

*Balaam – Introduction*

**Balaam – Prophet for Profit**

**Good morning.** Today we'll get into Numbers 22, the story of Balaam. But, before we do, I want to briefly mention a movie.

**SLIDE: *Maleficent***

A couple of weeks ago, my daughter Janell and I saw the movie called Maleficent starring Angelina Jolie. It's a Disney movie with a twist on the Sleeping Beauty story – and I must say that it was amazingly good. The young girl – Aurora – is cursed to prick her finger on a spinning wheel on her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, go into a deep sleep, and can only be awakened by a kiss. I won't give away the plot twist, but the striking line in the movie is: **"The Curse can be broken only by true love's kiss."**

That's a good lead-in to this week's presentation – the Scripture today is about the attempt to put a curse on Israel.

**SLIDE: BALAAM** Balaam - intro

The story of Balaam and friends. If you come from a Protestant background, this story was usually a favorite in Sunday school, as it gives children the opportunity to say a certain three-letter word without being reprimanded.

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Now, because the incident of a talking donkey is so memorable, many messages have spent a lot of time talking about that aspect of the story – but I will not. I admit that the incident is humorous, but **focusing on it is like being absorbed with the ventriloquist act on stage *when there's a colossal spiritual battle going on behind the curtain.*** And – that's what's going on in these chapters.

- Incidentally, while the fact that a **donkey talked and knew more than her master did** is interesting, it's really not so strange – Donna & I recently moved from a neighborhood where many of the pets knew more than their masters did.

SLIDE – OUTLINE

Numbers 22:

- Balaam is hired to curse Israel
- Talking Donkey

Numbers 23–24

- Oracles from the Holy Spirit
- Star of Bethlehem

Numbers 23–24 contain perhaps the most captivating chapters on Divine Prophecy in the Old Testament, and it's all occurring out of earshot of Moses and the Israelites. They have no idea of the battle waging on the surrounding mountainside between Jehovah and paganism. And, I say 'captivating' because the oracles are delivered by a pagan sorcerer forced by God to prophesize.

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Balaam – the GENTILE witch – utters four oracles that I believe are a Bible within a Bible. He speaks prophetic words about Yehovah's character, His unchangeableness, His faithfulness, His love of His people, and the coming Messiah.

If you were an Israelite, you could take these oracles – just by themselves – memorize them, and end up loving Yehovah and looking forward to the coming Messiah.

Numbers 25 (Balaam not mentioned but what happens is because of his advice)

<CLICK>: today, talking about Balaam being hired to curse Israel and the incident with the talking donkey.

**SLIDE: BALAAM & BALAK**

The story contains two main characters that are suddenly introduced into Jewish history – BALAAM and BALAK. Who are these guys? Balaam is the sorcerer for hire. Balak is the King of Moab who has 3 million Israelites camped in his backyard. He's scared. He aware of what this God of the Israelites had done to the Egyptians 40 years ago, and he just recently witnessed up close what Israel had done to the Amorites – a nation that had been – until now – stronger than his.

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- **If Israel enters into the Promised Land, Balak realizes that the BALANCE of power, not just locally but worldwide – will be altered FOREVER.**

In an act of desperation, Balak turns to a famous witch for hire, a manipulator of spiritual forces, to do battle in the *spiritual realm* so that Israel might be defeated in the *physical* realm. His weapon – Balaam's power of cursing.

Balak, in effect, is trying to achieve a final solution to the Israelite problem – a goal that we have heard that countless times down thru history– and we can hear it repeated very loudly today in the Mid-east and increasingly in Europe. **Why?**

- **Because these Israelites challenge idolatry – false gods – they have a King in their midst, and it is YAHWEH.**
- **And, they will produce the Messiah; the serpent will always persecute them.**

So, this story is both humorous, encouraging, and – at the same time – chilling, because it reveals a hidden reality we face as Christians. There's a battle occurring in the spirit world that the Israelites know nothing about. The battle that we witness here and now is often not the true battle that is waging.

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**SLIDE: WAS BALAAM A BAD GUY...?** Balaam will leave you scratching your head, wondering whether he was a true prophet of God who went astray, or whether he was just another religious husker that abound on TV today.

Now, if you just read Chapters 22–24, you'll probably come away with a very wrong impression of Balaam. At first glance, he seems like a neutral participant who reveres Yahweh and doesn't really hate the Israelites.

- And, that's an easy conclusion to draw, since Balaam actually verbally concedes to YAHWEH's authority and later he utters four truly extraordinary oracles about Yahweh, Israel and the Coming Messiah.
- But, the Book of *Deuteronomy* (23:4–5) shows Balaam as an enemy of God and of Israel and he is regarded as just a hired mercenary.
  - Nehemiah and Micah recall him to the people of their days as an evil man whom God defeated (Nehemiah 13:2; Micah 6:5).

And...

**SLIDE:** Jesus to Pergamum

In the book of *Revelation*, Jesus identifies Balaam as a type of false teacher who brings false ideas into the church. "But I have a few things against you (Church at Pergamun), because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling

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block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality" (Revelation 2:14).

