

Lessons From Balaam

Rick Railston

January 16, 2016

If I mention the word “Balaam,” most of us think of the talking donkey. If you read this out of the King James Version, instead of the word “donkey” they use the word “ass.” And, of course, if you read out of the King James—I’ve had it happen before, little kids, when you say the word “ass,” they put their hand over their mouth and snicker a little bit because it’s somewhat naughty in modern terms. But then, the ass talks. So, that’s the sum of what people remember about Balaam.

As we’re going to see today, there is far more to it than just that because God always has a reason for everything He does. He has a reason for everything He puts into His word and we’re going to see today what those reasons are. Some commentators say that Balaam was a righteous man, but we’ll see that he was anything but a righteous man. He had an agenda and he was against God’s plan, but he was very devious in how he went about it.

So, in the sermon today, we’re going to do two things. In the first part of the sermon, we’re going to talk about the context of the account and the account itself. Then, in the second part, we’re going to see what lessons we can take from this account because God doesn’t put anything into the Bible without a reason for us to learn something from it. The title of the sermon is

Lessons From Balaam

Now let’s talk about the context of Numbers 22. The date is approximately 1400 BC. Israel has left Egypt. They are marching north getting close to the Promised Land and they are on the east side of the Jordan River, which runs north and south. They are coming into Moab. They are coming up north on the east side of the Jordan River. Moab is directly east of the Dead Sea. So, they are just crossing into the borders of Moab.

The king of the Moabites is a man named Balak. He has heard these stories about this giant mass of people coming out of Egypt and this God that’s with them and they’re destroying everybody that’s in their path. And Balak, obviously, is very worried about that situation. With this in mind, let’s go to Numbers 22. You’ll want to put a marker here because we’ll come back to it from time to time. We’ll start with the last sentence of verse 4 where we pick up the knowledge of Balak.

Numbers 22:4b. ... And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time [at the time Israel was marching north].

5) He sent messengers therefore [because of his fear and concern] unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, ... (KJV)

Let's stop here and analyze Balaam. Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary says this about the name "Balaam." It means *lord of the people or devourer of the people*. Not a good title. Then it says he was "son of Beor." The word "Beor" is the Chaldean form meaning *destruction*. So, not only was Balaam the lord or the devourer of the people, he was "the son of destruction." In modern words—a bad dude. Then Pethor is a city of Mesopotamia. It's on the Euphrates and it is 500 miles to the east of where Israel was at that time or, in other words, 500 miles to the east of Moab. Let's go on.

5) He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, ... (KJV)

Who were his people? Who were Balaam's people? Some of the ancient texts translate that "by the river of the land of the children of Ammon." Balaam, therefore, is likely an Ammonite and, as we know, Ammonites are Israel's hated, hated enemy. They were the ones who tried to pick off the stragglers coming north in this journey. And history records that Balaam was the most powerful man in the region in the Babylonian Mysteries. So, this man, as we'll see, is a sorcerer, a magician, a high priest of Baal. Going on in the later part of verse 5, they sent to Balaam:

5b) ... to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me:

6) Come now therefore, I pray, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land [through this cursing]: for I [know] that he whom [you bless] is blessed, and he whom [you curse] is cursed. (KJV)

Now, this is 500 miles away and back then 500 miles was a huge distance, but we see here that Balaam's reputation was far reaching. He was a very famous man in the Babylonian Mystery Religion. Begin in verse 7 and notice.

7) And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed ... (KJV)

Here are not only the elders of Moab, but also the elders of Midian. What had happened is Midian and Moab united to oppose Israel as their common enemy, thinking that if they came together, they would be stronger. So, the elders of Moab and Midian departed. They're going 500 miles to the east, which could take a month or so.

7b) ... with the rewards of divination in their hand; ... (KJV)

In other words, they had money, gifts, whatever it was to reward Balaam for cursing Israel through divination.

7 continued) ... and they came unto Balaam, and [spoke] unto him the words of Balak.

8) *And he [Balaam, after hearing their request] 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.*

9) *And God came unto Balaam, and said, What men are these with [you]?*

God knew, of course, but asked Balaam, “Who are these guys?”

10) *And Balaam said unto God, Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, [has] sent unto me, saying, (KJV)*

“There is this giant mass of people. They are more than I can bear. I’m worried” (verse 11 paraphrased). God says two things in verse 12.

12) *... [You shall] not go with them; ... (KJV)*

“If they come to you and want you to go back with them, don’t.”

12b) *... [you shall] not curse the people [referring to Israel]: for they are blessed.*

13) *And Balaam rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Balak, Get [back] into your land: for the Lord [refuses] to give me leave to go with you. (KJV)*

In this sense, Balaam is saying, “God’s keeping me from going with you.” We’re going to find out that Balaam wanted to go but he blamed it on God that he couldn’t.

This reminds me of twenty years ago a woman in the church came to me about a job she was trying to get at Wal-Mart. They said, “We want you to work on the Sabbath.” She was telling me this. She told them, “I would like to work on Saturdays but my church won’t let me.” Now, that is similar to what this was with Balaam. “It’s not my fault. I really want to do this, but God won’t let me.” Verse 14:

14) *And the princes of Moab rose up, and they went unto Balak, ... (KJV)*

They went back 500 miles and said to Balak and Moab:

14b) *... and said, Balaam [refuses] to come with us. (KJV)*

So notice what Balak did in verse 15.

