

Balaam And The End-Time Church (Part 2)

Parallels With The Laodicean

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Given 25-Jan-03; Sermon #594

In the last sermon, *Balaam and The End-Time Church, Part 1*, we began discussing the story of Balaam. It is a part of scripture that most people, I think, treat as a story—just another thing that happened to the children of Israel on their way to the Promised Land. Maybe if people look at it in terms of having a moral, they may think that Balaam was greedy and that we shouldn't be greedy.

But, I hope last week I was able to convey (in some small way) that Balaam's story has important parallels with our own time, and our own experience. It should give us insight, knowing a bit more about the details of this story and the common worldly mindset, because I mentioned that the way Balaam approached God is the way most people seem to approach God.

Balaam's story should also make us aware of some of the dangers that even we may face as chosen sons of God with His Holy Spirit. We still have some of these same tendencies. We have brought some of these things in from the world. And because the world is so always pressing at us, there could be a very good chance that we will pick them back up, even if we have thrown them off in the past! So it is a good reminder, and maybe we can get some good lessons out of it.

Now before we continue in Numbers 22, we should at least review the major lessons that we found in the first half of the chapter. I think that the most obvious parallel to our time in this scenario is that it occurs just before Israel crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land. And here we are, living in a time just before Christ returns. So, the scene and settings are similar. Just as Israel was about to go in and possess the land, we are poised at the edge of the Kingdom of God, and our inheritance.

Let's begin today in Psalm 37:29, then we will skip down to verse 34, and continue from there. I want to pick this up because in a way this part of Psalm 37 is part of a summary of the things we can learn from the story of Balaam.

Psalm 37:29 The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell in it forever.

Psalm 37:34-40 Wait on the LORD, and keep His way. [Remember that word "way"] And He shall exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you shall see it. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading

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himself like a native green tree. Yet he passed away, and behold, he was no more; indeed I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the blameless man [That means recognize him, see who he is.] and observe the upright; for the future of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together; the future of the wicked shall be cut off. But the salvation of the righteous is from the LOORD; He is their strength in the time of trouble. And the LOORD shall help them and deliver them; He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in Him.

We'll see as we go through the remainder of the story of Balaam that he was just the opposite. He was one of the wicked mentioned as we went through the passage. Balaam is the kind of person that God stood against as an adversary. We'll see this also, as we go through this, for the salvation of His own people—those who trusted in Him.

So, I thought it good to look at that and set the stage.

Now, we saw also last week that Balak and all Moab were terrified of Israel. Remember it was terrified to the point of vomiting—of being literally sick. Here they had two and a half million, or three million people coming across at the edge of their land, and they thought for sure that the Israelites were going to treat them in the same way they had been treated by the Amorites under king Sihon, and king Og of Bashan. And so they were just mortally afraid.

They were also afraid that they would come in and consume every green thing in their land.

Well, they need not have feared either of these things, because God had told Israel not to mess with Moab. They are a kindred people, and they tried their best to go around them every time they came across Moabites, and the Edomites, and the Ammonites. They are all related peoples.

Also, we know that God gave manna to Israel for 40 years, and so there was no danger of the people consuming all the Moabites grain, and other foodstuffs (basically their wealth). Israel was just going to pass through the land. God would provide for them, and it was to be as if they had never been there. All they needed was safe passage.

But, Balak and all Moab were terrified. And they jumped to these conclusions. So, what did Balak do? He went and hired a religious mercenary to curse Israel for the purpose of

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weakening Israel so they could be beaten militarily—to put them to the sword. Like I said, this was totally unnecessary.

I want you to notice that they—Moab—were doing this without a cause.

Psalm 35:1 Plead my cause, O LORD, with those who strive with me; fight against those who fight against me.

Now in this situation with Balak, and Balaam, God was indeed doing this very thing. He was standing up to fight with them, and we will see the Angel of the Lord make his appearance at the end of Numbers 22.

So, without Israel having to do anything—in fact, they didn't know what was going on at all between Balak and Balaam until after the fact—God was standing up for His people, Israel. He was pleading their cause against those who would strive with Israel.

