

**BALAAM:
The Man
Whose Eyes
Were
Opened**

**By
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When God singles out a man from the Old Testament and refers to him three times in the New Testament, there must be some special significance for us — something for us to learn from his history. Such is the case with a man named Balaam. His history is recorded in Numbers 22 to 24, and his death in Numbers 31; in the New Testament he is mentioned in 2 Peter, Jude and Revelation:

“Cursed children: which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the *way of Balaam* the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man’s voice forbade the madness of the prophet.” 2 Pet. 2:14-16.

“Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the *error of Balaam* for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.” Jude 11.

“But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the *doctrine of Balaam*, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.” Rev. 2:14.

In these scriptures we have first the *way*, then the *error*, and finally the *doctrine* of Balaam.

The “way” of Balaam was to love money and be willing to curse the people of God provided that he could be enriched thereby.

The “error” of Balaam was to attempt to speak falsely in Jehovah’s name for reward.

The “doctrine” of Balaam was the teaching of a method by which Balak could pull the beloved people down from their high eminence by persuading them to leave their own special place of separation and mingle with the Moabites.

In the epistle of Jude, the last days are described; there Balaam is linked with two other men, so that the three together might picture certain moral conditions which would prevail at the end in Christendom. They are “Cain, . . . Balaam, . . . and Core.” The first man sought to approach God without a suitable offering; he came on the ground of his works and not that of having a substitute. The second sought to make a gain of speaking the Word of God, and the third rose up in rebellion against God’s anointed high priest.

These conditions are to be seen all around

us. The great religious profession is the religion of Cain. Good deeds, character development, self-improvement and religious ethics are substituted for the grand work of atonement on the cross. The whole scheme is a denial of the fall and utter ruin of man on the one hand, and of the wondrous truth of the Lord Jesus Christ as the sinner's substitute on the other. What does God say of all those who follow this course? "Woe unto them." And just as surely as Cain's offering was rejected, and he with it, so will these modern religionists be rejected. He will say to them, "I know you not."

The sad fact of the "error of Balaam" being current is that religion has become commercialized, and many mere professors are following in Balaam's error in preaching for the reward. Many of them are as false as Balaam was.

The last character of the last days which is coupled with the "way of Cain" and the "error of Balaam" is the "gainsaying of Core." He was a man who rose up against God's king (Moses; Deut. 33:5), and high priest (Aaron), and is a picture of those who today deny the Lord's authority — they reject Christ's authority while claiming to be Christians. In other words, it is infidelity clothed in the garb of religion. How prevalent it is! Surely we should be able to discern the signs of these times.

But let us turn back to the book of Numbers, and I think we shall learn some profitable

lessons from the history of Balaam. He was a wicked man, a false prophet, who was willing to sell his services to King Balak. He had a reputation as a prophet, for Balak said to him, "I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed." Num. 22:6. He was not a prophet of the Lord but was a sorcerer using divination; however, the Lord did take him up and use him, and that contrary to his own will and to the will of Balak. The Word of God gives us a number of instances where He used unregenerate men to speak His mind; for instance, Caiaphas the high priest, the man who took the lead in having Jesus crucified, prophesied "that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." John 11:51, 52.

Balak the king had much reason to be distressed when he saw the progress of the great multitude of Israelites swarming toward his land. He knew how they had victoriously left Egypt, and what they had done to the Amorites. He did not, however, take into account that Jehovah was with them, nor seek their favor, nor cast in his lot with them; instead, he sent the honorable elders of Moab with the elders of Midian to persuade this renowned prophet of Midian to come and curse Israel. When they went, they took "the *rewards of divination* in their hand."

Balaam received them, lodged them courteously and cunningly made it appear difficult to enlist his services, and also made a display of

seeking supernatural guidance, even to using the name of Jehovah — the name by which God was known in Israel — to parry their offers for a time. He wanted money, and perhaps the charge for his services went up with his delay.