15) *And Balak sent yet again princes [five hundred miles back to the east but], more [princes], and more honorable than they [meaning the first group that went].*

16) *And they came to Balaam [after another long journey], and said to him, Thus [says] Balak ... Let nothing, I pray [you], hinder [you] from coming unto me: (KJV)*

He sounds a little desperate. Verse 17, notice the offer.

17) For I will promote [you] unto very great honor, and I will do whatever [you say] unto me: ... (KJV)

We would say today, “He upped the ante.” We would say today, “Name your price. I need you to come here.”

17b) ... therefore, I pray [you], curse me this people.

18) And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the [Eternal] my God, to do less or more. (KJV)

Verse 19, now notice this.

19) Now therefore, I pray you, [wait] ... here this night, that I may know what the Lord will say unto me.... (KJV)

Now Balaam didn't need to do this. Think about it. He didn't need to do this because God had already told him those two things. He said, “Don't go with them. Don't curse Israel.” Balaam didn't need to go back to God, but Balaam here is pressing. Balaam wants his own way and he's pushing God on the issue. So, this tells us to ask: Did he have another motive, an agenda? Could it be the rooms full of silver and gold and the promoting to high honor? Verse 20:

20) And God came unto Balaam at night, ... (KJV)

Notice what He said.

20b) ... If the men come to call [on you, (meaning the next morning)], rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto [you], that [you shall] do. (KJV)

So, God here is changing things as a test for Balaam. God had instructed Balaam to wait until they called on him. And if they called on him, then he could go with them, but look at what Balaam actually did, verse 21.

21) And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his [donkey], and went with the princes of Moab. (KJV)

Balaam didn't wait for them to come to him. He just got on his donkey and left. Verse 22:

22) And God's [great] anger was kindled because he went: ... (KJV)

And why is God angry? Let me read from Clarke's Commentary.

We find his going was marked with the divine displeasure because he wished for the sake of honors and rewards to fulfill as far as possible the will of the King of Moab.

Balaam wanted to do what the king of Moab wanted him to do. He wanted to try to get around what God had told him to do. Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary says that Balaam:

... entertained the secret purpose of acting in opposition to the solemn charge of God.

We're going to see later how secret that was. Now continuing on in verse 22, because Balaam went out without God's permission, because he did not wait, the middle of verse 22:

22b) ... and the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him [because Balaam disobeyed God]. Now he was riding upon his [donkey], and his two servants were with him.

23) And the [donkey] saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: ... (KJV)

Now just stop here. Think about this. An animal sees this angel, probably glowing, maybe with fire, with a gigantic sword. If any animal saw that, the animal would run away. Notice this is going to happen three times.

23b) ... [the first time] the [donkey] turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: ... (KJV)

This is understandable; the donkey did this to get away from the "thing" in front of her. While she walked over into the field, Balaam is whanging on the donkey with his stick, just beating the donkey half to death because she's standing in the field and won't go down the road. Balaam wanted to turn her back into the way. The donkey wouldn't do it.

Now, the angel withdraws from the road.

24) But the angel of the Lord stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side [a narrow space].

25) And when the [donkey] saw the angel of the Lord [at this juncture, the second time now, the donkey turned] herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall: and he [started beating on] her again. (KJV)

Then the angel withdraws a second time.

26) And the angel of the Lord went further, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. (KJV)

This space was not much wider than the donkey itself.

27) And when the [donkey] saw the angel of the Lord, ... (KJV)

This is the third time.

27b) ... she fell down under Balaam: ... (KJV)

Just dropped right to ground, scared to death.

27 continued) ... and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the [donkey] with [his] staff.

This is almost laughable in some sense, but think about your reaction if you're Balaam sitting on this donkey and this donkey turns its head around and starts talking to you.

*28) And the Lord opened the mouth of the [donkey], and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto [you], that [you have] smitten me these three times?
29) And Balaam said unto the [donkey], Because [you have] mocked me: ... (KJV)*

The Hebrew can also mean *abused me*. Oh, poor Balaam.

29b) I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now [I would kill you]. (KJV)

This is probably the first recorded instance of shooting the messenger. Balaam would have killed her.

*30) And the [donkey] said unto Balaam, Am [I not your donkey], upon which [you have] ridden ever since I was [yours] unto this day? was I ever wont to do [this] unto [you]? [Have I ever done this before to you?] 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, and his sword drawn in his hand: ... (KJV)*

And guess what? Balaam bowed down his head, and he went right down to the ground just like the donkey did.

32) And the angel of the Lord said unto him, [Why have you] smitten [your donkey] these three times? behold, I went out to withstand [you], because [your] way is perverse before me: (KJV)

Now, let's stop there. Why did He use the word "perverse." What does He mean? The Hebrew word for "perverse" is Strong's #3399. It's "yarat." One of the meanings is *to (rush) headlong*. "You rushed headlong before Me." In other words, "You didn't wait for

the men to call on you. You rushed headlong to go to Balak because your mind is not right." Verse 33:

33) And the [donkey] saw me, and turned from me these three times: ... (KJV)

Now here is the irony.

33b) ... unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain [you], and saved her alive. (KJV)

Now the angel is saying, "I value the donkey's life more than your life. I would have given the donkey a pass. And if she hadn't turned aside, you would be toast right now."