Psalm 35:2-8 Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for my help. Also draw out the spear, and stop those who pursue me. Say to my soul, "I am your salvation." Let those be put to shame and brought to dishonor [Think about Balaam and the donkey here] who seek after my life; let those be turned back and brought to confusion who plot my hurt. [That's exactly what happened!] Let them be like chaff before the wind, and let the angel of the LORD chase them. Let their way be dark and slippery, and let the angel of the LORD pursue them. For without cause they have hidden their net for me in a pit, which they have dug without cause for my life. Let destruction come upon him unexpectedly, and let his net that he has hidden catch himself; into that very destruction let him fall.

That's exactly what happens with Balaam. He set the net for Israel, and he ended up falling into it himself. It came back to bite him. It cost him his life. There is also a New Testament parallel to this in John 15:25 where Jesus says in the talk that He gave after the Passover.

John 15:25 "But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, 'They hated Me without a cause.'

This same thing—laying a trap for the righteous, laying a trap for those who are

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innocent—is something we Christians have to deal with. It is almost a natural law, that those who see righteousness exhibited by those who are Christian will try to squash it, and put it down. There is no reason for it whatsoever. But, they are intimidated by it. They are put to shame by it because they see people that are actually doing what is right, and succeeding in it and being prospered for it.

Good things are happening to these people, and whether it is covetousness, or envy, or whatever their motivation, they try to stamp it out. They did that with Christ. And if they did it to Christ, they will do it to us. So, a little warning here. There are definite prophecies in the Bible that say it is going to happen here at the end time.

This story of Balaam is one of those things—keys, and warnings—that could help us keep our eyes open for what is coming up.

We also learned about Balaam himself. He is what is called a *Baru*, a priest-diviner. He considered himself a devotee of every god, believing that he could communicate with any god, could work with any god, and that he would curse for any god. He was very much like any multi-culturalist that we see today—willing to spread himself out among all the different types of religions. He was very tolerant of all religions. Willing to take here, and there, and make a syncretistic mix of religions. He attempted to be spiritual without being religious—without coming down to one specific way to live—rather embracing all ways. He was willing to work with *any* religion for *any* reason.

He was internationally known—remember it was 400 miles between Moab and Balaam's home. So, the word had gotten around that this guy was pretty good at cursing people. It was his specialty, and his family's specialty.

Balak got out the gold and went to get the best in the known world—the best curser that he knew of. He had a big enemy and he wanted that enemy to be crushed. And so he pulled the chains off his wallet and started dishing it out.

We saw that Balaam, knowing Balak's position, negotiated pretty doggedly for the job. He was not only willing to negotiate with Balak, later on he was willing to negotiate with God, just for a little more gold or prestige. That's an important part of his character, and understanding where his mind was.

Another thing we learned was that he might have known about the patriarchs because the place where he lived in Pethor was only miles away from Haran. It wasn't far; it was in the same general area. Some have even conjectured that Balaam himself may have been a Hebrew—that is a descendant of Eber, but not a descendant of the line of

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Abraham, because the people who lived in that locality were of the same kin (very closely related).

They weren't Syrians. They were Hebrew, from which there were actually several different lines. One being the Abrahamic/Israelitish line, and then the other branches, one of which was Balaam's line. (But, this is just conjecture, and I will leave it at that.)

One of the main things we have learned about Balaam's character is that he was greedy for wealth, and prestige. He was actually willing to get ahead at any cost. Whatever would benefit Balaam was good! It didn't matter if it was money, or prestige, honor, or whatever. If it was good for Balaam, then it was good!

He was always looking for his own advantage, and in II Peter 2:15-16, we will see a good summary by the apostle of the way of Balaam. Peter's subject is "False Teachers."

II Peter 2:15 They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor,...

Remember I said Balaam meant "devourer," and Beor meant "burning." From that, people have figured out that they were a family of cursing priest-diviners. He goes on:

II Peter 2:15 ...who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

That's probably the one sound-byte that you want to remember about Balaam—that he loved the wages of unrighteousness. His love was not for God. His love was not for truth. His love was not for anything that is good and righteous. His love was for wages that you could get from being sinful; a thoroughly evil character who had an effective façade.

