

Balaam And The End-Time Church (Part 1)

Numbers 22

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Certain biblical names strike us negatively.

We have names like Satan; now that's a bad one! Probably "numero uno" as far as negative connotations go.

We have other names like Herod; Caiaphas; Annas; Pilate; Judas; Cain; Lamech; Nimrod; Belshazzar; "The Beast"—now that's one that we all look out for. The "False Prophet;" Simon Magus; Babylon; Haman; Achan; Sisera; Goliath; Korah; Jannes, and Jambres—they were the two Egyptian magicians who tried to face down Moses and Aaron; we have Delilah; Jezebel; Athaliah—some of the worst women in the bible; and there are many others that I could probably name that would bring back some sort of negative connotation.

Some of these people were truly evil people, or evil beings. Others may have just been solid citizens of their county, or nation, but their country or nation just happened to be enemies of Israel. Sisera is one of those people. He was the commander of the armies of the Canaanites. Jabin was his king, and Jael had the best of him.

Now, one name that you may have noticed that I didn't mention among all of those is Balaam. Most of us would certainly include Balaam on a list of evil characters in the bible. That would certainly be a correct characterization. Balaam was an evil man.

However, it is not enough just to consider him to be evil, and then to pass on. Because, Balaam, once you read about him in the commentaries—what they say about him, and what they've dug up about him—turns out to be quite an intriguing character.

And one of the reasons why he is so intriguing is God's involvement with him. Here was an evil character, and God spoke to him personally! He met him on the road, like the apostle Paul was met on the road. God inspired Balaam by His Spirit, and He entrusted Balaam with prophecies about His children, Israel, some of the surrounding nations, and (by the time we get to chapter 24 of Numbers near the end of his oracles) he is prophesying about the Messiah.

Here's an evil, despicable Gentile, and God uses him! What is going on here? What is so important about this particular character?

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Then, you remember some of the things on the other side—that this man, that so-called "prophet" who led Israel into a very bad sin, and by the time everything is over, 24,000 Israelites were dead.

You probably wouldn't want Balaam as your neighbor.

So, today what I want to do is begin a character study of Balaam. But more than a character study of Balaam, I would like to bring out some lessons, or maybe better—warnings—that we can apply right now to life at this time. There are some astounding parallels between our time, and the time of this story. So, let's set that stage right now.

This sermon will be more like a bible study as we march through Numbers 22, verse by verse, bringing out some of the important things.

Numbers 22:1 Then the children of Israel moved, and camped in the plains of Moab on the side of the Jordan across *from* Jericho.

This is the setting for our story. The 40 years of wilderness wanderings were about finished. They had spent all this time coming out of Egypt wandering from camp to camp, sometimes staying quite long in one place, and maybe just a night in another; going around, and sometimes coming back to stay at a place where they had been, and then moving forward again. But, they were always marching inexorably toward the Promised Land—Canaan.

At this time in verse one, they camped across from Jericho. They were just steps away from going into the Promised Land. They were ready to cross the Jordan, and begin the conquest.

If you go through chapter 21, you find that they just defeated the Amorites under King Sihon, and they had smashed them—crushed them! Sihon and the Amorites were the big power on the East Bank of the Jordan. It was like swatting a fly.

And then they went next to Bashan and defeated King Og. I think that they were also Amorites, just a different part. They decimated them. So the whole East Bank of the Jordan River became Israelite territory.

And here also on the East Bank, down lower on the East Side of the Dead Sea, where

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the Jordan enters it, was the country of Moab. And the Israelites had come right against their northern border, opposite Jericho.

We have to remember that Israel was nothing like you see on the movie the Ten Commandments (or some other bible movie), where they have 15 people, and maybe 4 or 5 sheep, and they are supposed to represent the entire children of Israel.

We're talking maybe 2, 2.5, or 3 million people, plus all the livestock, and all the gear that they had brought with them. This was a train of people that stretched for miles! It took them a day or two to pass any one point from first person to last person! This was a huge, moving nation! And Moab, which was maybe about the same size as the children of Israel, maybe a little less, were watching all these people coming to their territory, and they had heard what they had done to Sihon, and Og, and all their people.