God spoke to him that night and told him that he was not to go with the elders of Moab, nor was he to curse the Israelites, for they were blessed. Balaam then grudgingly declined their proffered gifts, saying, "The Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you." This statement made it apparent to the elders that as far as Balaam was concerned he was willing. Whereupon, Balak sent "princes, more, and more honorable" than the first to persuade the wily Balaam to come. They were empowered to offer him greater and greater rewards.

This time God permitted Balaam to accompany the elders, but warned him that He would not allow him to speak anything but what He wished. God was about to use the enemies of Israel for their blessing. With God's permission, the false prophet readily acted, for he "loved the wages of unrighteousness."

But before Balaam was allowed to proceed very far, the angel of the Lord stood in the way of the ass upon which he was riding, but Balaam did not see the angel and smote the ass. This occurred three times; then the ass spoke with a man's voice, rebuking him; whereupon the angel of the Lord told Balaam that his way was perverse before Him, and again warned the

covetous prophet that he was not to speak anything but that which God gave him to speak. It took much preparation by God to use the false prophet's mouth to pronounce good concerning Israel.

God may use a dumb ass or a wicked man to speak His truth, but they are only instruments of His power, and the credit is not to them. He has used unsaved men to tell others the way of salvation to their eternal blessing. God is sovereign and can use what and whom He will, but that in no wise lessens the servant's responsibility to do as he is told.

At length Balaam arrived in the land of Moab, and King Balak took him up to a prominence from whence he could see Israel encamped below. Balaam felt, however, that he should make a great show of seeking hidden wisdom from some supernatural source. While it had the appearance of seeking God, it was really Satan's counterfeit of what God had established—something that was done by dealers in the occult sciences of the day. He had Balak prepare seven altars and their offerings, and then he went away alone to seek some special revelation. Here God met him and put words into his mouth, which he had already learned he MUST speak. Let us listen:

“And he took up his parable, and said, Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel. How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not

defied? For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" Chap. 23:7-10.

The children of Israel were God's *earthly* people, a chosen nation on earth, but there are some principles here that can well be applied to Christians — the heavenly people. Actually, this man Balaam *wanted to curse* the people of God for the gain he would make, but he is forced to say, "How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed?" Any curse of his would be meaningless and useless when God had not cursed them. This brings to mind a verse in Romans 8: "What shall we say then to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" No one, not even Satan, can touch the people of God in their security. The devil may for a time be allowed by God, for purposes of good toward His people, to touch them in their earthly circumstances, but to curse them is impossible. Surely "if God be for us, who can be against us?" This is self-evident. Our distress of spirit in times of trial really springs from lack of believing that God is for us. Jacob, at the very moment when God was moving all for his good, said, "All these things are against me." And have we not all more or less echoed the thoughts of Jacob? But what does it matter if the whole world be against us, when God is for us?

It is important to notice where Balaam was called to behold this people — “From *the top of the rocks* I see him, and from the hills I behold him.” God beholds them from His eminence, and Balaam is compelled to see them from above also. O that we always beheld one another as God sees us in Christ! How differently we would feel at times. What harsh and unkind words would be spared if we thought of the people of God as viewed from above.

Next Balaam says, “Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.” This is a cardinal truth, for ever since God called Abraham to a path of separation, the people of God have been called to walk apart from the world. Even before the time of Abraham we find in Genesis 5 a line of faith — men who were perhaps little esteemed by the world in their day, but they “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth,” and “died in faith.” There was another line of people, mentioned in Genesis 4 — descendants of Cain — who did great things and made a name in the earth. But those in the line of faith generally were not prominent in secular history.

Israel’s distinctive glory was their separation to God. They were not the largest nation, nor did they have giants among them; if they were to boast, they were to boast in the Lord, for He was their glory. When they mingled with the nations they fell from their exalted place. Christians are not now called out as a special nation, but God is taking out of the nations a

people for His name. They are not of the world, even as Christ was not of it. He was so separated and apart from the whole world system that when He left it there was scarcely a ripple on the surface of their society. The organized system of that day was hostile to Him, and He said it would be the same to His followers; but He has said, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." And how did He overcome? By walking in communion with His Father so that He was neither elated by their fleeting acclamations nor depressed by their rejection. May God grant us to be of that mind, so that we shall neither seek a place in man's world, nor bemoan it when we are made to feel its scorn and derision.

