

Thought For The Week

Articles: [Balaam Son of Beor, Part 2](#) ~300 words, ~1700 words

Balaam Son of Beor

Part 2

The evening Scripture reading, delivered by John, was a single verse from Revelation 2:14: “Nevertheless, I have a few things against you. There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin, so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality.” With that text as the anchor, Jim opened the second half of his study on Balaam son of Beor by reminding the congregation that the morning lesson had focused on the unseen protection of the angel of the Lord. While Israel camped on the plains of Moab, unaware of the spiritual warfare surrounding them, God was already at work foiling the schemes of King Balak.

Balak, terrified by the approaching nation, had joined forces with the Midianite leaders and hired Balaam of Pethor. Balaam was no ordinary seer. He belonged to the baru, a Mesopotamian caste trained in the black arts, familiar with every local religion and every local god. These men kept their ears open to current events so they could turn information into advantage. They served Baal and, by extension, functioned as agents of Satan. Their specialty was cursing—individuals, families, towns, entire countries—for a price. Balaam’s own name meant “devourer of people,” and his father’s name meant “consume like fire.” The names were not poetic; they accurately described the character of the family trade.

Jim noted with characteristic humor that no one had ever shrunk back at the sound of his own name. Balaam, however, carried a reputation that made pagan kings tremble. The morning session had closed with Numbers 22, just after Balak’s second, more impressive delegation of princes arrived. Balaam recognized desperation when he saw it. Larger princes meant larger payment. Yet God was about to place His own word in the prophet’s mouth and force him to ask the question that should have ended the entire negotiation: “Is God a man, that He should lie, or a son of man, that He should change His mind?”

The angel of the Lord permitted Balaam to go, but only under strict conditions. Balaam, however, could not wait. Driven by the prospect of wealth, he rose early, saddled his donkey, and set out. Scripture records that God was angry. Proverbs warns that the Lord hates the feet of those who rush into evil. The angel of the Lord—Christ Himself—stood in the path with drawn sword. Balaam could not see Him; the donkey could. Three times the animal tried to turn aside, and three times Balaam beat her. Then the Lord opened the donkey’s mouth. In human speech she reasoned with her master about the injustice of the blows.

Peter later explains the episode while warning against false teachers. In 2 Peter 2:15-16 he writes that such men “have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—a beast without speech—who spoke with a man’s voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.” The

apostle's insight is sharp: Balaam's problem was not ignorance of God's will; it was greed for dirty money. His heart had already chosen the wages of wickedness, and that choice had driven him to the edge of madness. Only after the donkey spoke did Balaam's eyes open. He saw the angel, heard the threat of death, and offered to turn back. The angel ordered him forward under the same restriction he had already received: speak only the words I give you.

Balak met the arriving seer with sacrifices to Baal. Balaam ate of the idol meat without hesitation—an act entirely consistent with pagan custom and entirely inconsistent with the worship of the living God. From the high places of Baal, Balak showed Balaam the vast Israelite camp and demanded a curse. Seven altars were built, oxen and rams prepared. Balaam inquired of the Lord, and the Lord put a word in his mouth. Instead of a curse came a blessing. Shocked, Balak moved the prophet to a second vantage point, built another set of altars, and again sought omens. Again God filled Balaam's mouth with blessing. This time the oracle declared that Israel's God was among them, that the shout of a king—the presence of the angel of the Lord—was in their midst, and that no curse, no omen, no divination could succeed against them.

Balak, now desperate, ordered Balaam neither to curse nor to bless. Balaam answered that he must speak only what God commanded. At the opening of Numbers 24 the pattern changed. Seeing that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, Balaam no longer sought omens. He faced the wilderness, beheld the camp, and the Spirit of God came upon him. For the first time he prophesied as a true prophet of the Lord, giving glory to God and pronouncing a third blessing. He declared that those who bless Israel will be blessed and those who curse Israel will be cursed, and he foretold the coming doom of the Canaanite nations. Enraged that the hoped-for curse had become a threefold blessing, Balak dismissed Balaam without the promised riches and honor.

Jim paused to underscore the sovereignty of God. The Lord had taken an enemy trained in the deep things of Satan and forced him to bless the very people he had been hired to destroy. The angel of the Lord had twisted the arm of the sorcerer until he cried “Uncle.” Yet Jim immediately warned the congregation not to grow sentimental about Balaam. The man was never converted. What God had done was comparable to a schoolyard hero thrashing a bully so the weaker children could walk free. The immediate threat was removed, but the bully still had one last scheme.

