

LESSONS FROM BALAAM

TEXT: II PETER 2:15, 16; JUDE 11; REVELATION 2:14

INTRODUCTION:

1. This morning we are going to look at one of the strangest men who ever walked across the pages of the Bible. His name is Balaam, and we are first introduced to him in Numbers 22.
2. A few chapters later, we read that Balaam was killed by the Israelites when they defeated the Midianites. His death is recorded in Numbers 31:8.
3. His life and death are spread over a few chapters in the book of Numbers, but he is also referred to in Deuteronomy (23:4, 5), Joshua (13:22; 24:9, 10), Nehemiah (13:2), Micah (6:5), II Peter, Jude, and the book of Revelation.
4. Peter refers to “the way of Balaam.”
5. Jude refers to “the error of Balaam.”
6. Numbers 31:16 refers to “the counsel of Balaam.”
7. In Revelation 2:14, we see that 1,500 years after his death, “the doctrine (i.e., the “counsel”) of Balaam” had corrupted the church at Pergamos.
8. And now, thousands of years later, this pernicious doctrine of Balaam is still polluting churches and hindering the work of God.
9. The counsel of Balaam refers to Balaam’s suggestion to ruin by fleshly seduction the people who cannot be cursed by divine permission.
10. Revelation 2:14 applies it to corruption in the local church – modern day Balaams advocate an unholy alliance with the worldly and with the ungodly. Its emphasis on the flesh pollutes and defiles the church.
11. I recently read an article about a worldly church in Manhattan called "Hillsong." The pastor is Carl Lentz. The article begins by saying: "He's hip, he has tattoos, and he wants his church full of gay people."
12. They also interviewed his wife. She said, "It's not our place to tell anyone how they should live, it's - that's their journey."
13. No. Actually it is the church's responsibility to tell people how they should live. First Timothy 3:15 says the church is "the pillar and ground of the truth."
14. Of course, I Timothy 3:15 is referring to a true Bible-preaching church, not a worldly church of antichrist.
15. Balaam is a complex character. Ralph Erskine, an 18th century Scottish preacher said: “To good and evil equal bent, And both a devil and a saint.”
16. Balaam had a reputation as a soothsayer (fortune-teller), and is referred to as a soothsayer in Joshua 13:22.

17. Numbers 24:1 tells us that Balaam used “enchancements” (magic spells, sorcery).
18. Divination, sorcery, and fortune-telling are strongly condemned in the Bible.
19. Peter refers to Balaam as a mad prophet (II Peter 2:16). Balaam was not a true prophet of God like Elijah or Elisha.
20. Balaam is an enigma. He acknowledged the true God of heaven, and God came and spoke to him (Num. 22:8, 9).
21. Balaam was a false prophet. And yet he uttered some of the most beautiful words in the Bible (cf. Num. 24:15-25).
22. Let us learn some lessons from Balaam.

I. BALAAM WAS MOTIVATED BY GREED (II PETER 2:15; JUDE 11).

1. In John 10, our Lord draws a contrast between a good shepherd and a hireling. Unlike the Good Shepherd, the hireling doesn't care for the sheep (John 10:13). Balaam was a hireling (cf. II Peter 2:15; Jude 11).
2. Balak, the king of Moab, heard of Balaam's reputation as a successful soothsayer, and sent messengers to go and fetch him (Num. 22:1-6).
3. These messengers had to go quite a distance to get Balaam. Numbers 22:5 tells us he was from the land of Pethor (in Mesopotamia), by the river Euphrates.
4. This was about 400 miles from Moab! Travel in those days was very difficult. It probably took Balaam and the messengers at least three weeks to make the trip.
5. Balak was willing to finance this because he was worried. He had heard great reports about the Israelites. Numbers 22:3 says he was “sore afraid” and “distressed because of the children of Israel.”
6. Balak felt it would not be worthwhile to fight Israel as long as the Israelites were enjoying the blessings of God. Balak was coming to the realization that Israel's God was far superior to the Moabite gods.
7. But rather than humble himself and seek the true God of Israel – Balak had another idea. He would seek to neutralize his enemy through some magic spells or a curse.
8. He had heard interesting stories about Balaam and so he sent messengers to go and fetch him (Num. 22:1-6).
9. Balaam seemed to have had some misgivings as to the lawfulness of Balak's request for he did not immediately agree to it (Num. 22:7, 8).
10. His misgivings were soon confirmed by the express prohibition of God upon his journey (Numbers 22:9-12).

11. That should have been enough to end all of the discussions with the Moabite messengers, but Balaam was a devious man – and a greedy, hypocritical, double-minded, crafty man.
12. Balaam should have clearly and unmistakably refused to go with the men of Moab. A true prophet of God would have explained he could not curse those whom God had already blessed.
13. But Balaam was crafty. He was covetous. Second Peter 2:15 and Jude 11 tell us Balaam was motivated by greed. Balaam saw “the rewards of divination” (22:7) in the messengers’ hands.
14. Our Lord warned in Matthew 6:24, “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” But Balaam thought he could.
15. You may recall this was Judas Iscariot’s problem also.
16. So Balaam told the messengers, “The LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you” (22:13).
17. False prophets are known not only by what they say, but what they don’t say! (cf. 22:12).
18. Notice that Balaam held back part of the LORD’s message. Balaam told them that the LORD refused to give him permission to go to Balak, but he left out, “Thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed” (Numbers 22:12b).
19. Balaam was not being straight with this Moabite delegation. He was subtly hinting that he would really like to go, but the LORD would not allow him to go (22:13).
20. The Moabite delegation picked up Balaam’s hint and returned with bigger and better bribes and offers (22:14-18).
21. The devil knows how to work a man over till he finally gets him to yield. This is what happened with Balaam.
22. Balaam showed his deceitfulness by telling the servants of Balak, “Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the LORD will say unto me more” (22:19).
23. But the LORD already told him not to go with them (22:12).
24. I hear people say this all the time. They ask me to pray for them when they know they are deliberately going against God’s Word.