They were frightened!

Now we should remember that as they were going through their wilderness wanderings, coming up into this territory, God had told them not to mess with the Moabites and the Edomites because they were relatives—they were kinfolk to Israel. And God had said not to worry about them.

Evidently, the Moabites and the Edomites were not aware of this because they figured that these 3 million people were a threat to them.

I should also mention that while they were camped across from Jericho, Moses wrote the book of Deuteronomy, all 32 chapters (less the parts about his decease—he didn't write that posthumously). He would also go up Mt. Nebo and view the land and see what they were to inherit, and then he would die, and God would bury his body in a valley somewhere across from Mt. Nebo.

A lot was going to happen in these final months while camped next to Moab. Much had to be done before they went in. This is the time setting.

Numbers 22:2 Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.

He was keeping up with news of the day. He knew what was going on.

Numbers 22:3-4 And Moab was exceedingly afraid of the people because

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they *were* many [possibly 3 million], and Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel. So Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this company will lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field." And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time.

Now there are a few things here that are kind of funny. I'd say in this whole situation that verse 2 is so ironic! (Actually this whole passage is.)

The name "Balak" means "Devastator." He has a very evil name. But, his father's name, "Zippor" means "Sparrow." Sparrows are among the flightiest of birds. You can't get close to a sparrow. They fly at the slightest movement.

Here is this mighty Balak, the Devastator whose father was Sparrow, and the next verse says that they were exceedingly afraid! The Devastator was afraid! How ironic! They were so afraid that they were sick with dread. Do you know what that actually means? Hebrew is a very colorful language. It means that they were so terrified that they were throwing up. It is literally "sick." Their fear was visceral. It made their gut wrench. They were terrified for their lives.

What makes this so ironic is that they had nothing to fear. God had told Israel not to mess with the Moabites.

So, Israel was to do nothing. They would pass by. If Moab would just leave well enough alone, and not let their fear to get the best of them, then nothing like the following story would have happened.

You find out that a lot of people died because of Moab's fear, and the things that they did. But, they reacted to their fear, and really made a mess of things.

Another ironic thing here is what is said in verse 4. There is also a possible economic problem here. Moab said that Israel would come through and "lick up" all of our goods—they are going to eat all our wealth up. At the time their wealth was mostly on the hoof, or in their grain storehouses. They thought Israel would come in and take all their livestock and grain, and leave Moab destitute.

Well, again they had nothing to fear because, remember Israel had not gone into the land yet, and God was still giving them manna 6 days a week, and double on Friday.

So Israel wasn't going to come in and devastate their land. They were not going to come

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in and take all their wealth. So the second element they feared was also bogus. They had made it up in their own heads. It was a figment of their imagination.

They were functioning by human nature, and it was only natural for them to think that if 2 or 3 million people came in, they would eat up everything and take over the territory. But, that's the irony of all this. Nothing like that was going to happen, especially if they didn't move to make Israel their enemy.

It is kind of interesting that all of this could have been avoided with a little bit of communication between Balak (the Devastator) and Moses. If he had come to Moses, instead of Balaam, everything would have worked out differently.

Instead Balak makes some sort of alliance with the Midianites. And if you remember, from the book of Judges, the Midianites end up being a thorn in Israel's side. So here is the beginning of an alliance against Israel that has gone on through the years.

Numbers 22:5 Then he [Balak] sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying: "Look, a people has come from Egypt. See, they cover the face of the earth, and are settling next to me!

Oh no! Horror of horrors!

Numbers 22:6 "Therefore please come at once, curse this people for me, for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed."

Now the Moabites did not have much of an army to field against Israel. That's why they didn't try to block their way by force of arms. They had themselves been subject to the Amorites and had suddenly been freed (by what Israel did in conquering Sihon, and Og). But they weren't grateful, and thought that they would have to defeat Israel themselves.