Verse 34, I'll read out of the New Living Translation.

34) But, then Balaam confessed to the angel of the [Eternal], "I have sinned. I did not recognize you standing in the road blocking my way. I will go back home if you are against my going." (NLT)

In other words, he's saying, "I'm going to stick my tail between my legs if you don't mind. And I will go home and get out of here." Go back to the King James for verse 35.

35) And the angel of the Lord said unto Balaam, Go with the men: ... (KJV)

This is a change.

35b) ... Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto [you], that [you shall] speak.... (KJV)

So, this test is over for Balaam. He failed, but God is still going to accomplish His will given the new circumstances. Going on in verse 35:

35 continued) So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

36) And when Balak heard that Balaam was come, he went out to meet him unto a city of Moab, which is on the border of Arnon, which is in the utmost coast. (KJV)

The River Arnon formed the northern boundary of Moab and the river flowed east to west into the Dead Sea. So, Israel now is getting close to the meeting of Balak and Balaam here, close to the northern border of Moab. Balak started chiding Balaam. "Why didn't you come right away? I had to send two groups of men to get you to come here." And Balak says to Balaam:

37b) ... am I not able indeed to promote [you] to honor? (KJV)

Could this be Balaam's agenda? I think so.

38) *And Balaam said unto Balak, Lo, I am come unto [you]: ... (KJV)*

“I’m here after all this back and forth.”

38b) *... have I now any power at all to say anything? The word that God [puts] in my mouth, that shall I speak. (KJV)*

Jump to verse 41.

41) *And it came to pass on the morrow, that Balak took Balaam, and brought him up into [a] high place of Baal, that [from there] he might see the utmost part of the people. (KJV)*

Let’s stop here and explain. The pagans worshipped their gods, their Baals, on a high place. It could be a mountain; it could be a hill. They believed that the Baal of that area had power in the area you could see from the high place. So, on the high place if you could see all the way to the horizon and 360 degrees, that is the area the Baal had power over. That’s why the pagans went there. Now, chapter 23 verse 1.

Numbers 23:1. *And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven oxen and seven rams.*

2) *And Balak did as Balaam had spoken; and Balak and Balaam offered on every altar a bullock and a ram.*

3) *And Balaam said unto Balak, Stand by [your] burnt offering, and I will go: peradventure the [Eternal that he might] come to ... me: and whatsoever he [shows] me I will tell [you]. ... (KJV)*

Now, after seeing the angel with the sword, there was no way Balaam was going to openly disobey God—no way Balaam was going to do that because of the power of that angel and Balaam knew what his fate would be. He had already been told that. Go on in verse 3.

3b) *... And he went to a high place. (KJV)*

Balaam is claiming to be of God but right here pagan beliefs are mixed with Balaam’s claim to worship the true God.

4) *And God met Balaam: and he said unto him [God], I have prepared seven altars, and I have offered upon every altar a bullock and a ram.*

5) *And the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth, and said, Return unto Balak, and thus [you shall] speak [to him]. (KJV)*

In verse 6, Balaam does so. He returned to Balak.

6b) ... and, lo, he [Balak] stood by his burnt sacrifice [fourteen of them], he, and all the princes of Moab. (KJV)

This is not an isolated event. All the princes of Moab, all the top people of Moab are there on that high place waiting to hear what Balaam is going to say. Verse 7:

7) And he took up his parable [repeating what God told him], and said, Balak the king of Moab [has] brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel.

8) How shall I curse, whom God [has] not cursed? Or how shall I defy, whom the [Eternal has] not defied? (KJV)

Verse 11:

11) And Balak said unto Balaam, What [have you] done? I took [you] to curse [my] enemies, and, behold, [you have] blessed them altogether. (KJV)

“What’s going on? Why am I paying you this money? Why am I promoting you?”

Verse 12:

12) [Balaam] answered and said, Must I not take heed to speak that which the Lord [has] put in my mouth? (KJV)

Now Balak tries to push the issue and says to Balaam:

13b) ... Come, I pray [you] with me unto another place, ... (KJV)

So, they built seven more altars, offered a bullock and a ram on every altar. We come to verse 15 where again Balaam again inquires of God.

15) And [Balaam] said unto Balak, Stand here by [the] burnt offering, while I meet the Lord yonder.

16) And the Lord met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, and said, Go again unto Balak, and [this is what I want you to say].

17) And when he came to him [Balak], behold, [Balak] stood by his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab with him [They were all there]. And Balak said unto him, What [has] the Lord spoken? (KJV)

“What’s the answer?” He was hoping that God would change His mind or that Balaam would curse Israel.

18) And [Balaam] took up his parable, ...

Now it gets stronger.

18b) ... Rise up, Balak, and hear; [listen] unto me, [you] son of Zippor: (KJV)

Notice this. This is about God's character.

19) God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: [has] he said, and shall he not do it? Or [has] he spoken, and shall he not make it good? (KJV)

These are all characteristics of God that we would do well to keep in our minds at all times. What God is really saying here to both of these men, Balaam and Balak, is "Didn't you hear me the first time? Didn't you hear what I said? Why do you keep pressing the issue?" Verse 20:

20) Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he [has] blessed; and I cannot reverse it [Balaam said]. (KJV)

Verse 25:

25) And Balak said unto Balaam, ... (KJV)

Balak's getting frustrated now.

