



## [Numbers 23:10](#)

(10) "Who can count the dust of Jacob,  
Or number one-fourth of Israel?  
Let me die the death of the righteous,  
And let my end be like his!"  
*New King James Version*

[Numbers 23:10](#) is one of Balaam's prophecies. He is looking out at all of Israel from a height, seeing their vast number, and he has just said that they have been blessed by God.

He then says, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his!" What about his life between this particular time and his own death? He did not want to live as the righteous but to *die* as righteous. Put another way, Balaam did not want to live righteously; he only wanted to be considered a righteous man when he died. He wanted "heaven" without behaving heavenly while he was alive. He was perfectly fine with continuing his trade as a sorcerer and even cursing God's people—he was concerned about was that, at the very end, he could make a death-bed [repentance](#) and squeak in between the bars of heaven's gate, so to speak.

Frankly, the religion of Balaam—his [doctrine](#) or teaching, his way of life—was the dominant religion of the time, just as Protestantism is dominant today. People then had the same human nature as people do now, and they wanted the best of both worlds. They were willing to do whatever they wanted—even to [sin](#) grievously—believing that in the end they would still be saved, because in their eyes what they were doing was not *all* that bad. They believed [God](#) would disregard their behavior. Remember, Balaam later advises the Midianites, "Get the Israelites involved in [idolatry](#) and sex with the women of Moab." A truly righteous individual would never even think of causing others to sin. Would God ignore such a thing?

This is the impression one gets from Balaam. He knew what was right, but would not

The Berean: Daily Verse and Commentary for Numbers 23:10 (<http://www.theberean.org>) take the responsibility to do it. Yet, he wanted all the rewards and blessings that would come from it.

Another idea that surfaces here is that he thought he could manipulate God. He thought he could bribe Him by giving Him sacrifices, cajoling Him, making a deal with Him—intending to curse even His own people. Obviously, it did not work. He did not understand God in the least.

Balaam did not understand what is written in [Deuteronomy 10:12-14](#), which [Moses](#) wrote at about this same time. In the New King James, this section is titled "The Essence of the Law."

And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God [Balaam certainly did not fear God—he was willing to negotiate with Him], to walk in all His ways [he did not want to obey Him] and to [love](#) Him [certainly his actions did not show that he loved God at all], to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul [Balaam was in it for himself—his heart and soul were not with God], and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good? Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the LORD your God, also the earth with all that is in it.

Here puny Balaam was trying to match wits with the God of all the universe—and he thought he could win! Notice the next verses:

The LORD delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day. Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer. For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no [partiality](#) nor takes a bribe. ([Deuteronomy 10:15-17](#))

Balaam did not understand this very simple point: In the covenant relationship we have with God, we are the junior partners. Our job is to submit, to obey, to fear and respect Him, and if we do that, everything will work out fine. However, when we step outside that role and try to take God's prerogatives from Him and do things that only He can do, then we start getting into deep trouble. This is where Balaam was—in very dangerous territory. He was trying to negotiate with God as if he were His equal.

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He was attempting to impose his will on God, and make God change for him! Is that not basically selfish? Is it not self-interest above what's in God's interest? In a way, it is like saying to God, "You're wrong, and I'm right, so You should do it my way!"—as if we can see things from our vantage point better than God can.

If we try to change [God's will](#) on some matter that He has clearly shown us, we are saying, "I am God, not You." We want our will to be followed and not His. There are several verses in the Bible that say, "Who are we before God?" We are the clay—He is the Potter! Balaam had it all backwards.

— Richard T. Ritenbaugh

**To learn more, see:**

[Balaam and the End-Time Church \(Part 1\)](#)



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