II Peter 2:16 but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet.

Peter puts it very plainly. Basically, Balaam was insane—he was totally willing to go against God Himself. Now that is insane! He was not insane in that he needed to be locked up in some facility, but he was insane. He was willing to fight the Maker and Ruler of the entire universe—willing to fight Him! And he wasn't backed into fighting Him, he went seeking Him—to get his own way. And to us, that's insane!

Now you can understand why Peter used the term, "the madness of the prophet." We'll see a little bit later how this comes out, and why Peter uses that term.

In my last sermon, we went through about 10 verses back in Numbers 22. I won't go back through them all. We read them. I'll just review Numbers 22:18 —Balaam is talking to the servants of Balak, and he says,

Numbers 22:18 I could not go beyond the word of the LOORD my God, to do less or more.

From there we went through the rest of chapter 22, and on through chapters 23, and 24, and found the same theme is repeated time and time again. God is continuously warning him "*Do not go beyond what I tell you to do,*" and every time Balaam tried to anyway. He fought God at every turn, because He wanted his own way. He wanted the gold; he wanted the honor; he wanted the reputation that he would get curing Israel (who, up to this point, had defeated Egypt and most of the nations they came in contact with). The True God was the "game in town," and if you beat Him, then you'd be on the top of the pile—that's the idea that Balaam had. He was "working his magic," trying to move himself into that first position.

This brings out his major flaw. This is one thing that many of the world also have. He believed that the end justified the means. To put it another way, he was willing to set aside principle (if he had any) to achieve his goals. We can put it another way. He functioned by self-interests rather than by belief or standards, because his standard was "Anything that is good for Balaam."

And so, what was his standard? Self-righteousness, self interests. It is what he set up to be the principles by which he could live a successful life. He didn't base them on anything that was Godly, but based them on what He reasoned out. What he figured was the best way to get what he wanted, had nothing to do with God.

So, you can put this flaw many different ways, but it all comes down to the same thing: He was willing to do anything to get his way. It doesn't come across that way with a simple reading of the story. But, by putting different things together from different parts of the Bible, Balaam comes out smelling like manure, not roses.

Let's get to the story of Balaam and his wonderful donkey. Now the donkey of all things comes out smelling like a rose!

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Numbers 22:20-21 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.

Now my bible has a break there. Maybe yours might have some notation that a new paragraph starts here. However you treat it, the story goes right on.

Numbers 22:22 Then God's anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the LORD took His stand in the way as an adversary against him. And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants *were* with him.

Now God was angry because he went when He had specifically told Balaam, "*Don't go!—unless they come to you and ask you.*" And there is nothing here in God's word that says they did. Rather it says that Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and off he went.

God gave conditional permission. But the condition was: *ONLY* if he was asked again. He was not asked again, but he went anyway. Balaam was one of those people who if you give him an inch, he would take a mile. If he was not specifically told, "you shall *not* go," then he thought that meant he could go ahead and go.

In like manner, there are those who think, "Well, because the Bible does not say 'Thus saith the Lord,' it is OK!" So we see a lot of things in the character of Balaam that are very similar to what people today possess because they are not listening to God.

God was very specific with Balaam, but all he heard was, "Go ahead!" He didn't hear the part about "If."

This is why God was angry with him. And it says that God was so angry that He came out against him, to stand in his way. Maybe the most intriguing detail here is that this word Adversary (in verse 22) is, in the New King James, "satan." It is not the capital "s"—Satan, but the lowercase "s"—satan. This is the Hebrew word for "adversary, enemy, foe."

So what God did was that He came out against Balaam the same way that Satan comes out against us (when God allows him to do so). God set Himself up as Balaam's enemy.

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A few years back, I did a series on *The Parables of Matthew 13*. In the second one, I showed that what Jesus illustrated through the parable was that there are two sides: There is God's side, and there is Satan's side. And we must choose which side we're going to be on.