25b) ... Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all.

26) But Balaam answered and said unto Balak, [Didn't I tell you], saying, All that the Lord [speaks], that I must do? (KJV)

So, in verses 27 through 30 they build seven more altars. They sacrifice fourteen more animals. And, then, Balaam goes up, asks for God's word, and comes back. And in the first nine verses of chapter 24, Balaam again blesses Israel, even more so this time. Let's pick the story up in the middle of verse 9.

Numbers 24:9b. *Blessed is he that [blesses you (Israel)], and cursed is he that [curses you].*

10) And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together: and Balak said unto Balaam, I called [you] to curse [my] enemies, and, behold, [you have] altogether blessed them these three times.

11) Therefore now flee ... to [your] place: I thought to promote [you] unto great honor; but, lo, the Lord [has] kept [you] back from [this] honor. (KJV)

Again, blame it on God.

12) And Balaam said unto Balak, [Didn't I speak to you and your] messengers which [you sent] ... me, saying,

13) If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do either good or bad of [my] own mind; but what the Lord [says], that will I speak? (KJV)

Go down to verse 25.

25) And Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place: and Balak also went his way. (KJV)

At this point, if you look at the commentaries, many of the commentaries say here that Balaam was a righteous man because he refused to curse Israel and he only spoke what God told him to speak. That is anything but the truth.

Let's notice what happens to Israel next because this is key. Let's go to chapter 25 and begin in verse 1.

Numbers 25:1. *And Israel abode in Shittim, ... (KJV)*

Shittim is just north of the Red Sea and just north of Moab. Israel has now passed through Moab, but notice what happened.

1b) ... and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. (KJV)

We're going to see, if you do the research, these are temple prostitutes of Baal from the high place and they are both men and women. There were male prostitutes as well as female prostitutes. Verse 2:

2) And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods [not the true God]: and the people did eat [meaning of the sacrifices offered to the Moabite gods], and bowed down to their gods. (KJV)

Horrible!

3) And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor: ... (KJV)

Now "Baal-peor" means *the Baal at Peor*—the Baal of that area that we talked about earlier. Let me read from Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of the Bible, a Biblical Theology. This is under the heading of "Sacral Prostitution."

The fertility cult was a central part of the Canaanite religion. It is thought that sacral prostitution was a form of sympathetic magic.

Listen to this.

As people performed sex acts with temple harlots, this stimulated sexual activity among the gods, which ensured the fertility of the soil.

That's what they believed. It sounds strange to us, but that's what they believed. The Holman Bible Dictionary says this:

Fertility cults attribute the fertility of the cropland and of the herds to the sexual relations of the divine couple.

That means Nimrod and his mother and many other variations down through the millennia in many other parts of the world.

Sacred sexual intercourses by cult prostitutes was an act of worship intended to preserve the earth's fertility.

And Israel participated in that. We'll see in a minute how many. Yet after what God did for them, you just shake your head. How could they do that? Going on in verse 3 of Numbers 25.

3b) ... and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.

4) And the Lord said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people [meaning those who committed whoredom], and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel.

5) And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay every [each] one his men that were joined unto Baal-peor. (KJV)

Now how did this worship of Baal happen? All of a sudden, Israel was going north. We know about the incident with Balak and Balaam, but how did this happen. What caused it? We get a hint in verse 6.

6) And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. (KJV)

This plague is going on and Israel is crying to God at the door of the tabernacle and this Israelite takes a Midianitish woman into his tent. And they're all watching it. Remember that Moab and Midian were united together to oppose Israel. Continue in verse 7.

7) And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand;

8) And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly.... (KJV)

It doesn't take much of a deduction to realize that if the sword entered her belly she was on her back. It's not a stretch to understand that the man was on top of her and the shaft went through both of them. And in doing so, continue in the latter part of verse 8:

8b) ... So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel.

9) And those that died in the plague were twenty-four thousand. (KJV)

Because they joined themselves to Baal at Peor—after all that God did for them. Now go on to verse 14. Here is the interesting thing.

14) Now the name of the Israelite that was slain, even that was slain with the Midianitish woman, was Zimri, the son of Salu, [Notice this:] a prince of a chief house among the Simeonites. (KJV)

So he was a prince of Simeon, one of the twelve tribes. Now notice this.

15) And the name of the Midianitish woman that was slain was Cozbi, the daughter of Zur; he was head over a people, and of a chief house in Midian. (KJV)

Therefore, she was a princess. So we see here that a prince of Israel is coming together with a princess of the Midianites. The logical question is: Could this have been some kind of marriage alliance between a clan of Midian and a clan of Israel? Was it an attempt to cement a relationship between these two peoples (obviously inspired by Satan)?

How did this alliance happen? How did we go from God telling Balaam to bless Israel to the fact that now we have 24,000 dead because they're worshipping Baal? The answer is in Numbers 31. Let's go there and we'll read just verse 16.

Numbers 31:16. *Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord. (KJV)*

So, we see here that Balaam counseled Balak and the Midianites to do something. Balaam's secret counsel with Balak provoked Israel to sin, provoked the intercourse with the temple prostitutes to worship the way the heathen worshipped their gods. We don't have time, but there are many biblical examples where God says, "Do not worship the way the Canaanites do. Don't worship Me the way they worship their gods. You worship Me the way I tell you to worship Me."

