

# Shadows Of Christ & His Bride

Lesson #32

Pergamos: Balaam & Oracle #1

August 28, 2024

Jude 1:3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. [entrusted to God's holy people]

The Doctrine of Balaam had infiltrated the church in Pergamos. It is the attitude that one can be fully cooperative with the world and still serve God. It teaches compromise, wanting Christians to forget they are called to be separate and holy. [Lev. 20:26; I Pet. 1:2]

This doctrine makes believers indistinguishable from the unbelieving world. [Matt. 5:13]

How does a belief become a doctrine that is in conflict with God's Word?

- Balaam's Way                      Balaam's Error                      Balaam's Doctrine

II Pet. 2:15 Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray,

following the WAY OF BALAAM the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his own transgression;

a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

Jude 1:11 Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and

ran greedily after the ERROR OF BALAAM for reward

Jude's Appeal: Engage in the war on spiritual terrorism! Be vigilant; alert; be discerning

I Tim. 4:1-2 Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

<sup>2</sup> Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

- They have NO conscience about what they do.

The Compromising Church: Rev. 2:12-17 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: <sup>13</sup> "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

<sup>14</sup> But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the DOCTRINE OF BALAAM, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block [snare, trap] before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. <sup>15</sup> Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. <sup>17</sup> "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knows saving he that receives it.

The church itself was doctrinally sound yet they were slipping into compromise with the world. They were being soft and tolerant of error and false doctrines.

I Kings 18:21 And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. [They wanted to "have it both ways."]

Compromise describes something that combines qualities of elements of different things. It often weakens or reduces fundamental principles or standards.

Key: The Danger of Compromise: Sound doctrine was being polluted by false teaching.

It is at the expense of their testimony.

The implication: The believers in the church knew about the false teaching, but had compromised their convictions.

Result: Jesus comes to them with the Word of God to call them back to the right path.

Joshua 24:2a; 7b-10 Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, ...and you dwelt in the wilderness a long season. And I brought you into the land of the Amorites, which dwelt on the other side Jordan; and they fought with you: and I gave them into your hand, that ye might possess their land; and I destroyed them from before you.<sup>9</sup> Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and warred against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you: <sup>10</sup> But I would not hearken unto Balaam; therefore, he blessed you still: so I delivered you out of his hand.

#### Numbers 22-24: King Balak, Balaam, Cursing & Temptation

These chapters comprise a single narrative relating King Balak of Moab's attempt to curse Israel in the name of the Israelites' own deity through the efforts of a well-known Aramean prophet named Balaam, a practitioner of divination.

The story of Balaam and the test of the new Israelite generation at Baal-Peor on the Plains of Moab are the defining events of the Israelites' final months in the desert wilderness.

Background Info: Israel, near the end of their 40 years of wandering, is camped out in the plain of Moab. God has given them great victories over King Og and King Sihon.

Ray Brown: Subjugating the kingdoms of Sihon and Og was the greatest possible encouragement to a people challenged by greater tests in the land beyond Jordan. It 'ranked with the Exodus as a paradigm of God's miraculous intervention on behalf of his people'. Their victories east of the river went down in their history as a perpetual reminder of the Lord's omnipotence in time of human vulnerability. The Lord who had given them victory on one side of the Jordan would not fail them on the other.

God has promised them He will give them victory over ALL their enemies in their Promised Land. Israel will face a great temptation BEFORE they cross the Jordan and enter their Promised Land, their inheritance. The nation has been transformed from an oppressed, fearful people to a strong fighting force that now strikes terror in the hearts of the Moabites and Midianites after a victorious military showing against the Amorites.

Num. 22:3 "So Moab was in great fear because of the people, for they were numerous; and Moab was in dread of the sons of Israel."

Raymond Brown: King Balak of Moab was filled with dread; literally, 'a sickening dread came over him' whenever he thought about the approaching multitude. However, his worst fears were groundless. All his scheming, planning and worrying was for nothing.