Well, what happened here was that, by leaving without fulfilling the conditions, Balaam set himself up on Satan's side. And so, God then, *visibly* to the donkey, but *invisibly* to Balaam, set Himself up as the adversary to Balaam.

He stood in the way against Balaam. By doing what he did, Balaam showed God that he was going to do what Balak wanted him to do. We will see later how sure of this God was.

We see that God is going to do something to try to get Balaam to change, to turn. God wasn't coming out against Balaam as a normal enemy would—to do him harm—rather to turn him around and give him a chance to repent, to redeem himself.

Now we will see that Balaam would have nothing to do with that. He had set himself up as an enemy of God. He never really turns himself around.

Numbers 22:23 Now the donkey saw the Angel of the LOORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the way and went into the field. So Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back onto the road.

Now Balaam was trying to do to the donkey what God was trying to do to him! Remember that!

This is the first appearance of the Angel of the Lord. The donkey changes course (Good donkey!). Balaam tried to put her back on course—on his course. The donkey was smart. Balaam was not.

When God stands against you, you turn away, and stop going in the direction you are going, because He has that sword out there, and He will cut you off.

But, Balaam was too dumb. He didn't see God at all in this. The dumb donkey did. The donkey knew that Balaam's path led to destruction, and it wisely turns aside. Blind Balaam continues down the path of sin.

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Proverbs 4:14-15 Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn away from it and pass on.

That's exactly what the donkey was trying to do. But, what did Balaam do? He stupidly went on. He couldn't see it. The donkey showed herself wiser than the "Wise and Powerful Balaam, the Renowned Enchanter!"

Numbers 22:24-25 Then the Angel of the LOORD stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on this side and a wall on that side. And when the donkey saw the Angel of the LOORD, she pushed herself against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck her again.

What does God do? His first attempt to get Balaam's attention failed—not with the donkey, but with Balaam. He was totally oblivious to what was going on. So God narrows him in. We call it "hedging him in." The path that Balaam was taking led exactly between two hedges or walls (as it is called here). There was enough room though for the donkey to turn aside. And that's what she did. She turned away, but in turning away Balaam's foot got crushed against the wall. He got physically hurt.

God probably thought that maybe a little pain would help him come to his senses. And so he got his foot crushed against the wall.

But, Balaam doesn't think about God at all. He thinks, "*You stupid donkey! Why did you do that to me?*" He didn't say anything at this point. Maybe he curses in Mesopotamian, and beats the donkey. "He struck her," it says. But, his injury doesn't make him consider at all that maybe God is trying to get his attention. It doesn't faze him. It never comes into his mind that God may be trying to tell him something.

He takes all his pain and rage out on this poor innocent donkey that was only trying to obey God.

Think of the donkey here:

Psalms 141:8-10 But my eyes are upon You, O GOOD the Lord; in You I take refuge; do not leave my soul destitute. Keep me from the snares they have laid for me, and from the traps of the workers of iniquity. Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I escape safely.

The donkey who saw God could avoid the trap and escape if it weren't for Balaam who was controlling the donkey. He made her go back into the trap and on to his own ruin later, as we will see.

The donkey is very interesting here. Let's just say that if we look at the donkey in terms of you and me, certain things come out.

Numbers 22:26-27 Then the Angel of the LOORD went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. And when the donkey saw the Angel of the LOORD, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam's anger was aroused, and he struck the donkey with his staff.

Now again the donkey proves herself wiser than Balaam.

God always does this: First He gets us in a wide place, and allows us to make our decisions. And it soon becomes very apparent which direction we're going, which path we're taking. But, then the way begins to narrow, especially if God sees us going in the wrong direction. So, He catches us in a place where we can turn around and gives us an opportunity to make a right decision.

If we don't do what He wants us to do, He'll go a little further down the path—a little bit later in our life—to catch us in a place where the answer is obvious, and we can't do anything except stop, and say, "God help me, I've gone the wrong way, I need you to open the path for me."