So we see here that Balaam secretly went against God's intent. God says, "Don't curse Israel," but what Balaam did secretly by counseling Balak is to bring evil upon Israel. Obviously, Satan is right in the middle of that. So, we see here as we wrap up the first part that there is more to this story than just a talking donkey—far more to this story than that.

Now this is not the end, because in the New Testament, guess what? Balaam is mentioned three times. And from those three times, we can learn some lessons because the New Testament writers had a reason for bringing this example into the New Testament and there are, obviously, lessons for us to learn.

This leads us to the second part of the sermon: What are the lessons for us today? We're going to talk about four.

Lesson 1: We cannot put ourselves first insisting on our own way, putting ourselves in front of God.

This is the most obvious. We can't put ourselves first. We can't insist on our own way. We can't put ourselves in front of God, but that's exactly what Balaam did every step of the way. The only reason he obeyed God was that angel with the sword.

Now, it's important here—and I know we all know this but just as a reminder—it's important to know the difference between the letter of the law and the intent of the law, which is the spirit of the law. Balaam kept the letter of the law but not the intent. The letter of the law was: speak only what God instructed. That's what Balaam did. He did exactly that. He kept the letter of the law, but the intent of the law was: don't do any harm to Israel. He did not keep that. He secretly taught Israel to sin. He didn't keep the intent at all.

We all know, too, that in the Old Testament, under the Old Covenant, Israel was required to obey, but it was an outward obedience. It wasn't from the heart. God said, "Oh if they had such a heart, they would obey Me." They didn't have the heart. They were obeying the letter of the law because they did not have God's holy spirit. Yet, today in the New Testament because we have God's holy spirit, we are required not only to obey the letter of the law, we're required to obey the intent and the spirit of the law because God's holy spirit makes it all possible. Through that, having God's spirit, we should love God more than we love ourselves. Balaam didn't do that and that is an enormous lesson for us.

Now, let's look at the first place Balaam is mentioned in the New Testament. Let's go to 2 Peter 2 and we'll begin in verse 9. This is the first place Balaam is mentioned and we're setting the context here.

2 Peter 2:9. *The Lord [knows] how to deliver the godly out of temptations, ... (KJV)*

We understand that, but the counterpoint to that is:

9b) ... and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: (KJV)

Who are these unjust? Verse 10:

10) But chiefly them that walk after the flesh ... (KJV)

What did Balaam do? He walked after the flesh.

10b) ... in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, ... (KJV)

Notice this characteristic.

10 continued) ... self-willed, ... (KJV)

They want to do what they want to do. They want to do what is best for them.

10 continued) ... they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. (KJV)

Verse 15:

15) Which [meaning these self-willed] have forsaken the right way [God's way], and are gone astray, [How?] following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; (KJV)

It's all about putting the self first. What's in it for me? So, the way of Balaam, as we see here in verse 15, is putting our desires, one's desires ahead of what God's desires are. Balaam was looking out for Balaam. He wanted money. He wanted accolades. He wanted promotion and all of that.

Let's go to 1 Timothy 6 and see that Paul addresses this too, this very same problem that we can't allow ourselves to fall into. 1 Timothy 6, we'll begin in verse 5. Paul is instructing Timothy. He says:

1 Timothy 6:5. *Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, ... (KJV)*

How are they destitute of the truth?

5b) ... supposing that gain is godliness: ... (KJV)

And Paul says, "Stay away from those people. Withdraw yourself from those people."

Verse 10, now in the New King James version:

10) For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (NKJV)

Now today, some Protestant faiths promise wealth by following Christ. You can see that on Sunday morning. "If you give your heart to the Lord, if you give money to us, God will bless you beyond your wildest expectations. He will give you houses. He will give you cars. He will give you vacations. He will give you furniture. He will give you all of this stuff." It is a gospel of physical prosperity preached by some today.

And, sad to say, some in the greater Church of God have drifted away from God and gone back to the physical, focused on the physical. And we all know physical gain is not our goal. It can't be our goal. We, as God's chosen, have to keep the intent of the law, the spirit of the law by first of all putting God first in our lives and not ourselves first in our lives. We learn from experience. If we've been in the church any time at all, that if we put God first, everything works out. God will take care of us if we put him first.

So, we see here in this first point the lesson we can learn is that we cannot put ourselves first. We must put God first.

Lesson 2: You cannot be part of the world while being in the body of Christ.

Yes, we live in the world, but we can't be part of the world. We can't be part of the world while we're in the body of Christ.

Now Balaam's focus was on the world and not God. He gave the appearance of serving God, but he did what he wanted to do. He wanted the rewards. He wanted the gold. He wanted the silver. He wanted the promotions.

Now this same attitude is prophesied for the end days, our days. Let's go to 2 Timothy 3:1. You all know where we're going. Paul prophesied that, in the end days, certain things were going to happen.

2 Timothy 3:1. *This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. 2) For men shall be lovers of their own selves, ... (KJV)*

Just as we read before, self-willed. Verse 5, here is the key.

5) Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: [and once again, we're told] from such turn away. (KJV)

Balaam had a form of godliness. "Hey, I can't do anything but what God tells me to do." Yet, behind the scenes, Balaam counseled Balak to teach Israel to sin—just the opposite!