God had told Moses not to 'harass the Moabites ... you are to pass by the region of Moab'. So much anxiety is wasted emotional energy and unnecessary mental torture.

The Moabites and the Midianites conspired together to recruit a man who had connections with the spiritual underworld, and who could therefore arrange to have a curse put on the Israelites. Balaam, from Pethor, a city located along the Euphrates River, had a reputation for success in:

- divination                      receiving hidden knowledge, especially the future
- incantation                      use of occult power to grant blessing or cursing

He was willing to sell his services to all who could pay his fee.

- Balaam, of course, had no power, in himself, to curse Israel, but, if God were willing to curse Israel, Balaam would be rewarded through Balak.

Constable: The OT does not call Balaam a prophet or seer but a diviner or soothsayer.

This title never describes true prophets of God who prohibited divination in Israel.

- The Israelites regarded it as a serious sin as well as a mark of a false prophet.
- Balaam customarily sought omens to understand the future by divination. He also had a reputation for being able to persuade the gods to take a particular course of action.

The difference between a prophet of God and a diviner/sorcerer is that the divine/sorcerer used his prophetic gifts apart from Yahweh to determine the future, while the true prophet only spoke the words of God. However, in this narrative Balaam is presented 14 times as a Gentile diviner who can only speak the words God puts in his mouth.

Num 22:8, 18, 19, 20, 35, 38; 23:3, 5, 12, 15, 16, 17, 26; 24:13

Note: Both terms are applied to Balaam, but he is never called a navi, =prophet in the OT.

Balaam, a wicked prophet, [II Peter 2:15-16] possessed great knowledge concerning God, and even received direct revelations from God. What do the prophetic gifts of this non-Israelite Gentile and his special communication with Yahweh reveal?

Balaam's prophetic gifts show that God did not limit His interaction with the family of Adam to the descendants of Jacob/Israel. God called all peoples of the earth to know and serve Him, just as He also called and blessed the Kenizzite Gentile, Caleb.

Peter: The Way of Balaam    Jude: The Error of Balaam    John: The Doctrine of Balaam  
Consider: Choosing to go the way in opposition to God will lead to error which ultimately ends in a doctrine which is opposed to God's Word.

Israel, poised to enter the promised land, their inheritance, will encounter a different kind of enemy: Hidden in the mountain heights and able to call upon the evil one to assist him.

There are hidden attacks behind the scenes that still threaten to undermine God's prophesied promise of future blessing.

*The Way of Balaam      Way of Covetousness      II Peter 2:15*

False Teachers, Brute Beasts: Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray,

following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

[They have abandoned the right road. The apostates know the right road, the straight path that God has established, but they deliberately abandon God's way for their own.]

His way: in opposition to God

Balaam means "destroyer of the people."

- Prophet for pay: one who hires himself out to do religious work to the highest bidder
- Promote falsehood to make money; cover up his sinful cravings; entice people to sin

Balaam's actions expose the deception of maintaining an outward façade of spirituality over a corrupt inward life. He was ready to obey God as long as he could profit from doing so.

- Mixture of motives > obedience and profit

Balaam demonstrates the tension between his commitment to remain loyal to the Lord's command and revelation, and yet push for his own greedy agenda as well.

- No prophet symbolizes impure motives and a double-minded heart than Balaam.

The elders of Moab offered handsome divination fees to Balaam, which he should have refused but didn't. Sadly, Balaam the prophet's number one priority was money.

- Balaam knew the right way, but deliberately chose the wrong way because he wanted to make money.
- He kept "playing with the will of God" by trying to get "a different viewpoint."

Num. 22:13 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."

Note: He doesn't tell them the reason. Israel CANNOT be cursed; God has blessed them.

Num. 22:15 After Balaam's refusal, Balak upped the ante in a second attempt to convince the prophet to be his agent against Israel.

He sends more people and ups the offer if Balaam will just come to Moab and curse Israel.

King Balak then sent "other officials, more numerous and more distinguished than the first," promising a handsome reward.