That's what He does to Balaam. He gets him to the point where there is only plunging on to destruction on one hand, and stopping and going exactly backwards retracing his steps out to where he can go off in the right direction.

That's where we are here. The donkey just simply lies down. That's all she can do.

Proverbs 22:3 A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished.

The donkey is the "Prudent man" here. Blind Balaam is "the simple." He is **so** without any spiritual acumen that he is just like a foolish simpleton. He can't see wisdom. He can't make a wise choice. But, the dumb donkey can! So, as a last resort, God goes one

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more. He is always full of mercy—willing to give us that one more chance to make the right choice. Now He has to do something drastic!

Numbers 22:28 Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"

Now this is incredulous!

Numbers 22:29 And Balaam said to the donkey, [Now if some animal talked to you, would you just answer the question?] "Because you have abused me. [*It is all your fault! I'm innocent!*] I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!"

They are carrying on a conversation!

Numbers 22:30 So the donkey said to Balaam, "*Am* I not your donkey on which you have ridden, ever since *I became* yours, to this day? Was I ever disposed to do this to you?" And he said, "No."

Now that is the end of the conversation.

I think that it is incredible that Balaam even spoke back. There are four parts there to the whole conversation, two speaking parts each.

This is a miracle—there is only one other place in the Bible where an animal speaks—Genesis 3 (the serpent to Eve)—and Balaam seems to act as if this happens to him every day!

I guess he probably thought, "Well I've talked to her enough, she's bound to answer me sometime."

But, here the donkey asked him questions! And he answers!

This is what I mean when I say that he's totally, spiritually out of it. He has no thought for God. He has no thought for spiritual things. He is so self-possessed, so full of self-interest that he can't think beyond the end of his nose!

All he's thinking about is, "*What am I going to do when I get to Balak? And he's going to pile all this money on me? How am I going to set up these sacrifices? What am I going to do? How am I going to say this? I know God will let me do it because I'm just a wonderful negotiator, and that's just the way it is. All the other gods have done exactly what I've said, so I think...*" As he talks to himself, thinking about this wonderful job he's got ahead of him.

And when these amazing things happen they don't faze him. They don't make him wonder what is going on. He doesn't even think why the donkey was treating him in a way that she had never done before. Yet, she was totally out of character! She speaks, and he answers!

It just illustrates the depth of his spiritual blindness. He couldn't see God if God had bit him!

Now, in today's lingo, we would call Balaam absolutely, totally materialistic. Everything was based on what he could see, feel, hear, and all the other senses. He couldn't see beyond that.

He was probably involved in spiritism, with all the augury, enchanting, and such. But, there is nothing spiritual about him. There is no depth to him whatsoever.

That's why I said he was thoroughly evil, and had the nice façade. It made him look spiritual. But, there was nothing there. The donkey was more spiritual than he was. I'm talking truly spiritual.

He may have had some knowledge, but it didn't work in him properly, because he never put it into practice. He may have known about Israel. He may have known about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He may have known some of the things that were taught. He certainly knew God was, in all His power and sovereignty, working for **them**.

But, none of this knowledge that he may have had did him any good. He talked to God! God talked back to him! God was doing all these things in his life, and he was thoroughly blind to all of it.

The incredible thing here that I see is that Balaam acted as if these things happened to him every day. But they didn't!

These were once-in-a-lifetime things that were happening to Balaam. But, he was so self-centered that he threw them off, and ignored them as if they didn't matter. Here

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was the great sovereign God saying, "*Wake up, Balaam! I'm here! Can't you see Me? Can't you see me working?*"

And, Balaam is blind. He can't see a thing because he is so stuck on the here and now, and what's in my hand, and what's in my pocket.

Revelation 3:17-19 "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know [Remember that Balaam had knowledge of some things that were worthless to him, so he might as well have not known.] that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—[So, God gives him some advice:] "I counsel you to buy from Me gold [Now remember Balaam wanted the gold, but he didn't want the gold from God. He wanted the gold from Balak.] refined in the fire, [God was putting him through some trials, some fire.] that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. [And, that's what Balaam needed. He needed the eye salve.] "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

I don't know how far God was willing to go with this, but Numbers 22 is certainly a parable of what God is willing to do to get **our** attention to make us turn so that we're indeed buying the gold refined in the fire, getting proper white garments, and anointing our eyes with eye salve so we can see.