Today, there are people who give the appearance of righteousness, come to Sabbath services, put on their church faces, but they follow the example of Balaam by putting themselves first and by allowing themselves to be in the world.

Now let's look at a second place where Balaam is mentioned in the New Testament. Let's go to Revelation 2. We're going to look at the letter to the church at Pergamos, Revelation 2:12. Notice this. We understand there are church eras. We understand that the message applies to that church era but it applies to all of God's people down through the millennia.

Revelation 2:12. *And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things [says] he which [has] ... (KJV)*

Notice this!

12b) ... [a] sharp sword with two edges; (KJV)

That's like the angel that appeared to Balaam. Verse 13:

13) I know thy works, and where [you dwell], even where Satan's seat is: ... (KJV)

We won't get into the application in that day. What is the application to our day? Today, this is Satan's world. We're told that. He deceives the entire world. And his seat is wherever humans allow it to be. Satan's seat is wherever we allow it to be.

In the church today, Satan can dwell in our minds. He can have a seat inside our minds. His seat can be in our hearts, in our innermost being if we let him. We need to understand when we let the world in guess what? Who is the prince of the power of the air? Who is the prince of this world? When we let the world into our minds, into our hearts, we're letting Satan in also. We have to remember that, just like Balaam. Notice verse 14.

14) But I have a few things against thee, because [you have] there them that hold the doctrine ... (KJV)

The Greek means *instruction*.

14b) ... the [instruction] of Balaam, ... (KJV)

And what did Balaam do?

14 continued) ... who taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. (KJV)

Balaam taught Israel to sin by worshipping Baal, and when Israel worshipped Baal, they were putting Baal before the true God. So, the doctrine of Balaam, is: You can sin. You can put somebody before God and still be acceptable to God. Somehow, you can have it both ways. The world and God, you can somehow manage that.

What Balak was saying to Israel was, "Hey, come worship god in our high place and then you can go back to your camp and worship your God. Everything's cool. Worship both gods." And Israel bought it. Twenty-four thousand in Israel bought it.

So, you can be part of the world and part of the body of Christ and be deceived in doing so because that doesn't fly; it doesn't work. How did this work for Balaam? Remember

that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Let's go to Joshua 13 and we'll read verse 22. You can also use as a reference Numbers 31:8. They say almost the same thing, but let's turn to Joshua 13:22 to see what happened to Balaam. Let's see if this worked for him, "You can do both." Will God be happy with that? Will He allow that?

Joshua 13:22. *Balaam also the son of Beor, the soothsayer, did the children of Israel slay with the sword among them that were slain by them. (KJV)*

He was hacked to death—not a pleasant end for this guy who tried to get around God.

Unfortunately, baptized brethren think they can live two separate lives—their church life and then another life pursuing their own lusts. I talked to a Church of God elder not that many years ago, about the time of the breakup, and he was not employed by the church. He was a local elder and he said, "I have two sets of rules in my life. I have God's set of rules and the rules in the church. Then, I have my own set of rules for my business." I was just floored. I was speechless. Oh, you can do both of these? You can make these work somehow? How does that happen? The fact is that kind of double life will not last. It cannot stand. Let's go to Matthew 6:24. You probably know where we're going—the Sermon on the Mount. Christ is saying that you can't juggle these two lives. You have to commit. You have to go one way or the other. Matthew 6:24, I'm going to read it out of the NLT. It's somewhat clearer. Christ makes this very plain.

Matthew 6:24. *"No one can serve two masters.... (NLT)*

You can't do it. It won't happen.

24b) ... For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. (NLT)

That's what Balaam was trying to do. He was trying to juggle God and juggle money in hopes of coming out with the money and somehow keeping God happy or satisfied or whatever was going through Balaam's mind. Yet, Numbers 32:23 says, "Be sure your sin will find you out" (KJV), and that's exactly what happened.

Now, let's see what James has to say about this, James 1:8. He has a unique term for trying to be in the world and be in the body of Jesus Christ.

James 1:8. *A double-minded man is [What?] unstable in all his ways. (KJV)*

You can't have your mind split down the middle. It doesn't work. You will go crazy. I've known several who have attempted—some for five or ten years—to live a double life. They had a secret life out in the world and then they had their church life. Every time that happened, that I know of, it ended badly, very, very badly. I know some today who have given themselves over to Satan. After being in the church for decades, they've gone back into the world, which is Satan's world. They finally, yes, made a decision.

“Not God, I’m going to go this way,” which was Balaam’s agenda all along. How sad it is to see people, who served God for decades, lose their salvation at the very last days—sad, sad, sad.

Now, there is an antidote for this double-mindedness. We were in James 1; let’s go to James 4 and let’s read verse 8. Here is the antidote, James 4:8.

James 4:8. *Draw [near] to God, ... (KJV)*

This is the first thing, “Draw near to God.” And, if you do that:

8b) ... will draw nigh to you.... (KJV)

The second thing is:

8 continued) ... Cleanse your hands, [you] sinners; and purify ... (KJV)

The Greek for “purify” means *to make clean*.

8 continued) ... your hearts, [you] double minded. (KJV)

The word “purify” can mean also *to be single*. We talk about the simplicity of Christ; it’s single. It’s focused. It’s only one. Pure gold is pure gold; it doesn’t have other things in it. What we’re being told here is if you draw near to God and you cleanse your mind and your heart from all of this garbage that Satan throws out, you will have a pure heart before God and Jesus Christ.