Again, nothing like that would have happened. It was all in their heads. They ended up acting upon the figment of their imaginations. You can't blame them; it's just human nature. Looking back on it, it was all very unnecessary.

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Balaam means "Devourer." Some people add "Devourer of the people." That's probably correct. It is also interesting that it is a very negative, destructive name (like Balak's). Devastator and Devourer were getting together to try to block Israel's passage into Canaan. Balaam's father's name, Beor, also fits into this. Beor means "Burning." So, we have several names here that are all very negative, and destructive.

It says that Balaam lived at Pethor. Pethor has made some historians wonder, but they think they know where it is. It is very interesting. It is up there, 400 miles to the north of Moab on the banks of the Euphrates River, 12 miles south of Carchemish.

If you will remember Carchemish was the location of the battle that Pharaoh Necho was going to when confronted by King Josiah (King Josiah was killed). Pharaoh Necho was taking his forces to aid the Assyrians against Babylon.

And Josiah was, at the time, allied to Babylon. And so, he took his army and met Pharaoh Necho at Megiddo—the place where all the battles of Israel seemed to take place—Armageddon. Israel was defeated there. Pharaoh had a much stronger army than Judah. A stray arrow happened to hit Josiah, and he was taken from the battlefield, and died.

But, the engagement there at Megiddo stalled Necho long enough for the Babylonians to defeat the Assyrians probably near Haran where Abraham had lived for a while; where Terah, Abraham's father died. Abraham buried him there, and then went on down to Canaan. That Assyrian-Babylonian battle took place near there. So the Assyrians had to retreat. And it was a couple of years later that Nebuchadnezzar, (or his father, I'm not sure which one) came up against the Assyrians and Egyptians again at Carchemish. And there was another big battle, and it turned the tide of the whole Middle East at that time, because that was the time when Nebuchadnezzar came through and pretty much gained control of the whole region defeating Assyria and Egypt there.

Anyway, Balaam lived just a stone's throw away from this area. This is very important to know because we're getting back to a connection between Abraham and Balaam.

How do you get that? Well, they were from about the same place, Haran. Haran is only 50 miles or less away. It was known that this certain place where Balaam lived, Pethor, was known for its "Baru," their "Priest-Diviners." Some of the people have tried to connect them with the Magi. But, I don't know how much evidence there is for that.

This area was well known for its sorcerers, magicians, diviners, soothsayers, and such. It is believed that Balaam was from a long line of celebrated soothsayers or diviners and

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that he and his family had made their living for several generations cursing or blessing other people. Their family reputation had gotten around throughout the entire region. If anyone wanted anyone else cursed, they would send for someone from Balaam's family, because they were the best in the world at cursing people.

It was their family trade. They passed it down, and gave their sons names that went along with that like "Burning," and "Devourer."

These guys—regardless of the requestor's religion or political stripe—would, for a price, do their little auguries, or say their little incantations, make the sacrifices, or whatever for some particular god, and then they would curse the other party in the name of that god.

So, that was what King Balak was doing. He was sending for the most renowned "curser" in the known world—Balaam—to come and curse Israel. King Balak had heard about all the things that God had done for Israel. He needed the very best, because he was going up against the God who could part the Red Sea, who could rain manna down from heaven every day for 38 some odd years. He was a God who could bring 10 plagues upon the people of Egypt, and could find water in the desert for 2.5 or 3 million people.

So, King Balak needed the very best, and was willing to give up just about all of his wealth to this man Balaam who he felt could do the job of cursing Israel.

So, what have we learned about Balaam?

He was internationally renown. Probably considered the best soothsayer in the known world. This sets him up pretty high. He was used to doing things like this. He was probably a pricey individual to contract with.

He was probably from a family of soothsayers who specialized in blessings and cursings. He was very well read, and very knowledgeable in all the methods of cursing and blessing, and all the gods and goddesses of the world. He probably kept an ear to the ground for all kinds of unusual things that would happen, and have reports sent to him. I'm sure he knew all about what was going on, especially with Israel. I'm sure that at times, it was one of those "international news stories" that just wouldn't quit. "What are the Israelites doing now? Where are they? Who are they defeating?" He kept his ear open for that sort of thing.