He's trying to get us to repent. That's what this chastening is all about, to get us to turn around. That's what He wants us to do.

He wanted Balaam to pick his donkey up, turn her around, and head back home, where the original sin took place, where he got on his donkey, and left without the proper permission. But, Balaam was blind, and couldn't see.

And, the Laodicean has the very same problem. He is blind to God at work in his life, and the lives of others. Why? Because he is busy doing something else. The Laodicean is not lazy. The Laodicean is distracted with busyness, with this world, with getting ahead in life, with everything else rather than what he should be busy with—the things of God.

That's what God wants him to do. Be zealous, but not at making money. Be zealous, but not at building his house. Be zealous, but not at cruising down the highway, going here

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and there, flitting off to various vacations, or whatever should fill his meter of wonderful, joyous things to do.

No, He wants us to be zealous for Him!

But, a Laodicean, is pretending to be righteous. He has this façade like Balaam. He makes it look like he is a good guy, and righteous. But, all the while inside, he is doing something else. He is totally hypocritical. This is one of the Laodicean's problems. He is so focused on other things, that he can't see God. He's got everything all figured out, so who needs God?

Christ's advice to the Laodicean is to get eye salve so he can see. It is not that we're to see other people, or other things, but it is so we can specifically see Him! And, produce righteousness so we can put on that white clothing; so we can purchase the spiritual riches that mean something—the treasure in Heaven He talked about.

Now remember what Peter said the doctrine of Balaam is: Loving the wages of unrighteousness. Balaam took advantage of sin, and sinful practices to get ahead.

And remember what we mentioned last time about him thinking that he had time to repent in the end, on his deathbed. It was in Numbers 23:10, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his!"

He didn't want to live like the righteous, he wanted to die like the righteous. He wanted all the rewards of the death of the righteous, but he didn't want to do anything the righteous do, in order to receive those rewards. He wanted to get while the getting was good. And when the getting was not good, that's when he would turn to God.

When there was no more hope of him actually building his wealth, or palace, or whatever, then he would let God in! "Get while the getting is good, and make amends later!" was his motto.

But, God says, "*Live righteously now, because time is short! You're about to inherit the land! It is going to be over in just a little while!*"

It is going to take a little time to get us to turn from the place we are now to the place where He wants us. You can't develop holy, righteous character on your deathbed. It takes a lot more time than that. It takes a lifetime.

Numbers 22:31 Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the

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Angel of the LOORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand;
and he bowed his head and fell flat on his face.

Now he was awake!

Numbers 22:32 And the Angel of the LOORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times?

It is funny! He doesn't say, "*Why did you leave your house when I told you not to unless they came back to you...*" Rather, He asked why he struck the donkey. God was very concerned about the donkey. In fact, you could probably say that He was more concerned about the donkey than Balaam, because Balaam was not on God's "good list." God has a soft spot toward the weak—"the poor"—He calls them in the Bible. And such are you and me.

And here was this Balaam who had pretensions of being a good person, but who was thoroughly evil taking it out on the righteous—those who saw God, and who were trying to do what He said. Balaam, who was in the seat of power over the donkey, took it out on her. And so God's concern was for his creature.

Numbers 22:32-33 ...Behold, I have come out to stand against you, [as an adversary] because your way is perverse before Me. "The donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times. If she had not turned aside from Me, surely I would also have killed you by now, and let her live."

Very interesting.

I want to look at this word "perverse" (verse 32). In Hebrew the word is *yarat*. It does not quite mean "perverse." Perverse is OK, but the preferred meaning is interesting. It means, "to precipitate; to be precipitant; to push headlong; to drive recklessly."

God says, "Your way is headlong and reckless before Me. It is precipitant."