Num. 22:17 For I will promote thee unto very great honor, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people.

- Balak offered wealth in the 1<sup>st</sup> appeal. He offered power and honor in the 2<sup>nd</sup> appeal.

Num. 22:18b-19 I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more.

<sup>19</sup> Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night,  
that I may know what the Lord will say unto me more.

No matter how much you offer me, I can't go against God. But just in case He's changed his mind, Balaam decides to consult with God again. They spend the night.

Num. 22:20 And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, **If** the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do.

God appears to be changing His mind here, does He not? How can we explain this, especially when the Angel of the Lord nearly takes Balaam's life for going with these men?

1. God clearly forbade Balaam to go. Num. 22:12 God said to Balaam, 'You must not go with them; you must not curse the people, for they are blessed'
2. *It wasn't that Balaam did not know the will of God; it was that he did not want to do it.*
3. *God does not approve of everything He allows. God sometimes allows men to sin, even though He has condemned and forbidden it; "God's permissive will."*  
Woe to those who persist in their path of sin, for it is surely the road to destruction.
4. *When God allows men to do what He has forbidden, it is because it will fulfill His purposes. God will use our disobedience to instruct others and to bring about His purposes in a way men would never have imagined, or to bring about our own demise.*

The sin of Judas Iscariot in betraying the Savior was the instrument God used to accomplish our redemption on the cross of Calvary. The rejection of Jesus as the Messiah by the nation Israel opened the door to the evangelization of the Gentiles.

The next morning, Balaam saddles up his donkey and goes to meet the Moabite men. [22:21]

- His mount, a donkey, is also an indication of his status and wealth.

Balaam was definitely a hireling who was interested primarily in money [II Peter 2:15].

- Though twice he refused to accept Balak's summons, Balaam deceptively maneuvered around God's declared will so that he could go to Moab and receive his fee.

Num. 22:22 God is angry. Balaam is determined to do his own will; gives in to the covetousness in his heart. He is running ahead of God and refusing to obey God's clear directions.

God clearly told Balaam to wait until the Moabites came to him.

He sends the Angel of the Lord to stand in the roadway and block him.

- Balaam had set himself in opposition [adversary] to God.

The Hebrew word translated *oppose* in verse 22 is literally transliterated *satan*.

Out of 27 occurrences in the OT, it is rendered Satan 19 times in the King James Version

"adversary" seven times      "withstand" once.

Truth: To deliberately and purposefully oppose the will of God is to make God your adversary.

Num. 22:26 And the angel of the Lord went further, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left.

Joshua 1:7 Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper withersoever thou goest.

Consider: In your walk with the Lord, you must stay on the right path: a godly path without "mixture;" without worldly thinking, values, & desires that lead only to compromise & rebellion. Compromise is never a position of strength - only weakness. God wants you strong in the Lord.

Num. 22:34-35 And Balaam said unto the angel of the Lord, I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, if it displeases thee, I will get me back again. Then the Angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak." So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

Why did God reverse His earlier instructions by telling Balaam in a dream to not go to Moab? One reason is obvious: Without going and giving God's blessings and prophetic vision for Israel we would not have the oracles that point to the significant events that will take place in the future of God's people.

The Rabbis, however, see in this an example of human responsibility and the doctrine of free will. Balaam was tested by having to choose between God's command and his personal desires. Since God knew Balaam had in his heart the desire to accept the tempting offer of riches and fame, God allowed him to face the ultimate challenge by coming face to face with his temptations and the opportunity to choose to be obedient to God or to be unfaithful and abandon the will of Yahweh in his life [*JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers*, page 189].

Question: If the Jewish Rabbis' interpretation is correct, why might God send the angel to confront Balaam on the journey?

Answer: God's anger expressed by the angel was a warning to Balaam to remain faithful. God does not set out to entrap us.

He gives us every opportunity and encouragement to make the righteous choice.