- Jesus exposed this *“everything-is-permitted-to-me because I’m saved”* type of teaching. Jesus obviously didn’t appreciate this in His Church.
- **The disruption at Pergamum represents the inevitable results of allowing false prophets to influence the Church.**
- ◎ The story of Balaam demonstrates again that God apparently uses hucksters – and swindlers and charlatans and false prophets and tax collectors and prostitutes and Pharisees and Judases and donkeys and – **you and I** – to bring about His Plan.
- **So – for our purposes as we read the story, don’t picture Balaam dressed as a prophet – try to picture him as running round with a **pointy black hat and a book of spells.****

SLIDE: Bless and curse

Now... **the BACKDROP** against which the entire Balaam story will play out occurred over 500 years earlier...

God’s covenant with Abraham and his descendants. The first time we read about the **Abrahamic Covenant** is in Genesis 12:1–3:

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*Now the LORD had said to Abram:*

*"Get out of your country,  
From your family  
And from your father's house,  
To a land that I will show you.*

*I will make you a great nation;  
I will bless you  
And make your name great;  
And you shall be a blessing.*

*I will bless those who bless you,  
And I will curse him who curses you;  
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

✓ **Balaam will try to change God's mind  
about His promise.**

OK... Numbers Chapter 22 opens with these words...

SLIDE: The Plains of Moab

"Then the Israelites traveled to the plains of Moab and camped along the Jordan across from Jericho."

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OK – They are in the very northern boundary of Moab – which today is in the territory of the Kingdom of Jordan. **Who was Moab?**

**SLIDE: Abraham's nephew Lot and History**

- Moab was a distant cousin of the Israelites. He was a descendant of Lot, who was the nephew of Abraham.
- As you probably remember, Lot chose to live in the city of Sodom because of the bright lights and chances of making money.
- God eventually had enough of their immorality and declared to Abraham that decrees that 5 cities – Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim and Zoah – will be destroyed. Abraham gets God to agree to spare Sodom (where Lot and his family lived) if the angels can find 10 righteous people.
- Well, there were not 10 righteous people in the city, so an angel led Lot, his wife and two daughters out of the city – wife looked back against specific instructions not to, and she was turned into a condiment.
- Lot asks the angels to allow him to escape to Zoar, the smallest of the 5 cities because he feared trying to live completely on his own (Genesis 19:20–23). The angel agrees and Zoar is spared.
  - Lot and his daughters live in a cave on the outskirts of this very small city at the southern end of the Dead Sea. Lot's daughters think they're pretty much out of luck for having children with Hebrews and they want children



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- Solution – get their father drunk and have intercourse
- This produces two sons:
  - The younger daughter named her son "Ben-Ami," which means "son of my people." We get the name Ammon from this today (capital of kingdom of Jordan). This daughter evidently felt uncomfortable about the incest, and modestly concealed the baby's lineage.
  - The older daughter also felt uncomfortable about the incest, but she dealt with it in the much different way. She figured that by presenting incest as a valid alternative lifestyle, that would totally justify her behavior and she'd have nothing to feel guilty about! In other words, "I can do whatever I want ... and who are you to tell me otherwise?!" So she brazenly named the eldest son "Moav," which means "from my father." **She made "incest" the child's name!** It actually can be translated **Who's Your Daddy?** or **What's Your Father?** a rhetorical question to which the story may easily give rise.

So – both Moab and Ammon are kin to the Israelites. And, just like God instructed Moses not to fight the Edomites, God also instructed Moses not to harass the Moabites or the Ammonites (Deut 2).

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➤ Trivia – who is the most famous person in the Bible from Moab?

- Ruth – an ancestor of Jesus “*Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.*” Ruth is an example of how God can change a life and take it in a direction He has foreordained, and we see Him working out His perfect plan in Ruth’s life, just as He does with all His children (Romans 8:28). Although she came from a pagan background in Moab, once she met the God of Israel, Ruth became a living testimonial to Him by faith. Ruth, the Moabite, is one of only three O.T. women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus. (Matthew 1:5).

SLIDE: OK: let's read on in Numbers Chapter 22...

Numbers 22

<sup>2</sup> Now Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites (**Note: AMORITES, not AMMONITES (the son of Lot) - I'll explain this in a minute**), and Moab was terrified because there were so many people. Indeed, Moab was filled with dread because of the Israelites.

<sup>4</sup> The Moabites said to the elders of Midian, “This horde is going to lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field.”

So Balak son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, <sup>5</sup> sent messengers to summon Balaam son of Beor, who was at Pethor, near the Euphrates River, in his native land. Balak said:

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"A people has come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the land and have settled next to me. <sup>6</sup> Now come and put a curse on these people, because they are too powerful for me. Perhaps then I will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that whoever you bless is blessed, and whoever you curse is cursed."

<sup>7</sup> The elders of Moab and Midian left, taking with them the fee for divination. When they came to Balaam, they told him what Balak had said.

<sup>8</sup> "Spend the night here," Balaam said to them, "and I will report back to you with the answer the LORD gives me." So the Moabite officials stayed with him.

<sup>9</sup> God came to Balaam and asked, "Who are these men with you?"

<sup>10</sup> Balaam said to God, "Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, sent me this message: <sup>11</sup> 'A people that has come out of Egypt covers the face of the land. Now come and put a curse on them for me. Perhaps then I will be able to fight them and drive them away.'" <sup>12</sup> But God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed."