So, this second lesson for us is we need to be single-minded as Christ is single-minded, and we can’t have one foot in the world. We can’t do that.

Lesson 3: We can’t deceive God.

This is also obvious. I don’t care how hard we try. We can’t deceive God.

Now, on the surface, Balaam appeared to honor God. “I can only speak what You want me to speak.” Balaam wouldn’t lie because he was afraid of the penalty, of course. And three times, Balaam said he would obey God even if Balak offered his household of silver and gold. Balaam said, “I’m going to obey God. I’m going to speak only what He tells me.” That’s what Balaam said on the surface.

Yet, notice Balaam’s heart. Balaam tried to work around God and God’s instruction to get what he wanted all along. Balaam’s agenda (Remember?) was when Balak said, “I’ll promote you to a very great honor. I will do whatever you tell me to do. I will do it”—that was Balaam’s agenda. It was a very tempting offer. On the surface Balaam appeared to obey God, but behind the scenes, he went to Balak to hatch a plan to do what he wanted to do and retain the money and the promotions. Balaam wanted to

bring curses on Israel for a reward. So, Balaam instructed Balak to entice Israel to sin by worshipping Baal and we know that story.

We have to stop here and ask: Did Balaam think God wouldn't notice this? Did Balaam think somehow he could pull the wool over God's eyes? Maybe, with a pagan mind, Balaam thought somehow if he got out of a certain area like the area of the Baal at Peor, that God wouldn't have influence. Maybe Balaam thought that. Someday we'll find out if he thought the God of Israel was only powerful in a certain area. We don't know, but we'll find that out.

For us today, I think we know better. Don't we? Can we deceive God and He won't notice? God knows our hearts. He knows our very thoughts. He knows our innermost being. So, can we somehow trick God by giving the appearance of obeying Him like Balaam, but on the side do things that are abhorrent to God? That's why the angel blocked Balaam's path. God knew his evil agenda.

Notice what Clarke's Commentary says about Balaam. This is really important, very instructive. Clarke says

How many are restrained from sinning merely through the fear of God?

They want to sin. They want the pleasure, but they don't do it because they're afraid of God just like the angel with the sword. Clarke continues:

They would gladly do the evil, but it is forbidden on awful penalties. They wish the thing were not prohibited for they have a strong desire to do it.

They find a way to try to deceive God because they really want to do whatever it is they want to do. And the only thing holding them back is an angel with a sword—the fear of what's going to happen. I'm speaking metaphorically here of being hacked to death by the angel with the sword.

Now, Jude saw the same behavior in his time and we see it today. Let's go now to the third place where Balaam is mentioned in the New Testament. Jude is right before the book of Revelation and we'll start in verse 4. Jude noticed that there were men creeping into the church and he is not happy with that.

Jude 4. *For there are certain men crept in unawares, ... (KJV)*

Not known—it's not apparent looking at them.

4b) ... who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness... (KJV)

The New King James says “lewdness.” That is exactly what Israel did and people crept in unawares. Notice this.

4 continued) ... denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. (KJV)

When you worship Baal on a high place, as Israel did, or when we worship the world, our lusts, or whatever, we deny Jesus Christ. We deny God. Verse 11:

11) Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, ... (KJV)

This is just what Balaam did.

Now the Greek word for “error” is Strong’s #4106. It’s the Greek word, spelled in English “plane” (plan'-ay). Strong’s says, *objectively it means fraudulence*—to go after the fraudulence of Balaam. It could also mean *deception or delusion*.

Balaam was a fraud. He pretended to obey God. He pretended to honor God, but behind the scenes, he did exactly the opposite. So, we see here “the error of Balaam” is he deceived himself into thinking he could deceive God. Satan, obviously, had a hand in that and Satan can do that to us. He can deceive us into thinking somehow we can hide these thoughts or hide these deeds from God Almighty without getting caught. Yet, we can’t do that. That’s not going to happen. So, an error that we must at all costs avoid is the deception of Balaam—thinking we can deceive God and not pay the penalty.

Lesson 4: God is concerned with what we do more so than what we say we will do.

God is more concerned about what we actually wind up doing than what we say we will do.

Balaam said (as we’ve covered before), “If Balak gave me his house full of money, I’m going to obey God. I can only speak what God tells me to speak. I can’t curse Israel.” That’s what Balaam said he would do, but what did he actually do? He went after the money. He went after the aggrandizement. He went after the “I will promote you to a very great honor.” That’s what Balaam went after. He secretly taught Israel to sin. He secretly brought a curse on Israel, going against what God told him, going against God’s intention.

Notice what Christ said about the religious leaders of His day because Balaam was a religious leader in that huge area because his reputation traveled at least 500 miles. Let’s go to Matthew 23. We know that in this chapter Christ is laying into the scribes and the Pharisees, but let’s read this from the perspective of God and this issue with Balaam. God is more interested in what we do rather than what we say we’re going to do. Matthew 23 verse 1:

Matthew 23:1. Then [spoke] Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,
2) Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:
3) All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not
... after their works: for they say, and do not. (KJV)

We don't want to be like that. We've seen that in the history of God's church, in the greater Church of God. We saw it in the Worldwide days. People were saying one thing and doing another. In the top echelon of ministers and evangelists were saying one thing and in their private lives doing something else.