"Nay, let the world cast out our name,
And vile account us if it will."

Balaam is moved to add at the close of his first prophecy: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" This he never achieved, for he died as he lived, a wicked man. He was slain by Israel among their enemies (Num. 31:8). It is a vain wish for one to desire to die as a righteous man, and yet remain a rebel against God. Many today hope to go to heaven when they die, but they prefer to live for the earth with no thought of God. Their wish shall perish with them.

Balak was much displeased with Balaam for what he uttered, and continued his attempts to get the people cursed. He took Balaam to another vantage point from which he could see the Israelites, hoping that he would curse them from there. Again Balaam went through his

ritual, and notice that in the 15th verse Balaam said to Balak, "Stand here by thy burnt offering, while I meet . . . yonder." The words "the LORD" are in italics in the King James Version, showing that they were added by the translators. They were not in the original Hebrew. Balaam did not here speak of meeting Jehovah, but of going to meet with some evil spirit. It was a typical act of accult diviners of that day. However, the Lord did meet Balaam and put the words in his mouth that he was to speak to Balak. Let us listen to what he has to say:

"Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor: God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" No, there would be no disannulling what God had said. As the poet has said:

"When once His word is passed,
When He has said, 'I will,'
The thing shall come at last,
God keeps His promise still."

Neither Balaam nor Balak nor all the hosts of hell could change God's decree concerning His people Israel, nor can "death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, . . . separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom. 8:38, 39. Every purpose and promise of God concerning us will

be fulfilled; nothing shall fail of all the good things which the Lord has spoken.

Balaam then continues: "I have received commandment to bless: and He hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it." Evidently he would have reversed it if he could, but he had been warned most solemnly not to do so when he was withstood by the angel and reproved by the dumb ass. Satan and many ungodly persons would gladly curse the saints of God today, and there is a man coming who will "blaspheme . . . God, . . . and them [the saints] that dwell in heaven" in his rage, but all to no avail.

Balaam's first prophecy contained negative truth: God had not cursed the people, so Balaam could not. His second utterance gave positive truth: God had blessed them, and that could not be reversed. Just so we read in the New Testament of both negative and positive blessing; for example, John 3:16 says that the believer in Jesus shall not perish on the one hand, and shall have everlasting life on the other.

Dear fellow-Christians, if God blessed Israel of old, how exceedingly more has He blessed us. It is good to stop and consider how many and great are our blessings. In Ephesians 1 we are told that we are blessed with "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." There is not a saint, however feeble, who does not have every blessing God can give him, in Christ. May we have a deepened sense of how God has manifoldly blessed us, and that not all

the evil designs and power of men and demons can affect these blessings.

Next Balaam says, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel." What a statement! If Balaam had been down in Israel's tents, he might have heard them murmuring and complaining, but if God had not beheld iniquity, who is going to make Him do so? The enemy would gladly accuse them before God, but

"Though the restless foe accuses,
Sins recounting like a flood,
Every charge our God refuses,
Christ has answered with His blood."

It was not apparent in Old Testament times how God could behold a people like the Israelites and not see iniquity. Christ had not yet died, and the gospel had not yet been proclaimed, but there were those who had some sense of the forgiveness of God. "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Rom. 4:6-8. In Old Testament times God looked forward to the work of Christ while He dealt in grace with those who had faith. Now He beholds the believer in Jesus as "clean every whit." More than that, He sees us in Christ, in His beauty.

O that we saw one another more as God sees us. I am afraid that we often drop down to a

lower plane when we think of our brethren in Christ. We see their crotchets. Sometimes their dispositions cross with ours, and we become annoyed and irritated, forgetting what they are in all their loveliness in Christ. Naturally we do see some things with them that are not very pleasant, but let us not forget that they see things in us which are not what they should be. May our eyes be open to see our brethren as God sees them, as those dear to Him, and precious to the heart of Christ. O to see one another from the "top of the rocks!"