<sup>13</sup> The next morning Balaam got up and said to Balak's officials, "Go back to your own country, for the LORD has refused to let me go with you."

<sup>14</sup> So the Moabite officials returned to Balak and said, "Balaam refused to come with us."

<sup>15</sup> Then Balak sent other officials, more numerous and more distinguished than the first. <sup>16</sup> They came to Balaam and said:

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“This is what Balak son of Zippor says: Do not let anything keep you from coming to me,<sup>17</sup> because I will reward you handsomely and do whatever you say. Come and put a curse on these people for me.”

<sup>18</sup> But Balaam answered them, “Even if Balak gave me all the silver and gold in his palace, I could not do anything great or small to go beyond the command of the LORD my God. <sup>19</sup> Now spend the night here so that I can find out what else the LORD will tell me.”

<sup>20</sup> That night God came to Balaam and said, “Since these men have come to summon you, go with them, but do only what I tell you.”

**SLIDE: Map of area**

OK – Here's a blowup of the area where the events of Chapters 22–25 take place. The Israelites come into the Jordan valley after detouring around Edom. In the time of Moses, the Jordan River valley were occupied by three main groups: the **Amorites, Ammonites and Moabites**. God told Moses to avoid the Kingdoms of Ammon and Moab because they are kin thru Abraham's nephew Lot. However, God **didn't** say for them to leave the *Amorites* unmolested.

I know that the variety of tribal names can get confusing – the *Ammonites* were kin, the **Amorites** were not.

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The **Amorites** were descendants of Noah's son Ham; the Land of Canaan was named after the grandson of Ham. So, the Amorites were **NOT** close relatives of Abraham like Edom and Moab.

The **Amorites** were, however, a large and powerful nation that controlled much of both sides of the Jordan River, including the cities of Jerusalem and Hebron. In fact, the Moabites were actually vassals of the Amorites.

Now, we've heard about the Amorites before...

About 550 years previous to the Plains of Moab encampment, God had promised the land of Canaan to Abram and his descendants forever.

But then God tells Abraham that **before** this happens, his descendants will be slaves in a foreign land (Egypt) for 400 years; but then they will come out with many possessions and come back and inherit this very land.

Why wait so long?

**SLIDE: MAP AGAIN**

- Because, God says, “**the sin of the Amorites is not yet full.**”  
Genesis 15.

What does that mean? Don't fully know for sure – perhaps it took them 400 years to become fully emerged into child sacrifice – which we know happened from history.

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- Here's a spiritual reality that we don't think about, but it's true.
- There comes a point in time when God says to a nation – any nation – – that's enough – you're finished!

So – Israel now enters the Jordan Valley from the southeast and asks to pass peacefully thru Amorite territory to cross the Jordan River – this side of the River is not Canaan, so these people here were not being threatened by Moses. However, the Amorites on this side of the River here decide to fight.

< CLICK >

Now, the story of the battles with the Amorites is in the end of Numbers Chapter 21, but we'll get into this another time. However, the outcome was that Israel defeated the Trans-Jordan Amorites and conquered their territory – this area is in modern-day kingdom of Jordan. Some of the Israelites will later settle here rather than in Canaan proper.

SLIDE map again:

Israel now stands on the threshold of the Promised Land, separated only by the waters of Jordan. But, before crossing that boundary-line, God allowed one more trial for them – but this time, it is to reveal the real character of heathenism in its relation to the God's kingdom.

Israel must learn two realities:

- 1) Not only were the heathen nations were hostile *political* powers, opposing their progress; but also,

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- 2) Their religion of these nations itself – **by its very nature** – is incurably hostile to the kingdom of God.
- The two religions are incompatible, and therefore no alliance must ever be formed with heathenism, no intercourse cultivated, nor even its presence tolerated.

Now, Moses promises the Moabites that the Israelites will be peaceful, but the King of Moab – Balak – is worried. The Israelites appear as a horde of locusts descending upon them.

Ver. 3 says: **And Moab was terrified because there were so many people –**

**Three million people camped in your backyard is difficult to ignore... But there's** more involved here than just fear of the numbers. Small armies can overcome large armies if they fight better. The issue was that Jehovah, the God of Israel, was there and He had proven that He keeps His word. He also has proven that He is stronger than the gods of the Egyptians and the Amorites.

- So, while the Moabites feared for their national territory, **they feared even more for their national deities and their national religion.** Even though Moab was kin to Israel, they were of a different religion – they worshipped Baal.
-

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**To understand Balak the King of Moab, we've got to get into the head of a heathen!**

- Every heathen people worshipped its own gods. And these gods **only controlled the area in which they lived.**
- This may be very difficult for us to comprehend, but that's what it was. Most people today, even if they don't believe in God, do believe that if there was a God, He would be everywhere.
- Not back then. If you got onto an AMTRAK train in Albany, you'd be leaving the local god – I'll call him **Cuomo**. And when you arrive in the Bronx, you'd be greeted by another god named **Stengel**.
- That's how they thought in those days, and many primitive tribes still think this way today.
- If you walk away from a location and a people, you would be leaving your god behind.
- **But – this God Jehovah travels!** He moves around with the Israelites! He dwells in their midst – this was unheard of.
- So, not only are the Israelites seen as invading the land PHYSICALLY, another god – Jehovah – is also invading the land SPIRITUALLY.
  