II. BALAAM WAS SWAYED BY CARNALITY (REV. 2:14)

1. The doctrine of Balaam is identified and defined in Revelation 2:14 -- "to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication."
2. When Numbers 24 comes to a close, it appears that Balaam is quietly going to head back home to Pethor, but there is more to the story as we see in Numbers chapter 25 (cf. Numbers 31:16).

3. We learn later on that Balaam died on the battlefield with many other Midianites (cf. Numbers 31:6-8).
4. Furthermore, we learn that between Balaam's prophesyings and his departure, he gave Balak certain subtle and immoral advice which nearly ruined Israel (25:1-9).
5. This wicked sin is repeatedly referred to in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The apostle Paul refers to it in I Corinthians 10:8 -- "Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand."
6. Balaam's name does not appear in Numbers 25 because the sin of "the people" is the point of attention (25:1, 2).
7. Hosea 9:10 says, "but they went to Baalpeor, and separated themselves unto that shame; and their abominations were according as they loved."
8. Balaam was behind this shameful sex scandal (Num. 31:16). He told Balak, "Listen, I cannot curse Israel because God has already blessed them...but here's my advice...let your beautiful Moabite women come around at night and before you know it the Israelite men will be worshipping Baal-peor, and committing adultery with them" (25:1-9).
9. What are some of the lessons from this story? Well, for one thing, we need strong men like Phinehas (Numbers 25:6-9; Psalm 106:28-31).
10. Another lesson -- it is not at all uncommon for a carnal man to hold a spiritual office. Sadly, there are men like Balaam in churches and ministries all over the world.

III. BALAAM WAS WARNED BY GOD (NUM. 22:21-34).

1. When I say "warned," I am referring specifically to the angel of the LORD who stood in his way (Numbers 22:22 ff).
2. Even the pagan Balak saw the LORD'S hand in hindering Balaam (Numbers 24:11).
3. Balak sent word to Balaam, "Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me" (22:16), but God hindered Balaam.
4. God used an ass to hinder Balaam (22:21-31), and II Peter 2:16 says God used a this "dumb ass" rebuke him for his iniquity.
5. Balaam finally gave up trying to fight God. He said to the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned" (Numbers 22:34), but he was not sincere.
6. We hear many people say these words: "I have sinned," but oftentimes there is no genuine repentance.
7. Pharaoh said to Moses and Aaron, "I have sinned this time: the LORD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked" (Ex. 9:27).
8. But Pharaoh was insincere and impenitent.

9. Then later on, Pharaoh again said to Moses and Aaron, "I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you" (Exodus 10:16).
10. But again, there was no genuine repentance.
11. When confronted by Joshua, Achan confessed his sin, and said, "Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel" (Joshua 7:20).
12. Though he was truly repentant, it was too late for Achan. He and his family were taken out to the valley of Achor, where they were stoned to death. And after, their bodies were set on fire.
13. A man may repent, but still have to suffer the consequences of his sin.
14. King Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD" (I Samuel 15:24).
15. But King Saul was insincere. Even in his confession, he made an excuse for his transgression -- "Because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice."
16. Not surprisingly, Saul waxed worse and worse. He tried killing David, and later on he said to David, "I have sinned...I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly" (I Samuel 26:21).
17. David knew Saul was insincere, and so as soon as Saul left, David quickly fled into the land of the Philistines (I Samuel 27:1).
18. The Prodigal Son repented. He climbed out of his hog pen and returned to his father. And as soon as he saw his father, he said unto him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son" (Luke 15:21).
19. The parable of the Prodigal Son is a picture of genuine repentance.
20. Judas Iscariot said, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood" (Matthew 27:4). But Judas Iscariot went and hanged himself, which proves his repentance was not genuine.
21. Back to Balaam. Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again" (Numbers 22:34).
22. We know Balaam was insincere because after this he advised the daughters of Moab to commit fornication with the Israelites (Numbers 25:1ff).

CONCLUSION:

1. In Numbers 23:10, Balaam said, "Let me die the death of the righteous."
2. There are many people like Balaam today – they want to die the death of the righteous but they are unwilling to live the life of the righteous!
3. The doctrine of Balaam is very popular today. It is the lie that a person can be saved and live just like the unsaved.
4. It is the lie that God's grace gives Christians the right to disobey God's Word.

5. Several people have told me that they know so-called Christians and even pastors who are now supporting homosexuality, adultery, drinking, and just about every wicked sin imaginable.
6. This is the doctrine of Balaam, and it will surely bring God's judgment upon those who promote it.