St. Ambrose: God was angry with Balaam because he tried to deceive God: What offense does Balaam commit? He said one thing and plotted another. God seeks out a pure vessel, one not corrupted by impurity and squalor. Balaam was tested, but he was not found acceptable.

II Pet. 2:15 wrote of Balaam's deficiencies, comparing him to men who are more concerned with material rewards than with offending God.

Num. 22:36 King Balak expressed his irritation that Balaam didn't come when he was first summoned. It probably didn't sooth Balak's irritation, but Balaam reminded the king that he had certain limitations. Balaam will repeat three times to Balak that his prophetic gifts come from Yahweh and he can only say the words that Yahweh gives him.

Num. 22:36-24:25 Balak enlists the prophetic word of the famous seer Balaam to curse God's people and undermine God's kingdom agenda. Balaam tries 3 times to curse Israel, but he always speaks blessings.

The covenant-keeping God is immutable and committed to His promises to bless Israel. All the promises made in Genesis to the patriarchs will be fulfilled in perfect detail. As the nation prepares to enter the promised land, they can be assured of God's future blessing and His ultimate destruction of their enemies.

Amazingly, four of the most important revelations in the entire Bible were given through a pagan seer named Balaam, including the classic Messianic prophecy of Numbers 24:17.

There are four separate prophecies given through Balaam in Numbers 23 and 24.

When you compare the 4 prophecies, you begin to observe some very interesting relationships.

1. Each subsequent prophecy is longer and more specific than the previous one.  
From Balak's perspective, every prophecy gets worse.
2. At the beginning, Balaam's words emphasize the impossibility of cursing the people God has blessed; as these prophecies continue, there is a growing emphasis and specificity regarding the judgment of God on Israel's enemies. Does Balak want God's people cursed? Instead, he finds that he and his people are cursed!
3. There is also a growing emphasis and specificity regarding the blessings that God will bring upon His people, Israel.
4. They ascend and increase in power, details, and distance as Balaam spoke.
5. All the prophecies of Balaam are the outgrowth of God's covenant promises to Israel. Balak's attempts to reverse this covenant will prove futile.

#### Balaam's Three Oracles Commissioned by King Balak of Moab

Num. 22:41 And it came to pass on the morrow, that Balak took Balaam, and brought him up into the high places of Baal, that thence he might see the utmost part of the people.

Num. 23:1 And Balaam said unto Balak,

Build me here 7 altars and prepare me here 7 oxen and 7 rams.

Dr. Criswell: Balaam was probably a Mesopotamian baru, or priest-diviner, known to us from ancient tablets. These specialized in "seeing" the future in the entrails of slaughtered animals, in drops of oil on water, in the stars, in clouds and in influencing the will of the gods.

Seeing that Israel must have the blessing of a god, King Balak summoned the most famous supernaturalist in the east to thwart that god's plans.

Wiersbe: Balaam used these sacrifices as part of his sorcery and soothsaying. He didn't simply wait for God's promised message. In His grace and goodness, God used this evil man and endured his duplicity because He had a special message to declare about His people Israel.

Num. 24:1 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.

### Balaam's 1<sup>st</sup> Oracle: Numbers 23:5a, 7-10

Num. 23:5a,7-10 And the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth...<sup>7</sup>Then Balaam took up his oracle, and said, "Balak, the king of Moab brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, 'Come, pronounce a curse on Jacob for me, and come, denounce Israel.' <sup>8</sup>How can I curse whom God has not cursed, or how can I denounce whom the LORD has not denounced?"

God had especially blessed the people of Israel. They could not be cursed. This was part of God's covenant with Abraham [Gen. 12:1-3]. It has been fulfilled throughout their history. God has judged every ruler and nation that has caused His people to suffer, including Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Nazi Germany. No nation has been blessed of God like Israel, not only with material blessings and divine protection, but primarily with spiritual blessings to share with the whole world. Paul lists some of them in Romans 9:1-5. Israel gave the world the knowledge of the true and living God, the written Word of God, and Jesus Christ the Savior of the world.