- Now, the ancient world was an ECUMENICAL LOT – everybody at this time respected each other's gods.
- Nobody danced in front of the other person and sang "***My god is better than your god...***"



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- It was a free society – I'll have my god and you have yours and everyone is happy.
- So, you worship Baal and I'll worship Shiva or Osiris or Ra or Baal – that's OK – we're inclusive here.
- And, everybody was happy until then Israel turned up. Israel claimed that Jehovah was their God – and everybody said “Good -> He's your God.”
- And they said, No, no, no – He is the God over all gods; He's the God over the whole earth – He is everywhere and He rules over all nations and all kings. Whether they know it or not.
- And – EVERYBODY GOT MAD.
- If you keep your God to yourself, that's OK – but why do you have to come bugging us and telling us that our beliefs are wrong – sound familiar?)

So, Balak – the King of Moab – is scared for both *his country* and *his gods*

Now, Balak *could* have allied with other nations around and combined forces (Midian already was in the coalition). Everyone was uptight with this bunch. Instead, he goes to a witch and asked spiritual aid to overcome them.

- This tells me that he was more afraid of their spiritual power than afraid of their physical power.

No doubt, Balak had tried to get Moab's national deities — Chemosh and Baal — to curse the Israelites but to no avail.

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Balak concludes – correctly – that Jehovah was stronger than his gods, and so – like all good struggling businesses do today – *he wants to **bring in a consultant** to fix the problem. Balak is worried that this Jehovah will smash his gods into pieces.*

Balaam's reputation evidently was widely recognized. The belief was that– if a witch of Balaam's status chose to exert his power with the gods – he would prevail. His SUCCESS rested on his ability to persuade and bribe the gods to come to his side of the dispute.

SLIDE: HAVE CURSES – WILL TRAVEL

- Takeoff on a late 1950's TV western about a hired gun named Paladin (Richard Boone) – he had a calling card. Balaam might have also – have curses, will travel.
- Balaam himself is a mystery – someone who has been described as "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma".
- He is a profession sorcerer for hire who relies on his ability to manipulate the “gods” to achieve his purposes.
- Old Testament *sometimes seems* to present Balaam as ‘neutral’ in character.
- But New Testament describes him as a “wicked man”.

As a businessman – professional sorcerer for hire – Balaam's **name would be at the top of ANGIE'S LIST.**

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- He was a hired gun with no conscience. His loyalty was dictated by whoever offered the most money. Balaam was the perfect choice to turn Jehovah against Israel and save Balak's nation

Now, the stakes were also high for Balaam in this endeavor. Besides the king's ransom, if Balaam could succeed in making the God of Israel one of his patron-deities, and if he could get Yahweh to turn from His promise of protection over Israel, then Balaam would **become by far the most powerful magician in the world – and both his reputation and his fees would skyrocket!**

OK – Balak – the King of Moab – sends a delegation to Balaam with the offer of a contract for cursing the Israelites, for which Balak will pay a substantial fee.

Slide: Pethor Location

400 miles.

Balaam asks the delegation to stay the night and he will ask the Lord. The text is usually translated as: "Stay here tonight, and I will bring back to you whatever word the "lord" may speak to me."

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**SLIDE: YHWH**

However, in the actual Hebrew text, Balaam says that he will consult with YHWH – the personal covenant Name of God!

“Stay here tonight, and I will bring back to you whatever word “YHWH” may speak to me.”

Balaam here used the Personal name of God – **YHWH**. From his familiarity with the spirit world and the gods/goddesses of many cultures, Balaam evidently knows that YHWH is not just an ordinary run-of-the-mill god, He was stronger than the mighty gods of the Egyptians and the Amorites, and it will take YHWH's permission for Balaam to work a curse on YHWH's people.

- Now, Balaam probably did not expect YHWH Himself to say a word to him that night. He was putting on his diviner's hat and doing a little acting here. "Oh, I can't make this decision on my own! I must consult the gods. Stay here overnight, and in the morning I will tell you if God has come to me in a dream or a vision to tell me what I can do!"
- Balaam's typical practice would have been to converse with a demon masquerading as a god – either that or make up some good story.
- But, on this occasion, YHWH surprises Balaam by actually answering him! He starts off by asking him...

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Verse 9: " And God came to Balaam and He said 'Who are these men with you?' " Was God *pretending* to be unaware of who these people were? No – God was asking Balaam a typical retorical question.

- In Genesis 3:9 when God asked Adam, as he hid in the Garden of Eden, "*Where are you?*" – God knew where Adam was; He wanted to engage Adam in conversation so that he would not be too bewildered to repent.
- And again in Genesis 4:9 when, after Cain murdered his brother, God asked him: "*Where is Abel, your brother?*"
- Jewish commentators explain that God did not want to surprise the person with whom He was communicating. (A voice from God can be shocking and quite unsettling.) God, therefore, thoughtfully posed an innocuous and unnecessary question – unnecessary, since He already knew the answer.

Well, incredibly, Balaam then makes his pitch to God! "God, let me curse them!" God responds emphatically, "No! No! No! You shall not go with them. You shall not curse them. I have blessed them."

The next morning, Balaam tells the delegation he can only do what YHWH commands, and YHWH has, via a dream, told him not to go. So the delegation returns to Moab.