Before leaving, Balaam whispered counsel into Balak's ear. Scripture does not record the words, but Numbers 25 reveals the result. The daughters of Moab invited the men of Israel to the sacrifices of their gods. The people ate, bowed down, and joined themselves to Baal of Peor. The Lord's anger burned, and a plague killed twenty-four thousand. After the plague, Israel's army marched against Midian. Numbers 31 records that they killed every male, including the five kings of Midian and Balaam son of Beor himself. Verse 16 makes the connection explicit: it was through the counsel of Balaam that the Midianite women had caused Israel to act treacherously against the Lord at Peor. Moses therefore ordered the surviving women put to death.

If Balaam could not destroy Israel from the outside by curse, he would destroy them from the inside by corruption. He taught Balak to appeal to sensuality, to lure the people into idolatry and sexual immorality. Jim asked the congregation to picture Satan whispering the same temptation into a human ear. Balaam was simply doing the enemy's bidding.

Christ Himself confirms this interpretation in Revelation 2:14. Addressing the church at Pergamum He says, “I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things

sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.” The same strategy that wrecked Israel at Peor was at work inside a first-century congregation. Temple prostitution and idol feasts were leaking into the fellowship, and the risen Lord called it by its ancient name: the teaching of Balaam. The same divine Person who stood in the path with drawn sword in Numbers was now confronting the same teaching in Asia Minor.

The historical narrative therefore carries a searching personal application. How many of us, Jim asked, are restrained from sinning merely by the fear of God’s punishment? Balaam obeyed the command not to curse Israel, yet his heart remained unchanged. He still found a way to extract payment by advising the moral ruin of God’s people. It is possible to stop short of certain sins out of dread of consequences while the heart continues to love the wages of wickedness.

God does not want external compliance born of fear alone. He wants the heart. He wants willing obedience that springs from love and gratitude for what He has already done. He gave His Son. Jesus paid the price on the cross to take away our sins. That is the ultimate demonstration that He has our backs. As believers grow, they must learn the nature of sacrificial agape love. The mature Christian shares the mindset of 1 John 4:18: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”

Fear of wrath is appropriate at the beginning of the Christian walk and remains necessary whenever we are tempted to do what we know is wrong. Yet the mature believer delights to please God and obeys willingly. Jesus said in John 14:21, “Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.” Hebrews 6:1 therefore urges us to leave the elementary teachings about Christ and press on to maturity, for the mature are able to distinguish good from evil.

Israel was tested and should have known better. When false teachers or evil plans are whispered in our ears, we must reject the temptation as Israel ought to have done. The outcome for both the corrupters and the corrupted was tragic. These accounts are recorded so that we may learn from them. Jesus had Israel’s back; He prevented the curse and turned it into blessing. He has our backs as well. As long as we walk in obedience to His will, we will receive His blessing.

The invitation remained open for any who needed the prayers of the saints.

[back to top](#)

Balaam Son of Beor, Part 2

John read Revelation 2:14, in which Christ rebukes those who hold to the teaching of Balaam—the man who taught Balak to entice Israel into idolatry and sexual immorality. Jim continued his study of Balaam by recalling how the angel of the Lord had protected Israel from Balak’s hired curse. Balaam, a Mesopotamian **baru** trained in the black arts and known as a “devourer of people,” was driven by greed for the wages of wickedness.

Despite God’s clear restriction, Balaam eagerly set out after Balak’s second delegation. The angel of the Lord stood in his path with drawn sword. Only the donkey saw the danger and turned aside, receiving three beatings until the Lord opened its mouth to rebuke the prophet’s madness—an event later cited by Peter (2 Peter 2:15-16). Balaam finally saw the angel, humbled himself, and was allowed to proceed only if he spoke the Lord’s words alone.

Three times Balak sought a curse; three times God filled Balaam’s mouth with blessing. On the third occasion the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied Israel’s future victory. Yet Balaam was never changed. Before departing he whispered counsel to Balak: corrupt Israel from within by inviting them to Moabite sacrifices and immorality. Israel fell at Baal of Peor; twenty-four thousand died in the plague. Balaam himself was later killed by the sword when Israel judged Midian (Numbers 31).

Christ identifies the same teaching in the church at Pergamum. The deeper lesson is personal. Many, like Balaam, may avoid certain sins merely from fear of punishment while the heart still loves the wages of wickedness. God desires willing obedience born of love and gratitude for the cross. Perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). The mature Christian keeps Christ’s commands because he loves Him (John 14:21). Jesus had Israel’s back then; He has ours now—provided we walk in genuine obedience.

[back to top](#)