He was probably a Baru, as was mentioned before. He was a priest/diviner

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of Mesopotamia who worked enchantments, auguries, sorceries, and any kind of divining that was necessary. These Baru didn't consider themselves devotees of any one god, but devotees of every god. And they would work with any god or communicate with any god for a price.

He probably knew of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or at least had heard things about them from the local history, or local legend, because they were pretty important people in their own right. Abraham was a direct descendant of Shem, and as far as we know firstborn to firstborn. He had given up a great deal to follow God's call, and it came through that area where Balaam and his family lived. It would not be out of the realm of possibility that he had a great deal of information about Israel (their beginnings), and even some of the things that they believed, because Abraham was not a person who would pass through a place without leaving an impression. He was a great and wealthy man, and he had convictions. That is the sort of thing that makes impressions upon people. And, once they got to Canaan, they kept sending back to that particular area (the area of Haran) for their wives: Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah were all from the environs of Haran. It was almost as if they could say, "*These are our home boys,*" Israel was finally coming back into the area of Canaan.

Balaam would have had a possible interest in them from a local history standpoint. He certainly knew about Israel, and about Israel's God, and about the things that He had done in all of His miraculous works because everybody knew about it.

If you would turn to Joshua 2, we will see Rahab's account to the spies. She certainly knew what was going on.

Joshua 2:8-11 Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men: "I know that the LOORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. " For we have heard how the LOORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who *were* on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. "And as soon as we heard *these things*, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LOORD your God, He *is* God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

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The little bit of news of what God had done for Israel, in the 40 years wandering, certainly convinced Rahab.

Balaam was not somebody who just came onto the scene without knowledge. He was a man who was well aware of what was going on.

Now, before we go into the story any further, I want to let you know what the rest of the Bible thinks about Balaam because the remainder of the Bible is not kind to him. I want to balance some of the things that I've said already with what the writers of the Bible have said about him.

Deuteronomy 23 occurs after what happens with Balak and Balaam.

Deuteronomy 23:3, 4-5 "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the LORD...because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. Nevertheless the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam, but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you.

So, Balaam is considered an enemy of Israel.

Joshua 13:22 The children of Israel also killed with the sword Balaam the son of Beor, the soothsayer, among those who were killed by them.

Israel took revenge on Balaam.

Joshua 24:9-10 'Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose to make war against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you. 'But I would not listen to Balaam; therefore he continued to bless you. So I delivered you out of his hand.

Now this one is interesting because God considers this experience deliverance—[physical] salvation—for the children of Israel. It is interesting to think of it in that way because 24,000 of the children of Israel died in that deliverance. Just keep that in the back of your mind for now.

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Let's go to the New Testament. There are a couple more references to Balaam in the Old Testament—one in Nehemiah and one in Micah—but they say basically the same thing as those versus we have already read.

The following is probably the clearest example of how the New Testament writers thought of Balaam. This is interesting. Peter is pretty colorful here.

II Peter 2:15-16 They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, [talking about false teachers] following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness [bringing out his covetousness here]; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet.

Think about that! In Peter's estimation, Balaam was mad—insane. He wasn't in his right mind.

Jude 11 Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

Jude points that Balaam was greedy for profit. That's what most people think about when they think about Balaam.

Revelation 2:14 "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam..."

Think about this. We're talking about the letter to seven churches. And if we consider that these letters are written not only to the historical churches throughout the times since the first century, but also to all seven churches that exist at the end time (churches that have the attitudes that are exhibited here in these letters), then this brings Balaam and his doctrine (his error, his sin, his rebellion) right down to our own time. It is something we should think about; something we must be wary of.

Revelation 2:14 ...you have there those who hold the doctrine 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.

So we're basically talking about two sins here: Idolatry and adultery. But, idolatry and adultery are two sides of the same coin. The adultery one could be thought of in terms of worldliness. I'll just leave it at that for now, and go on.