When Balak hears Balaam's reply, he thinks that Balaam is just negotiating for a higher fee – the typical Middle Eastern practice of

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haggling. So, Balak sends higher-ranking delegation and offers Balaam honors and even more money; Balaam, in his covetousness, again invites the delegation to stay overnight and he will see if God has changed His mind.

Being a good salesman was important not just with his customers, but also with the gods that he dealt with in his profession. So in verse 19, Balaam (who **really** wants this job and the king's ransom of a payment that goes with it) tells the 2nd group of men to stay the night & he will consult with God about this again. He says, "Let me find out WHAT ELSE the Lord will say".

You see... Balaam is **used to having gods "change their minds"**. So – Why would this Yehoveh be any different? **In fact this whole procedure of negotiating with the gods is the basis of divining.** Negotiations routinely continued until the hoped-for omen is received. The diviner's motto was "if at first you don't succeed, try and try again".

This time, God says, "Go." You can almost hear Balaam saying to himself, *"Great! YHWH gave me permission! Great first step – **it won't be long before I'll persuade Him to let me curse them.** Saddle the donkey... let's go get the gold!"*

This incident raises an interesting dilemma that we as Christians face every day... but seldom think about it.

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SLIDE: MORAL NEUTRALITY?

- Is there such a thing as moral neutrality???
- Balaam's thought was that he'd go with these men, run thru some ritual and pronounce a curse upon the Israelites, and then go home with a pile of money for his efforts.
- Balaam, so far as we know, was not a violent man (except for hitting the donkey). He definitely would not have hung around to participate in any coming battle.
- And by the morality of that day, Balaam would do what he was asked and then just wipe his hands clean of whatever followed because, after all, he was but a mercenary of sorts.
- He wasn't pro-Moab or anti-Israel, personally.
- He had no dog in this fight and no real interest in the outcome.
- He was only doing his job as a professional diviner and had no personal agenda or (as he saw it) evil intent. **Balaam was trying to be morally neutral**
  - **kind of like the UN today**

The problem is that – to Yehovah – there IS no such thing as moral neutrality; that is a figment of the world's imagination.

- Whatever you do to impede or harm God's purpose IS an offense to God no matter what role you might play in it. Jesus said that you are *either for or against Him*. There is no middle ground.

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So it is with cursing Israel. Balaam can't just "do his job" for Balak, take the money and leave.

- He will not absolve himself from responsibility just because he personally is not anti-Israel or *even if he is personally opposed to cursing Israel but does it because that's his job...*
- Many examples today IN THE NEWS:
  - Christian-run bakery who is forced to make a choice – either make a wedding cake for homosexual marriage or make no cakes for anyone.
  - The Little Sisters of the Poor who the government wants them to provide medical insurance for contraceptive services
- God **DOES** want us to do our best at work – but you won't be praised by the God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob for being a RR engineer who did his job well & made the trains run on time if the line he was working on to Auschwitz.

OK... now for a lighter topic... the donkey makes her appearance.

Let's continue in Chapter 22...

**SLIDE: THE DONKEY SPEAKS**

<sup>21</sup> Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the Moabite officials. <sup>22</sup> But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the LORD stood in the road to oppose him. Balaam was riding on his donkey,



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and his two servants were with him. <sup>23</sup> When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, it turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat it to get it back on the road.

<sup>24</sup> Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path through the vineyards, with walls on both sides. <sup>25</sup> When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, it pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat the donkey again.

<sup>26</sup> Then the angel of the LORD moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. <sup>27</sup> When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, it lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat it with his staff. <sup>28</sup> Then the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and it said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?"

<sup>29</sup> Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If only I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now."

<sup>30</sup> The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?"

"No," he said.

<sup>31</sup> Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown.

<sup>32</sup> The angel of the LORD asked him, "Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>33</sup> The donkey saw me and turned away from me these

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three times. If it had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now, but I would have spared it."

<sup>34</sup> Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned. I did not realize you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now if you are displeased, I will go back."

<sup>35</sup> The angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but speak only what I tell you." So Balaam went with Balak's officials.

<sup>36</sup> When Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went out to meet him at the Moabite town on the Arnon border, at the edge of his territory. <sup>37</sup> Balak said to Balaam, "Did I not send you an urgent summons? Why didn't you come to me? Am I really not able to reward you?"

<sup>38</sup> "Well, I have come to you now," Balaam replied. "But I can't say whatever I please. I must speak only what God puts in my mouth."

<sup>39</sup> Then Balaam went with Balak to Kiriath Huzoth. <sup>40</sup> Balak sacrificed cattle and sheep, and gave some to Balaam and the officials who were with him.

<sup>41</sup> The next morning Balak took Balaam up to Bamoth Baal, and from there he could see the outskirts of the Israelite camp.

This episode of Balaam and talking donkey is case of God's pure humor – **THE THING THAT ALWAYS PROVOKES DIVINE LAUGHTER IS HUMAN PRETENSION.**

- Balaam had won renown as the greatest witch of his day. He was known as THE man who held the secrets of blessing and curse.

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- **YHWH now proceeds to show Balaam that – whenever He YHWA so chooses – Balaam's donkey can be a greater seer than Balaam.** The donkey sees what Balaam cannot see: the angel standing in the path, barring their way.