And, we see that today. You would think we would learn the lesson, but we still see that today. We have those who call the brethren to sacrifice. We have that in writing. They call the brethren to sacrifice, telling them to cash in their 401(k)s, cash in their retirement. Calling the brethren to take a second mortgage out on their house and send all the money in to do "the work." "Time is short. Christ is going to return. We need the money to do the work." Yet, at the same time, those calling for money establish headquarters with grandiose buildings having marble floors, chandeliers, high priced furnishing and fixtures. And, the man at the top lives like a king at the same time he's calling for people to sacrifice. "Do what they say, but don't do what they do. Watch what they do."

I remember in Worldwide days, I sent in two down payments to two different houses. Finally, at the third call for money, I went to a man I highly respect, who was the regional pastor. I said, "Look, here's what I've done—twice. I have this money in the bank. I just got a letter last week wanting more money. What do I do?"

He put his arm around me and said, "Look, when you see the folks at headquarters selling their palatial homes, when you see them driving an economy car, when you see them shopping at Salvation Army for their suits, when you see that happening, then send your money in. But, if you don't see that, my strong advice is 'Don't send it in.'"

And, I didn't. So, it seemed very wise to me. Watch what people do. Do they really do what they say they're going to do? Or what the Bible says they should do? In James 1:22, what did James say?

James 1:22. But be (you) doers of the word, and not hearers only, ... (KJV)

But notice what else he said.

22b) ... deceiving [yourselves.] (KJV)

We deceive ourselves if we think that it's only about what we say we're going to do because God knows our hearts. Unlike what Balaam thought, God knows exactly what we're going to do. He knows our minds. He knows our thoughts. He knows our hearts.

He says, "You'll deceive yourselves." Be doers of the word. All of us must live God's way, not just talk about it. We have to live it.

Now in conclusion, we have seen that there is more to the account of Balaam than a donkey, more to it than a talking donkey. We have seen some lessons from this very carnal soothsayer. A soothsayer is a man who promises to foretell the future but does not have the inspiration of God. (You can check the Hebrew and the Greek on that.)

We saw that:

1. We have to put God first. Not ourselves first.
2. We can't live a double life, being part of the world while being in the body of Christ. We have to be pure, whole-hearted, committed to God in a pure way.
3. We cannot deceive God. We can't. We deceive ourselves. We play games if we think that's the case.
4. We have to be doers of the word, not just hearers or talkers or saying what we're going to do. God looks at what we actually do.

Now, let's close with another important lesson. This is the encouraging thing. God turned Balaam's instruction to Israel (his hypocrisy, his deceitfulness) into a blessing for Israel. Not for the twenty-four thousand that died because they revealed their true character, but it came out to be a blessing in the end. Let's go to Deuteronomy 23 and look at verse 3. We'll start there; it talks about the Ammonite and the Moabite. Notice this.

Deuteronomy 23:3. An Ammonite ...

Balaam was likely an Ammonite.

3b) ...or Moabite

Balak was a Moabite. So, we could substitute Balaam and Balak for Ammon and Moab.

3) An Ammonite or [a] Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord forever: (KJV)

That's a strong statement.

4) Because they [meaning Ammon and Moab] met you not with bread and with water in the way, ... (KJV)

Balak could have met Israel with bread and water. He didn't do that.

4b) ... when [you] came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against [you] Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse [you].

5) Nevertheless the Lord [your] God would not [listen] unto Balaam; ... (KJV)

And here's the beauty of it.

5b) ... the Lord [your] God turned the curse into a blessing unto [you], ... (KJV)

Why?

5 continued) ... because the Lord [your] God loves [you].

Because God loves us, and this is in the Old Testament. How much more does He love His children now? God loves them just as much, of course, but we're under the New Covenant.

And, the fact is that after the plague of the twenty-four thousand that died, guess what happened? God took Israel into the Promised Land. He took them into the Promised Land and once they were in the Promised Land, guess what? Ruth was a Moabitess and she married Boaz, an Israelite. Their child was the great great-grandfather of David and an ancestor of Christ later on down the road. What a blessing! Not only to be in the Promised Land, but a Moabitess became part of that lineage. And God loves us—not because of the color of our skin or because of the area of the world we grew up in or what religion we were taught before He called us—God is concerned about us ultimately as His children. So, God turned Balaam's evil into a blessing for Israel.

And, for us today? It's exactly the same thing. Let's close with Romans 8:28. We learn this lesson from what God did to Ancient Israel despite Balaam's attempt, which was a weak attempt compared to the power of God.

Romans 8:28. *And we know ... (KJV)*

We don't "suspect." We don't "think."

28) ... we know that all things work together for good to [those] that love God, (KJV)

God will turn whatever our trials are into good. On the prayer update last night, I think I counted close to ten people on that update. There is a lot of sickness. God will turn every one of those to good ultimately. Whatever trials we go through, God will turn it to good for us in this life and in the life to come because of the lessons we learn, how we grow spiritually and, then, our ultimate reward if (the big IF). Go back to Matthew 24:13, Christ said, "He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved," but we have the confidence in this life that everything we do, just as Ancient Israel experienced Balaam, Balak, all of the deception, etc., it all comes out to good for those that love God.

So, let's learn the lessons from the life of Balaam. Let's remain faithful, following God and Christ. And let's please them from the heart because we want to, not because we have to.