From these few verses that we've gone over, a few character traits are apparent. I'll list these for you. This is what the Bible paints Balaam as.

He was covetous of wealth and power.

He was a practitioner of occult art.

He was personally sinful.

He led others into sin. It wasn't that he just sinned himself, but he got other people involved in sin.

He was not quite sane.

He was quite a character, this Balaam.

A simple reading of this would make you think that Balaam was alright. But, let's not think simply about this because we just saw that the rest of the Bible paints him as a very evil and wicked man. So, let's read this with a bit of cynicism, because it is important to get the lesson.

Numbers 22:7-14 So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the diviner's fee in their hand, and they came to Balaam and spoke to him the words of Balak. And he [Balaam] said to them, "Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you, as the LORD speaks to me." So the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam. Then God came to Balaam and said, "Who are these men with you?" So Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, saying, 'Look, a people has come out of Egypt, and they cover the face of the earth [a bit of an exaggeration]. Come now, curse them for me; perhaps I shall be able to overpower them and drive them out.'" And God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed." So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, "Go back to your land, for the LORD has refused to give me permission to go with you." And the princes of Moab rose and went to Balak,

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and said, "Balaam refuses to come with us."

This is interesting: The princes come to Balaam and tell him what Balak has asked. Then, when Balaam goes to God, he leaves out some of what the princes said. After God gives His answer, Balaam reports back to the princes, this time leaving out some of what God said. Finally, when the men return to Balak, all they say is, "*He is not coming.*"

So, there is a lot of deception here in trying to hide the communications between one another for advantage. The princes certainly don't want Balak mad at them because they didn't succeed at their mission; and Balaam didn't want to tell them everything because he wants them to come back with more money.

That's what I mean about not looking at this straight forwardly. We have to remember that this was Balaam's living. This is how he made his money. He was a sorcerer for hire—for pay.

This man was negotiating here. That's what we've been reading. We just read a sorcerer's negotiation for hire.

Now the first thing that Balaam did wrong right off the bat—these guys waltz into his courtyard, and they said, "*Balak wants you to come and curse Israel for him.*" He says, "*Oh. Let me think about that. In the meantime, why don't you stay the night? Here, I'll put you up. I'll feed you.*"

I don't know; he probably entertained them. Maybe he performed "parlor tricks" for them.

But, what should a Christian have done? What should a good person have done? They would have said, "Get out of here!" and not even listened to them.

Let's go to II John and see what the Apostle John tells us to do, should anyone come to our house and wants us to do evil, to go against the Lord God.

II John 10-11 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

So, right off the bat Balaam has already become complicit in the sins of Balak. He should have said, "No. I'm taking my shingle [sign] down; I will not curse Israel." But, he

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doesn't. Instead he says, "*Why don't you stay the night. I'll see if God says anything here.*" This was the gist of what he said.

I'm almost positive from my own reading of this that He didn't expect God to say a word. But, this was a ploy to get the people interested and drag them along. So, he was putting on his diviner's hat, and doing a little acting here. "*Oh, I can't make this decision on my own! I must consult the gods. Stay here overnight and in the morning I will tell you if He has come to me in a dream, or vision to tell me what I can do!*"

And of course, he was playing the charlatan with them because most of the time, a demon didn't come to him and say, "OK, go ahead and do this," or "Don't do that." He, Balaam probably manufactured most of these things. And if a demon did tell him all these things and was behind all of his sorcery that makes it even more evil.

So, he was giving them his pitch. And then, God surprises him by actually answering him!

God started off by asking him, "*Who are these men with you?*" making him explain himself. And so Balaam does. And then, Balaam makes his pitch to God! "*God, let me curse them!*" And God says very emphatically, "*No! No! No! You shall not go with them. You shall not curse them. I have blessed them.*" And, Balaam says to Balak's princes, "Go back to your land. The Lord refused to give me permission."

Now we can give this to Balaam. He actually did what God said here, and sent them away with their diviner's fee in their hand evidently. He didn't make any money. But, we can also read that it was not because of the fear of God, but because, "*Hey, maybe this will help the negotiations if I send them away, because they might come back, and bring a bigger bag of gold with them to try and convince me. Hey, if I play hard to get, and they really want me, I could make a 'killing.'*" And maybe that's what he did.

