.

Balak, the king of Moab was afraid of the children of Israel. He did not want them to cross his land, so he sent some of his men to Balaam to ask him to curse the Israelites. Balaam was not a Hebrew, but he was a prophet of God. He lived in Pethor, a city located along the Euphrates River. This city was 370 miles north of Moab. This journey would have taken somewhere between 20-25 days at this time.

At first it appears as if Balaam is worthy of admiration and respect. When Balak’s men made their offer to him, Balaam refused to accept it without first asking the Lord. *“And he said unto them, Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the Lord shall speak unto me: and the princes of Moab abode with Balaam.”* (Numbers 22:8) God told Balaam that he was not to go with Balak’s men, and Balaam obeyed the instructions of the Lord. He sent Balak’s men on their way.

Well, Balak refused to take no for an answer. He sent more men to Balaam with an even better offer. Balaam told the men to stay the night while he asked the Lord a second time. *“And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do.”* (Numbers 22:20) Remember, God originally told Balaam not to go with Balak’s men. Did God change His mind on the matter? The answer is no. Two verses later the Bible tells us that God was angry with Balaam because he went to Moab.

How are we to understand this passage of scripture? Well, God is not going to prevent a person from doing what they want to do. ¹⁰*“And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. ¹¹And for this cause God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie.”* (2 Thessalonians 2:10, 11) In these verses the Apostle Paul is talking about apostasy. He points out that those who do not love the truth will be given strong delusions.

This is the same thing that we read in Romans 1 regarding the Gentiles rejection of the knowledge of God. In both instances, God had already spoken. He gave His answer to Balaam, and He had revealed Himself to the Gentiles. In both cases they rejected God's word. Instead of doing what God said they wanted another alternative – one that suited them.

This is a real sad thing. It has happened time and time again throughout the ages. A person starts out obeying God, but other things begin to interest them. God's word is clear on a particular matter, but it interferes with what they really want to do. Like Balaam, they keep looking for some type of justification for their actions. Eventually they find something to help them believe that it's ok.

Just as Balaam went back and asked God again, people who lose their love for the truth begin to search the scriptures in order to justify their actions. The Bible talks about those who do this. *"As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction."* (2 Peter 3:16) The Apostle Peter is making reference to Paul's inspired writings in this verse. He says that some wrest or pervert these scriptures. In other words, they twist and turn it from its original meaning. They do this in order to get it to say what they want so their actions can be justified.

You've probably seen this happen before. More than likely you have known someone who at one time believed and followed the word of God. Over the course of time, however, other interest began to fill their heart. They begin to justify their actions by perverting God's word. They twisted and turned scriptures in order to make them say what they wanted, and you couldn't believe how far they were willing to go to justify their actions.

Listen, people can come up with some pretty far-fetched ideas in order to justify their actions. They believe a lie because they do not love the truth. It happened to the Gentiles, it happened to Balaam, and it can happen to us if we are not careful.

Balaam began traveling to Moab. God sent an angel to stand in the path. This angel had his sword drawn prepared to kill Balaam. The donkey that Balaam rode turned to the side. The angel blocked that path as well, so the donkey threw herself into a wall crushing Balaam's foot. The whole time that this was happening Balaam was beating the donkey. Finally, when there was no other place to turn the donkey laid down.

What happened next is a good indication of just how mad a person can get in their attempt to disobey God. *"And the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?"* (Numbers 22:28) Naturally Balaam was shocked when the donkey spoke, he repented of his sin, and went home! Is that how the rest of the story reads? NO! Not only did Balaam not change his course, he began to argue with the donkey!

The man was mad with his desire for money! A speaking animal didn't faze him one single bit. Not only that, the angel also appeared to him and told Balaam that he stood in the way to slay him. None of these things changed his course.

The Bible gives a warning to those who follow Balaam's path. *"¹⁵Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; ¹⁶But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb donkey speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet."* (2 Peter 2:15, 16) Sin will cause you to get off of the right path. The more your affection grows for sinful things, the more you will lose your ability to be reasoned with by others. If you give your heart to sin you will reach a point where even a talking animal won't cause you to stop and seriously consider your actions.

In this story we can also see God's desire for repentance. *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."* (2 Peter 3:9) God will provide warning after warning in order to get His people to repent. Unfortunately, those warnings go unheeded by those who love the world.

Balaam eventually made it to his destination. Once there he tried on three separate occasions to curse the children of Israel. Each time God caused him to bless them instead. This did not please Balak. When all of his attempts failed, Balaam sought other ways to gain his prize.

The New Testament tells us what Balaam did in order to get his money. *"But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication."* (Revelation 2:14) Balaam instructed the Moabites to send their women among the Israelites to cause them to commit fornication and sacrifice unto idols. His plan succeeded and God punished Israel in order to remove those who had sinned.

God protected His people from outside forces. The only way harm could come upon them was if they were unfaithful to God. The same is true today.

"⁵And beside this giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; ⁶and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; ⁷and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. ⁸For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. ¹⁰Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." (2 Peter 1:5-10)

This protection and security is conditioned on us remaining faithful.

Balaam was eventually killed for his wickedness. *"And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; namely, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba,*

five kings of Midian: Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword.” (Numbers 31:8) As the children of Israel continued on their conquest they eventually caught up to Balaam and killed him as they fought the Midianites.

If we want to avoid following Balaam’s path we need to make sure that we do not seek to twist God’s word in order to justify our actions. We can lie to others, we can lie to ourselves, but God knows the true desires of our heart. If we are not fully committed to serving Him, we leave Satan a means to destroy us. We are free to choose, but we are not free to choose the consequences.