To Balak's consternation, Balaam continues to enlarge on Israel's blessing: "The Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. God brought them out of Egypt; He hath as it were the strength of a unicorn. Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!" vv. 21-23. God was with them, and God had acted for them, and He had wrought all for their blessing. What a blessed people they were. Strange that they should ever forsake Him and turn to other gods! But is it not stranger still that we who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and have been accepted in the Beloved, should seek our satisfaction apart from Him whose we are?

By that time Balak was exasperated with Balaam, and said to him, "Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all." But if the enemy made God step in and speak for them, he must

hear still more. Balaam replied, "All that the Lord speaketh, that I *must* do." Thereupon Balak made one more attempt to get the people cursed. What utter folly!

The first verse of chapter 24 is enlightening as to the character of Balaam. "And when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he went not, *as at other times*, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness." This lets us know definitely that he had merely been in the habit of seeking enchantments from Satan, and that his display of seeking God's guidance was a sham. Then Balaam spoke.

"Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: he hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open." Chap. 24:3, 4. His eyes had been opened, but against his will. He heard the "words of God," and "saw the vision of the Almighty," and his heart was unchanged. How much more was his guilt than if his eyes had not been opened.

Then he says, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lignaloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters." vv. 5, 6.

Balaam's third parable continues the advance noted in the two previous ones: first, they could not be cursed, for God had not cursed them; second, God had blessed them,

and they would be blessed: third, they were to be seen in their beauty as trees of the Lord's planting. What an advance! Now God would tell their enemies of their beauty and loveliness, and all was the fruit of His doings. And when God tells how He has accepted *us*, He says, "accepted [taken into favor] in the beloved." How precious is that! Not accepted in Christ, though that is true, but accepted in that One in whom He delights. Nothing can be higher than that.

But poor Balaam had to say, "I shall see Him, but not now: I shall behold Him, but not nigh." How dreadful for man to have his eyes opened and to resist the light and revelation. All such will assuredly see Christ as their judge one day, but then be banished from His presence. They, like Balaam, will have no part in the blessing which they witnessed for others.

Another point we may notice in this parable of Balaam's is, "Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee." This was to pronounce his own and Balak's judgment, for they sought to curse Israel, but they themselves would be cursed.

Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together and upbraided him, but Balaam reminded Balak that he told him when he came that he could not go beyond the word of the Lord. After this Balaam prepared to depart to his own land, but under the influence of the power of God he was made to give Balak one more parable. This one was of Israel's future glory and power, for out of

Jacob a Star was to rise, and a Scepter out of Israel, "and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth . . . and Israel shall do valiantly. Out of Jacob shall come He that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city." vv. 17-19.

It is thought that the wise men from the east that came to see the child Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 2, knew of this prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah, and that they connected it with the bright star which they had seen. But that blessed One who came of Israel is yet to reign and put down all His enemies, and Israel shall be blessed under Him in that day.

There is much for our meditation in this last prophecy of Balaam's, for it looks forward to the end of this age, and the judgments that shall fall. In language descriptive of the Great Tribulation, it says, "Alas, who shall live when God doeth this!" It also predicts that the last scourge of Israel (the Assyrian) will be afflicted by a Western maritime power, and then the Western power will perish (v. 24).

Thus we see that the enemy was merely used by God to bring out His own purposes of good toward Israel, looking on to the ultimate blessing under the Messiah. All enemies will be subdued, and Christ will reign gloriously. How often we see that prophecy leads us on to the coming and reign of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is, alas, a melancholy turn in the account of the next chapter. The Israelites,

those of whom all these blessings were described, began to intermingle with the Moabites, those enemies of God's people — those who sought to have them cursed.

“And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. And the Lord said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel. And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baal-peor.” Chap. 25:1-5.

Now connect this with a verse in Numbers 31:

“Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the *counsel of Balaam*, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the Congregation of the Lord.” v. 16.

Here we see what Balaam's counsel was. This wicked man, a man whose eyes had been opened and wilfully closed, when he saw that he could not curse the people, counseled Balak how to deceive them. What the enemy could not do with open assault, he would accomplish by stealth. This unfolds the true state of Balaam, for we might have hoped that he was changed by the revelations which he had. But

the crafty man knew that if he could get the people to intermarry and then come to the idolatrous feasts, he would bring them down in their practice from the exalted place in which they stood, and then they would reap God's governmental dealings.