Remember all the authors after this talk about him being greedy for profit at the expense of Israel. So, we have to put that back in here. What did the other biblical writers see from these verses? God obviously approved, because He inspired it to be written several times in His Word—that this was the way that Balaam worked. He was negotiating a higher fee.

Numbers 22:15 Then Balak again sent princes, more numerous and more honorable than they.

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So he, Balak upped the offered price, and also upped the honor bestowed. He sent maybe his son, or the firstborn—the heir to the throne. That would have been quite honorable for Balaam to have entertained the next king of Moab in his home.

Numbers 22:17 And they came to Balaam and said to him, "Thus says Balak the son of Zippor: 'Please let nothing hinder you from coming to me; [Remember that Balak was terrified, and was throwing up in his fear of Israel] for I will certainly honor you greatly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Therefore please come [you can here the entreaty in his voice!], curse this people for me.'"

He is saying "*I can't fight them with the sword. I have got to fight them with evil spirits. I've got to whittle them down so that my puny army can go up against them.*"

Numbers 22:18-19 Then Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold [think cynically—he's upping the price here], I could not go beyond the word of the LOORD my God, to do less or more. "Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight [the same tactics again], that I may know what more the LOORD will say to me."

This time I'm sure he was expecting God to say something.

Numbers 22:20-21 And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men come to call you [that 'biggest little word in the English language'], rise and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you—that you shall do." So Balaam [listen to this very carefully] rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab.

"*Aha! God gave me permission! Great! I can go! Load the gold!*" he thought.

How Balaam replies to the embassy of Balak is one of the main themes of this whole account. "I cannot go beyond the Word of the Lord my God to do less or more." And then in verse 20, God tells him very specifically, "Only the word which I speak to you, that you shall do."

Numbers 22:35 Then the Angel of the LOORD said to Balaam, "Go with the

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men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak."

Numbers 22:38 The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak."

Numbers 23:5 "Return to Balak, and thus you shall speak."

Numbers 23:12 "Must I not take heed to speak what the LOORD has put in my mouth?"

Numbers 23:16 "Go back to Balak, and thus you shall speak."

Numbers 23:19-20 "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? Behold, I have received a command to bless; He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it.

Numbers 23:26 'All that the LOORD speaks, that I must do'?"

Numbers 24:13 ...I could not go beyond the word of the LOORD, to do good or bad of my own will. What the LOORD says, that I must speak'?

Now if you know that God repeats these same things over and over, and over again (I didn't count them), it must be important. It is something that Balaam never got into his thick skull, because throughout the entire account, these three chapters, he is trying his best to curse Israel, and to do more than God tells him to do; or to say beyond what God has put into his mouth. He keeps being restrained.

Why? Balaam wants that pot of gold! He wants the honor! Think about that.

God spoke to him time and time again. He appears to him, visibly as the Angel of the Lord. He speaks to him through a donkey! God keeps changing Balaam's words in his mouth, speaking blessings, and not curses. God puts His spirit on him, and he prophesies under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, and still Balaam is trying to do his own will, and not God's will.

Is this a guy who ever got it? Even the most simple command, "*I will put a word in your mouth, you say that word, no more, and no less.*" This is very easy to understand. It is something a child could do.

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But, Balaam is being driven by gold, by pride, and who knows what else. And so he constantly and consistently refuses to do what God tells him to do. Mark's sermonette this afternoon was perfect because this is something that Balaam never understood. He never understood the connection between obedience and blessing, or, obedience and the relationship with God.

Balaam wanted to do all these things—have this relationship with God, be able to bless and curse, be a prophet—but he never wanted to obey. He wanted all the good things and none of the responsibilities.

And, Balaam in a sense is an illustration of a person who has the truth—has access to the truth—like people who read the bible all the time, but never obey it!

They are very willing to cheat on their income tax, when they know the bible says, "Thou shalt not steal."