God humbles the self-important, just as He gives importance to the humble. When human beings think they can dictate what God will or must do because of some magic words, God laughs. And, on this occasion with the donkey, so do we.

**SLIDE: ANGEL SHOWS UP.**

So, Balaam is atop his female donkey thinking about all the things what he can do with all the money. Suddenly God shows up in the form of "an angel of Yehoveh". And amazingly, Balaam doesn't see the Angel but the donkey does.

- Now, here we learn something more about Balaam: *he is utterly spiritually blind.* He cannot see the Angel of the Lord standing in his path, blocking his way. His donkey who sees the Lord, swerves off the road and down into the fields, afraid of this sword-wielding apparition. The supposedly super-spiritual Balaam is utterly oblivious of the reason for his donkey's actions and so beats the donkey to get her back onto the road.
- A few feet farther the Lord stations Himself in a very narrow spot of the road with a fence (meaning a wall of piled stones) on either side. Afraid, the donkey tries to back away from the fearsome Angelic apparition and in doing so catches Balaam's foot

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between her side and the stone wall. Balaam is no longer merely irritated but in pain, so he beats the donkey some more to get her to release his foot and to continue.

- A few more feet and the path became so narrow that the donkey couldn't go around the Angel of the Lord so **in self-defense her knees buckled and down she went, right on the spot**. Balaam completely lost his temper and began a terrible beating of his poor frightened donkey that had done the only thing it could do under the circumstances.
- **Now, animals behaving strangely were omens to even the most novice of sorcerers. That Balaam completely ignored this animal's behavior shows his absolute determination to do what it is that he had set out to do: get that money by cursing Israel.**

Still completely blind to what was actually going on, the Lord enables the donkey to speak: and the donkey asks Balaam WHY he is beating her. In other words.... **hey, stupid, can't you figure out that something extraordinary is going on here?** Have I EVER behaved like this before? Haven't I been a good faithful servant to you? And, Balaam admits that the donkey DOES have a point.

Now that Yehoveh has Balaam's attention by means of his talking donkey, Balaam sees the fearsome figure with the sword standing before him, and so Balaam drops to the ground in panic and dread. The Lord asks Balaam why he keeps treating his donkey so badly. He points out that, in fact, if it weren't for the donkey doing the right thing, He would have used that sword not on the donkey, but on Balaam!

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- There is no doubt that Balaam's donkey spoke. The **question that arises is whether the donkey was suddenly given the power of speech** – which would also mean she was given the power to reason because she answered Balaam's questions, asked some of her own, and carried on a rational conversation.
- While it is certainly possible that God granted human powers to the donkey, **it's more likely that God opened her mouth and spoke through her.**

I must admit that I have acted like Balaam in making incorrect assumptions about things going on around me, my knee-jerk misinterpretation of events or what someone meant by his words has often made an *a.s.s.* out of me.

Now – surprisingly, Balaam doesn't question why the donkey is speaking but instead enters into an argument with the animal. **The Bible doesn't tell us why he didn't find it ODD to be addressed by a donkey,** but we do know something about his state of mind.

- The donkey's refusal to continue down the path toward a king's ransom enraged him – he beat her out of anger because she had mocked him and made a fool of him in front of the people with him. **Anger combined with GREED has a way of curtailing rational thought,** and perhaps he was so intent on exerting his dominance over the animal that he lost the ability to think clearly.

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An interesting side note: Expanding on Numbers 22:30, the Talmud (written compilation of oral Jewish commentaries on the Scripture, not Scripture itself) reports a conversation – not Scriptural – among Balak’s high-ranking delegates, Balaam, and Balaam’s donkey. The emissaries asked Balaam, “Why didn’t you ride your horse?”

Balaam – embarrassed to be riding a donkey rather than a horse – replied, “I have put it out to pasture.”

But Balaam’s donkey – somewhat insulted – asked Balaam: “Am I not your donkey?”

Balaam replied, “Merely for carrying loads.”

Balaam’s donkey said (in the words of Numbers 22:30), “Upon which you have ridden.”

Balaam replied, “That was only by chance.”

Balaam’s donkey sarcastically replies “Yeh – Ever since I was yours until this day.”

- In verse 32, the Angel of the Lord repeats that He finds what Balaam is doing in going to Balak is obnoxious. Balaam replies, but he still doesn't get it: he says, "Oh, Lord, I was so wrong not to see you in the path! I was wrong to beat my donkey so terribly! I just don't know what came over me. And, **if you *STILL disapprove*** of my going to Balak, I won't go".

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- **STILL disapprove?** The Lord just told him that He found his going to Balak obnoxious. Balaam is pandering. He is groveling and trying to negotiate.
- **Like we do ourselves....** We want a new SUV for our pleasure and status. But somehow we don't sense that the Lord says OK...

SLIDE CARS

- Example taken from **Tom Bradford's Torah Class**
- Gee, Lord, maybe it's not that You don't want me to get a new SUV, maybe it's that you don't want me to get a new BLUE Toyota SUV with the Platinum Package...
- CLICK: Would RED be better?
- CLICK: Maybe a Ford?

Have you done something similar? I know I have. We're not much different than Balaam when our desires take front and center.

OK – The Lord allows Balaam to continue to exercise his and so says that Balaam may continue to Moab; but remember, don't say one thing to Balak that I don't tell you to say. Balaam is ecstatic and off he goes to meet King Balak.

