



"A golden coffin will be a poor compensation for a damned soul."
—Charles H. Spurgeon

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A Warning from Jude (Part Two)

Last time, we saw that Jude wrote his epistle to urge his readers to "contend earnestly for the [faith](#) which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed . . . who turn the grace of our [God](#) into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord [Jesus Christ](#)" ([Jude 3-4](#)). In particular, [Jude 11](#) uses three [Old Testament](#) characters as examples of what to watch out for. The first character was Cain, whom we considered in Part One.

The second character is Balaam. Jude says that the men he is warning about "have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit." The Greek word translated as *ran greedily* means "to pour out," with the sense that these people rush uninhibitedly toward the object of their desire. There is no restraint—their self-indulgence is obvious in their actions. A similar description of Balaam is found in [II Peter 2:15](#). As in [Jude 11](#), Balaam is noted for his motivation for material gain: "They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness."

The story of Balaam takes up three chapters in the book of Numbers, but we can see the crux of the matter in [Numbers 22:18-21](#):

Then Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more. Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the LORD will say to me." And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men come to call you, rise and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you—that you shall do." So Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab.

As in the example of Cain, here we see the antagonist happily overlooking God's Word and intent for the sake of what suited him better. God says, "*If* the men come to call you," and Balaam says, "Let's go!" In his sermon "Balaam and the End-Time Church (Part One)," Richard Ritenbaugh notes Balaam's approach to what God says and how it is repeated today:

In our modern way, we have turned it around: "Well, the Bible doesn't say that you can't do this." Others put it as, "There is no 'Thus saith the Lord' about this"—though there may be dozens of verses that say that one should not do it because of this, that, or something else. Or, there may be a whole story about someone who does something, illustrating a principle of a way we should not go. Nevertheless, because Scripture does not specifically say, "You shall not do this," then many people think it is okay to do it.

This is how it was with Balaam: He took God's conditional permission as absolute permission. He was not concerned about what God truly wanted. Blinded by greed, he was willing to use whatever mental gymnastics necessary and take any leeway offered to arrive at the answer *he* wanted. He turned the grace of God into a license for evil.

The King James Version uses the phrase "for reward" rather than "for profit" in [Jude 11](#). Silver and gold were the reward that Balaam was after; he was driven by materialism. But there are other types of reward as well. In [Matthew 6:1-2](#), Jesus warns about doing charitable deeds in order to be seen by men, saying that those who do this already have their reward, a positive reputation with other men. A reward can vary from person to person,

depending on what one values and is motivated by. While Balaam was motivated by silver and gold, the men Jude warns of may have been motivated by influence or prestige rather than just money. Nevertheless, the transgression is the same: compromising with what God says for the sake of personal gain.

In the letter to Pergamos, Christ calls Balaam's error "the doctrine of Balaam": "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine [or *teaching*] of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit [sexual immorality](#)" ([Revelation 2:14](#)).

Jesus links the teaching of Balaam with putting a stumblingblock before Israel and to encouraging people to become involved with idolatry and sexual immorality. Balaam counseled Balak to encourage the Israelites to turn away from God, even as he was claiming he was devoted to God and that he could only speak what God gave him to say. While he undoubtedly had a certain respect for God—respect of His power—at the core he was a mercenary, willing to say or do whatever was necessary to get the earthly reward he wanted. He spoke what God gave him to speak but still worked the circumstance so he could also receive Balak's payment.

While the "way of Cain" can be summarized as *worship on one's own terms*, the "error of Balaam" can be encapsulated as *compromising with the Word of God for personal gain*, in whatever form that might take.

Next time we will look at Korah, the final character in [Jude 11](#), and see a commonality between these spiritually dangerous men.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Beware of False Prophets](#)

by Martin G. Collins

False prophets promote the broad way, giving people what they want to hear. Prophets who falsely speak in God's name, prophesying lies, are particularly odious to God Almighty, causing people to go into captivity. The false prophets lead people away from God's way of life, causing them to forget His name, replacing God's truth with human tradition. Penalties were severe in Deuteronomy 13:1-5, proscribing the death penalty for falsehood. Christ warned against false prophets in the Sermon on the Mount and the Olivet prophecy, both from outside and inside the church, promising liberty by preaching against the Law of God. Even though the false prophets and teachers are subtle, they are easy to identify if one examines the fruit. The law of biogenesis demonstrates that good fruit cannot come from a bad tree. Even though they may be persuasive and gentle, promising liberty, they deliver depression and discouragement, and like wolves, desire to tear the flock to shreds.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Prophecies of Balaam \(Part One\)](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Many have wondered why God would allow the oracles of a pagan Mesopotamian soothsayer to be included in His Word. Richard Ritenbaugh shows that, notwithstanding the source, Balaam's prophecies are significant to understanding God's purpose.

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