There are people who, like Martin has mentioned last week, are willing to kill their unborn children, but know that the sixth commandment says, "Thou shalt not murder."

There are people who lie all the time, but they know that the bible consistently says, "Thou shalt not bear false witness."

These are people who have the truth, have access to the truth, or have knowledge of the truth, but are unwilling to ever put it into practice, because they are so stuck on doing what they want to do.

There are a lot of people in this world like this. As a matter of fact, there is one branch of Christianity in particular called Protestantism that is founded on this formula right here. You will not find more learned people than Protestant Theologians. They know the bible from cover to cover. But, they still keep Sunday! They do more than this—keeping Sunday is not the only thing. They know the law is there, and admit that the law is there, but they tell you, "*It is done away! We don't want the responsibility of the law. We let Jesus keep it for us!*"

And so they emphasize grace, and do away with the law, because they want all the blessings of being a Christian, but none of the responsibility. Just like Balaam!

Numbers 23:10 is one of Balaam's prophecies.

Now, just think of Protestants and Protestant Theology when you read this. Balaam is

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looking out at all of Israel from a height, and seeing their vast number. And he has just said that they've been blessed by God.

Numbers 23:10 "Who can count the dust of Jacob, Or number one-fourth of Israel? [Now listen to what he says] Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his!"

What about all that "life" between this particular time, and his own death? He didn't want the life of the righteous; he wanted the death of the righteous. He didn't want to live righteously, he just wanted to die and be considered a righteous man. He wanted (pardon the expression), "Heaven without acting heavenly while he was alive." He was perfectly fine about going on and even cursing God's people just so that at the very end, he could make a death bed repentance and squeak in between the bars of the gate, to use Protestant illustrations.

Frankly, the religion of Balaam—the doctrine, teaching of Balaam, the way of life of Balaam—was the dominant religion of the time! Just like today. Protestantism is the dominant religion of our time. It was that same human nature that wanted the best of both worlds.

They were willing to do whatever they wanted and sin grievously—Balaam told the Midianites later, "*Oh get the Israelites involved in idolatry and the women of Moab, and get them involved with temple prostitution, and all these other things*"—in the end they believed they would still be saved, because these things aren't that bad. They believed God would look over this.

That's the kind of impression you get from all of this. The man knew what was right but wouldn't take the responsibility to do it. He wanted all the rewards and blessings that would come from it.

Something else that comes out here is that he thought he could manipulate God. He thought he could bribe God—by giving Him sacrifices, communicating with Him, making a deal with Him—into cursing even His own people.

Obviously, it didn't work. He did not understand God in the least.

Balaam did not understand what is written in Deuteronomy 10. Moses wrote this at just about this same time. In the New King James, this section is titled, *In Essence of the Law*.

Deuteronomy 10:12-14 "And now, Israel, what does the LOORD your God require of you, but to fear the LOORD your God [Balaam certainly didn't fear God. He was willing to negotiate with Him], to walk in all His ways [He didn't want to obey God] and to love Him [certainly his actions didn't show that he loved God at all], to serve the LOORD 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 LOORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good? "Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the LOORD your God, also the earth with all that is in it.

Here puny Balaam was trying to match wits with the God of everything. And he thought he could win!

Deuteronomy 10:15-17 "The LOORD 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 LOORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.

Balaam sure thought he could bribe God. He did not understand this very simple point: In this relationship we have—this covenant relationship—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.

But, when we step outside that role and try to take God's prerogatives away from Him and start trying to do things that God only can do, then we start getting into very deep trouble. And that is where Balaam was. He was in very dangerous territory. He was trying to negotiate with God as an if He were his equal.

Think about what it means to try to change God's mind. I don't mean going to Him in humility and asking Him for something like healing, a new job, a better job, or whatever. I'm not talking about this type of thing. I'm talking about something God has made clear to you. For example—that He is going to go down this certain road (whatever it might be), but we want to somehow induce Him to change His mind. As the old cliché goes, "There are no atheists in a foxhole."