- Like Pharaoh, Balaam knows what he wants.
- But, unlike Pharaoh, Balaam doesn't need God to stiffen his backbone to proceed with his intentions.

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- God is going to use Balaam, just like He used Pharaoh, to show how He (Yehovah) is the true God and cannot be kept from accomplishing His purposes.

**SLIDE: NOW --- DID GOD CHANGE HIS MIND?**

God said to Balaam that he could go but now is very angry at Balaam for going –

- **Q: Did God change His mind?** – not once but twice in the course of a single narrative. 1st: Balaam can't go, then he can go, and now God is angry that he is going.
  - What is going on here? What is Balaam supposed to do? **What does God want?**

**SLIDE: to "go with"**

There is a distinction that is only apparent in the Hebrew text itself – there are several different words used in Hebrew to connote "go with" someone –

**click: "eetam"** – which means to "Accompany, merely tag along, just along for the ride but you don't have a common purpose"

- This is the word used when – after the donkey incident – the Angel of the Lord says he can continue but can't speak unless directed. The other word is...



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**click:** "im" – which means that you are going with a common purpose – you're of the same spirit as those you're traveling with.

- This is the word used to describe Balaam's intention when he first saddled the donkey.

OK – The angel disappears, and Balaam now will constantly be looking over his shoulder when in Moab.

Balaam will speak some tremendous words from God when he gets to Moab. Because of this, some believe that he was actually a believer in Yehovah in the true sense of the word – although perhaps a closet believer. Was he? Did he have the gift of prophesy but merely was misusing it? Or, was it something else?

*Was Balaam a "Prophet" like Isaiah & Jeremiah?*

– no. The Scriptures are clear – he was not a Biblical prophet – he was trying to be a stumbling block to God's Plans.

*Did he speak prophetically?*

YES – this time. .

*Could he have been a closet believer in YHWH? – an Israelite at heart?*

– NO

**But... How could Balaam prophesize if he was *not* a "believer" ???**

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**SLIDE: GOD SOMETIMES SPEAKS TO/THRU NON-BELIEVERS**

Actually, there are several occasions in the Scripture when God speaks to and thus nonbelievers.

- Abimelech – Abraham's wife – Genesis 20 (2x)
  - Laban – Jacob's uncle who is chasing Jacob until God warns him not to harm Jacob – Genesis 31
  - Pharaoh's dream that Joseph interprets – Genesis 41
  - Magi who had a dream and went home a different way– Matthew 2
  - **Caiaphas** – John 11
- John 11:49-52: "But one of them, **Caiaphas**, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. <sup>50</sup> Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." <sup>51</sup> He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year **he prophesied** that Jesus would die for the nation, <sup>52</sup> and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad."

**SLIDE** – here's why I say the Balaam was not a closet believer in Yahweh:

**The 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment** by God is that: "You shall have no other gods before me."

Balaam believed in YHWH in the sense that YHWA was a god, but there were many other gods. Balaam may even have believed that YHWA was

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the strongest – even the highest – god, so Yahweh may have been #1 to Balaam. Doesn't that satisfy the commandment? Perhaps Balaam had other god is before Yahweh in importance and strength? Isn't that enough? **NO.**

<CLICK>: The Hebrew text that we translate "BEFORE ME" actually means "IN MY PRESENCE" – i.e. standing in His presence.

**You don't enter the Throne-room of YEHOVAH wearing a Hare Krishna pin on your lapel!** You don't go before YHWA believing that He is just one of many gods (like Mormons do).

<CLICK> : Polytheism is not acceptable to God, even if you grant that YHWH is **Highest** on the pyramid. **Balaam was simply a spiritualist; he *believes* in Yehoveh – just as he *believes* in some unknown number of other gods.** And he will try to manipulate YEHOVEH just like he has been successful doing with other “so called” gods in his career.

This commandment applies to worshipping other gods before Him, besides Him, along with Him, or Him in them (statues supposedly representing Him – e.g., Golden Calf)

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**SLIDE: STRANGE FIRE** – what is also not allowed under this command –

> **equating any other god with YHWH.**

- According to a religions opinion survey (Barna Group), “When Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Muslims and others pray to their god, all of those individuals are actually praying to the same god, but *simply using different names for that deity.*” – Registered opinion of 40% of American adults & 63% of teenagers.
- Touchy subject – especially today. In trying to open a dialogue with Muslims, some Christians start by saying “*Islam and Christianity have a lot in common because both religions revere Abraham and that YAHWEH and Allah are really just different names for the same God.*” – GEORGE BUSH – He is a Christian President he is wrong!
- The *Koran*, which Muslim’s believe is a revelation from ALLAH to Mohammad thru a SPIRIT *calling himself* Gabriel, denies that Jesus died on the cross, denies the necessity of Christ’s shed blood for the remission of sins, demies Jesus is the Son of God, and it places Mohammad as a prophet greater than Jesus. That’s NOT information from the Father of Christ! – It may be coming from the spiritual dimension, but it is not from the Holy Spirit.
- If your religion denies the necessity of Jesus’ death for sin, promotes beating women, punishes rape victims, instructs you to kill all Jews, allows you to sell your daughters as wives as young as eight years old, and concurs with you taking nail bombs into nurseries – you’re not praying to the God above.
- “*What comes to mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us. ... Worship is pure or base as the worshipper*