It is like going 90 mph down a steep hill, heedless of the danger at the bottom. Balaam had no foresight. And God says, "*that's perverse. Balaam, you are not looking ahead to the consequences! Your way is going to get you into trouble.*"

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He is like the daredevil, Evel Knievel, who without thought or terror, endangers his life, and other's for his own selfish purposes. He just rushes through life for everything that he can get out of it, and doesn't think about what's going to happen afterward, or at the end.

Like I said, he is a man who can't look past the end of his nose. He is so consumed with himself that he sees nothing down the road, except for what is happening now.

And God said, "That is perverse."

A wise man looks ahead, and sees where he is going to land. If a man like Balaam gets up a head of steam, he thinks that no one is going to stop him. Conversely, if we consider the donkey to stand for those who actually see God at work, we can notice a few things.

The donkey responds to God's direction.

The donkey is persecuted for her obedience.

The donkey, in her meekness, does not retaliate. Does she reach back and nip Balaam like he should have been? No.

And God said that it was for her sake that He had not carried out His judgment on Balaam.

That is very interesting because the same thing happens to us. Jesus calls us the salt of the earth. And part of the meaning there is that we're the preservative in this world. If there weren't us, there would be no world.

Revelation 7:2-4 Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed:

And then guess what happens? The proverbial "all hell breaks loose."

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We could also go to Ezekiel 9 where the man with the writing horn goes through the midst of the city with an ink pen, and he marks those who are God's on their forehead, and then right behind him comes the slayers with their swords.

This donkey was the only thing standing in God's way of totally consuming Balaam.

We are that donkey.

We, who see God, are the only ones keeping the Balaams of this world from getting totally snuffed out, because God has mercy on us.

So, we're not unimportant in this. The Laodiceans, in a way, are only getting their chance before God because those who are truly righteous are on the ship.

So this donkey is a very important character in all this.

Let's finish this up (Numbers 22 and Balaam's reply). This is really sad.

Numbers 22:34 And Balaam said to the Angel of the LOORD, "I have sinned, for I did not know You stood in the way against me.

He admits that he did wrong, but he blames his own blindness. He was terrified, we found there in verse 31, but he didn't beseech God for mercy. All he did was confess that he had sinned, and said, "*I didn't see you. I'm just a poor ignorant person.*" His confession is quite insipid, if you ask me.

Numbers 22:34 Now therefore, if it displeases You, I will turn back."

This guy is just amazing to me. "If it displeases You..."? There's an angel in front of him with a sword ready to lop his head off, and he's saying, "*Did I make you angry?*"

Blind, blind, blind Balaam!

He could not figure God out at all. God was just totally beyond him. Balaam was so materialistic that when God stood face-to-face with him with a drawn sword, he couldn't tell what God was up to. Woe to anyone who ever has this type of character flaw.

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." So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

Do you know what God said? "Balaam is going to do what he wants to do, and I'm not going to stand in his way because he's already set his mind on destruction." God, at this point, was going to let the natural course of events take place. He was as good as dead right there.

As we close, it is good to see the other side of things—the way a true servant of God should conduct his life. As Peter and Jude show, Balaam is an example of a false teacher, and a false servant of God.

So, I want to look at a true minister of God to close—to show the opposite, the contrast. We'll read II Corinthians 4 and look at the apostle Paul.

What we see here is that instead of Balaam's "Me, me, me..." all the time, we see Paul—a typical true servant of the True God—focused on "God, God, God, and God's people, God's people, and God's people."

II Corinthians 4:1-4 Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

That's the perfect summary of what we've just seen with Balaam.

II Corinthians 4:5-18 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and [we] ourselves [are] your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. [Exactly the opposite, again, to Balaam.] We are hard pressed on every side [Kind of like Balaam going through the narrow place!] yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not

in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—[Sounds a lot like the donkey!] always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you. And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," [Which is something Balaam did not do in the least. God had to put that word in his mouth, and tell him time, and time again, "Just say what I tell you to say."] we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Well, I hope you have gotten something out of this episode with Balaam. Maybe the best thing to do is to remember the example of the apostle Paul.