Num. 23:9 For from the top of the rocks I see them, and from the hills I watch them.

Indeed, a nation that lives alone, and it will not be reckoned among the nations.

King Balak took Balaam to Bamoth Baal in the high places for the 1<sup>st</sup> oracle. [Num. 22:41].

He can only see the outskirts or a portion of the camp of Israel in the plains of Moab.

Num. 23:9 Balaam says Israel will "dwell alone" and not be "reckoned among the nations."

Jews were chosen by God and therefore were a nation set apart from the other nations

➤ The Lord had declared this to Israel at Mount Sinai.

Ex. 19:5-6 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:

<sup>6</sup> And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.

These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

In his farewell message to Israel, Moses also emphasizes the uniqueness of Israel as the people of God [Deut. 4:20; 14:2, 21; 26:18-19; 32:8-9; 33:3, 28-29]

He reminded them that God chose them because He loved them [Num. 7:6-8].

Instead of rejoicing in their uniqueness as the people of the true and living God, they imitated their neighbors in their worship and conduct, and God had to discipline them.

Instead of letting God rule as their King, they asked for a king "like all the nations" [I Sam. 8:5]

Dwell Alone: From AD 70 to 1948, Israel did not exist as a nation; thus, other nations did not recognize her. Since 1948, the Jewish state has often stood alone as enemies have risen from within and without.

Num. 23:10 Who can count the dust of Jacob, Or as a number, the fourth part of Israel?

Let me die the death of the upright, and let my latter end be like theirs."



Constable: The "fourth part of Israel" refers to that quarter of the camp that was closest to Balaam as he prophesied. He could not even count the quarter of the nation that was closest to him. This is another indication, besides the number of Israelite males counted in each tribe, that Israel was about two million strong at this time.

The theme of this verse revolves around the righteousness and favor of God upon the Israelites. Balaam, a non-Israelite, recognizes and acknowledges the greatness and favor that God has bestowed upon the Israelites. He marvels at the vast numbers of Jacob and the fourth part of Israel, illustrating the sheer magnitude and abundance of God's chosen people. Balaam longs for a death similar to theirs, a death of righteousness and blessing.

His use of the word "dust" reminds us of God's promises to Abraham and his descendants that they would multiply and become as numerous as the dust of the earth.

Oracle #1: The seed of the Messiah will be innumerable. Num. 23:10a

Gen. 13:16; 15:5 God previously promised Abraham: I will make your descendants as the Dust of the earth....or the stars in the sky.

Gen. 22:18 God promised that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through Abraham's seed.

Heb. 11:12 Through Jesus, the Messiah, God fulfilled His promise that Abraham's Descendants would become "as the stars of the sky in multitude; innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore."

God faithfulness to the Jews. The Jews left Israel with only 70 men [Gen. 46:8].

Yet, after almost 400 years, they had grown to 603,000 fighting men [Num. 1:46].

Although they were not yet innumerable, what does this tell you about God's faithfulness?

- God will never leave you nor forsake you.

Neither Balaam nor Balak could curse Israel because God would not allow it: "

God previously promised Abraham:

"I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse." [Gen. 12:3].

Although the Jews had done nothing to deserve God's promise, He would keep His Word.

What Balak cannot grasp, and Balaam begins to understand, is that God's relationship with Israel is based upon His covenant with Abraham and his descendants. Unlike men, God will not break His promises. No matter what Balak offers, there is no way that Balaam or any other prophet can manipulate Him so that He will abandon His people, to whom He has eternally committed Himself in the form of a covenant:

Nations come and go, but in spite of their many trials, the people of Israel have never been destroyed. Instead, they have multiplied and today are found all over the world. Balaam was sent to curse Israel, yet he ended his oracle by declaring that he wanted to be like Israel!

"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

Rom. 12:1 Have you made your life a living sacrifice for Jesus Christ?

Or is your longing to be righteous like Him just a mere desire?