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*entertains high or low thoughts of God. For this reason, the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what at any given moment he may do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God.”* AW Tozer 'The Knowledge of the Holy'

- Allah is NOT the God of the Bible, the Loving Father of Jesus. The God of the Bible so **loved the whole world that He sent His only Son – such love is impossible for Allah!**
- **Note the Picture: Nadab and Abihu**, two eldest sons of Aaron. They took their censers, put coals in them, and attempted to offer incense to YHWH in the Tabernacle. But, the **coals were NOT taken from altar of sacrifice!** Scripture calls that “**strange fire**”.
- **They were killed on the spot by God.** We cannot approach the Holy God in *whatever way seems right to us* or in whatever way some deceptive spirit tells us when God says there is only One Way. Anything except the blood of Christ is *strange fire*.
- **Being well-intentioned doesn't matter. That's not how the universe works.**

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- Certainly there are many Muslims who are kind and peace-loving – I've worked with some who impressed me with their kindness and integrity. -> **OMAR & discussion,**
  - w/o death & resurrection, there is No Christianity. Christianity is a Person!
- **Equating Allah with the God of the Bible is an unholy compromise, strange fire. It violates the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment!**

**SLIDE:** Q:- Why include story about talking donkey & Angel of the Lord?  
Humorous but is it needed?

**SLIDE:** Yes. Because, otherwise nobody would accept a sorcerer's oracles as God's word.

**SLIDE:** Just as Yahweh can enable a donkey to speak in a man's voice...  
Prophecy can come from the mouth of a non-believer (Balaam) when Yahweh wills it.

That's enough for now about Balaam and his **futile desire** to CURSE Israel. We'll get into his prophetic words next time.

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**Generational Curse Teaching**

But I want to briefly mention a related theme that is equally bogus. It is teaching that Christians are subject to generational curses and generational demons and therefore we must get rid of them to lead a happy life. It is a false teaching that has become quite popular – especially in Pentecostal and charismatic circles – and is even taught by some who claim that they are modern-day apostles. It is that Christians are affected by generational curses.

This teaching is actually an example of how **pagan thoughts** have crept into the Church. Pagans like Balak lived under unremitting fear of curses and threats from unseen and malicious spiritual causes and effects. Consequently, they need specialists in cursing and curse-breaking.

The “*Christian*” version of pagan curse breaking is the false teaching that we inherit our ancestors’ **sin nature** (the tendency all have to rebel against God), that we acquire the **accumulated guilt** of our ancestors, and quite likely we are vulnerable to possession by the **very same demons** they had – in other words, demons are inherited also. . So, we obviously **need the help of spiritual warfare specialists** to break our generational curses.

The basis for their false teaching is a misapplication of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment – “You shall have no other gods before me.” Here’s what the rest of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment says: “You shall not worship them or

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serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, **visiting the iniquity** of the fathers on the children, **on the third and the fourth generations** of those who hate Me, but showing loving-kindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments." Exodus 20:3,5-6

I can tell you that without doubt, this verse is taken out of context when it is applied to Christians.

Now – I do believe in spiritual warfare, **but this I not it!**

- The validity of a teaching cannot be determined by the number of people who embrace a teaching, by the status in the church of those who promote it, or by claims that *“The Lord revealed this truth to them.”*
- Also, in matters of faith – in other words – what we believe, as well as Christian practice – how we live out our lives as Christians– can **only** be determined by a correct understanding of Scripture.
- **The generational curse teaching is a combination of both the Colossian and Galatian heresies all over again.**
- In other words – we supposedly need Jesus **plus** special knowledge and some religious process to gain victory over the forces that are deemed to stand between us and “completeness” in Christ

The best rule of thumb when evaluating the multitude of “God told me” type of teachings that continually come down the pike is this: **JESUS + ANYTHING IS HERESY.**



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**SLIDE: Galatians 3**

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a **curse for us** -for it is written 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree' - in order that - in Christ Jesus - the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, **so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith"**

- "Don't let any advocate of bondage steal the freedom Christ has secured for you!
- And don't listen to anything that those individuals who teach these things might say to the church. They are not prophets or apostles or teachers. They deceived at best, outright liars at worst. **You are COMMANDED BY YAHWEH not to be afraid of them.**
- **CHRIST BROKE EVERY CURSE AT THE CROSS!**
- **Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage"**  
(Galatians 5:1).

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**SLIDE: TU B'AV**

- Now... I do not think that it is just a coincidence that this message was delivered today on Jewish festival of Tu B'Av.
- Tu B'Av – the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Av – is sometimes called Jewish Valentine's Day. It is a celebration of love and dedication, and marriage, and the Coming Messiah.
- God so loved the world – true love – that He broke the curse on us with the kiss of Christ.
- Christ gave the world true love's kiss at the cross.
  
- **NO MATTER HOW LONG OR LOUD SATAN SAYS 'CURSE' ---  
GOD SAYS 'BLESS'!**

**SLIDE: PSALM 85**

"Mercy and truth have met each other: justice and peace have kissed."

Psalm 85:10

**The curse was broken by True Love's Kiss at the Cross**

For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church;

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and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven. Colossians 1:16-2