Now it is precisely here that we have to be on our guard. Nothing can ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. We are a people of God's choosing and blessing — a heavenly people, too. But the enemy would tell us that it is not too bad if we mingle with the world, and join in its pursuits.

In the Lord's address to the church in Pergamos, we read, "But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of *Balaam, who taught Balak* to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication." This period of the Church's history, depicted by Pergamos, is that wherein the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire and the Church and the world formed an unholy alliance. There were some then who taught that this was not bad—but the Lord tells us it was the doctrine of Balaam. It is to tell the saints that there is nothing wrong in unholy association with the world. And it is on every hand today. It is the warp and woof of present-day Christendom.

How terribly sad it is when such bad counsel comes from the lips of true children of God. Some have openly advised young Christians to

join fraternities and earthly societies of one kind and another, when God has said, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." Through bad counsel, even from Christians, many dear young believers have kept company with unbelievers, only to end in an unholy marriage, a linking of light and darkness. Dear young Christian, please remember that all such counsel comes from the enemy of your soul; it has a deeper source than the lips of the one who gives it. And if you follow the counsel of Balaam, you will reap sore disappointment from the world, and the government of God in your life.

The devil can never frustrate the purposes of God to bless us. He can never keep us out of heaven, or take away one blessing which we have in Christ up there, but he can spoil your joy and mine and ruin our testimony for the Lord if we follow the counsel of Balaam. The word "fornication" in Revelation 2 has reference to an unholy alliance between the people of God and the world—a mixture of holy and unholy. Our happiness depends on walking in the good of all that God has given us. May the blessings bestowed on us and the glories that await us so captivate our hearts that the world will have no appeal to us. May the language of the hymn be the expression of our hearts:

"O worldly pomp and glory,
Your charms are spread in vain;
I've heard a sweeter story,
I've found a truer gain.

Where Christ a place prepareth,
There is my loved abode;
There shall I gaze on Jesus,
There shall I dwell with God."

Let us not trust in our own hearts, "for he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." Prov. 28:26. We have an old nature which is susceptible to the counsel of Balaam. And dear young Christians, beware of the little things. Great matters turn on little affairs. The bait may be small, but the hook is large. It is the small edge of the wedge that enters first. The enemy of our souls would like to draw us away from faithful devotedness to Christ, and he will use any means that he thinks will succeed.

There are many practical applications that could be made of shunning the counsel of Balaam. But we leave it to the reader to make his own application in the matters of his daily life. Anything that will draw you away from Christ in heart, anything that will make you compromise the truth, anything that is contrary to the Word of God — shun it. The world is more to be feared when it smiles on us than when it hates us. "The kisses of an enemy are deceitful." Perhaps the devil would dangle financial advantage or social advance or any one of a thousand things before your eyes. May God give the reader and the writer spiritual perception to see the tempter's hand in these offers, even though disguised like Jacob's when Isaac said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." Gen. 27:22.

There was One who trod this path before us

who never waivered for an instant in faithful devotedness to His Father, and in entire separation from the scene through which He passed. He began and finished the path of faith in all perfection (Heb. 12:1). May we keep our eyes steadfastly on Him.

“O Lord, when we the path retrace
Which Thou on earth hast trod,
To man Thy wondrous love and grace,
Thy faithfulness to God;

“Thy love, by man so sorely tried,
Proved stronger than the grave;
The very spear that pierced Thy side
Drew forth the blood to save.

“Faithful amidst unfaithfulness,
‘Mid darkness only light,
Thou didst Thy Father’s name confess,
And in His will delight.

“Unmoved by Satan’s subtle wiles,
Or suff’ring, shame, and loss,
Thy path, uncheered by earthly smiles,
Led only to the cross.

“We wonder at Thy lowly mind,
And fain would like Thee be,
And all our rest and pleasure find
In learning, Lord, of Thee.”

Paul Wilson

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