"God if you would just get me through his battle, I'll tithe to you not just 10%, but 20% of

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all that I ever earn for the rest of my life, if you will just save me from this,"—thinking that somehow God is going to be impressed with the extra 10%. That was what Balaam was trying to do.

He was trying to impose his will on God, and make God change for him! Isn't that basically selfish? Self interest above what's in God's interest? In a way it's like saying to God, "You're wrong, and I'm right, so You should do it my way!" As if we can see all things from our vantage point better than God can.

This is a total turning around of Romans 8:28 —putting one's self in place of God. Really, that is what it is. If we're trying to change God's will on some matter, that He has very clearly shown us, we are saying, "We are God, and not You." We want our will to be followed, and not His. And there are several verses in the Bible that say, "*Who are we before this God?*"

We're the clay. He is the Potter! But, Balaam had it all backwards.

Back in Numbers 22, notice that God is on to him. He gives Balaam some rope to hang himself with. And, he just sticks his head right into the noose. That's the "If" statement. "If the men call on you, then you may go." The Bible gives no indication whatsoever that the men came to call on him. It just says that he got up, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab.

So, what did Balaam do here?

This is what we might call bending the rules, or breaking the ground rules. God gave him conditional permission to do something. And what did he consider it to be? Absolute permission. It is almost like he didn't hear God say, "If the men come to call on you." All he heard was, "Then you can go."

How many people do that? How many Protestants do that? In our modern way, we have turned it around. It is, "Well, the Bible doesn't say that you can't do this." It is the, "I need a 'Thus saith the Lord.'"

But, there might be tons of verses that say that you shouldn't do that because of this, that, or something else. Or, there might be a whole story about someone who does something and brings out a principle of a way we should not go. But, because it doesn't say anywhere in there, "You shall not do this," then they think it is OK to do it.

Mr. Armstrong always used the example of smoking. There is no place in the bible that

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says that you shall not smoke cigarettes. It does not say anywhere that you shall not breathe in the burning of any kind of flammable substance. But, there are these principles—huge principles—that people totally pass over. And this is kind of what Balaam did.

"God didn't say that I could not go. He gave me a condition, but I'm sure it will be all right this time if I go. If He was willing to give me permission in this case, it must be OK." So, he went. He didn't believe God.

And so we have Balaam and his donkey incident, which I really wanted to get to because that was, I thought, the highlight of the sermon! I was building up to that.

Think of I Peter 2, in terms of what Balaam did. What Peter had been telling them to do was submit—submit to government; submit to the king; to governors; to anyone in authority—for the Lord's sake, because that is what God wants us to do. He wants us to learn to submit to authority—especially to **His**.

I Peter 2:15-16 For this is the will of God, that by doing good [submission to government is doing good] you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.

God gave Balaam conditional permission. He made him free to do a certain thing, which was to go with the men, but He put a condition on it. "If they come to you."

Well, he used his freedom (his liberty) as a cloak for vice. Balaam's vice was money. He wanted riches. And the way he was going to get his riches was to curse Israel—another vice! Not a good thing to go around cursing people. Certainly it is not showing love for them.

So, God tells us here that as Christians we have been given grace. We've been given freedom. We've been given gifts by God to do good. And He says here, "Do not use this freedom to do evil—it is not freedom *from* the law, but freedom **within** the law—to do good and not evil."

But, how many out there have used the liberty given to us by Christ as license to sin? "God will forgive us! That's what God does best! So, if we do it just this once, it will be OK!"

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That's what Balaam did. He got (from God) permission in one small area, under a certain circumstance, and Balaam interpreted it as freedom to do as he pleased. Doesn't that sound like Protestantism to you?

That's all they ever talk about is grace, grace, grace. Grace is a wonderful thing. God has given us so many freedoms, but there is also law, responsibility and submission to the will of God. This is one thing that Balaam just totally left out of the picture. He saw nothing that he had to do. All he wanted was the freedom. And it came back to bite him severely in the end.

We'll get into Balaam and his amazing talking donkey in the next sermon.