

# Balaam

In this short lesson, I want to look at Balaam. If I were to ask what you remember about Balaam, I suspect the most common answer would be the talking donkey. Many of us have heard that Bible lesson since we were young.

Now, I want to look at the rest of the story around that incident and see what lessons we can learn for our own lives.

**Numbers 22:12-13** 12 God said to Balaam, “You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.” 13 Balaam rose up in the morning, and said to the princes of Balak, “Go to your land; for Yahweh refuses to permit me to go with you.”

Balaam listened to what God had said and spoke clearly about it to the messengers, saying he wasn’t permitted to go. So far, a good response.

**Numbers 22:18-19** 18 Balaam answered the servants of Balak, “If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I can’t go beyond the word of Yahweh my God, to do less or more. 19 Now therefore please stay here tonight as well, that I may know what else Yahweh will speak to me.”

He realized he couldn’t go beyond God’s word and wouldn’t even do it for a house full of gold and silver. He still sounds like a good person, a good example. But again, let us see what God says.

**Numbers 22:20** 20 God came to Balaam at night, and said to him, “If the men have come to call you, rise up, go with them; but only the word which I speak to you, that you shall do.”

God tells him to go, but with an instruction

We remember the story of the donkey turning aside, so we skip down to verse 32..

**Numbers 22:32-33** 32 Yahweh’s angel said to him, “Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out as an adversary, because your way is perverse before me. 33 The donkey saw me, and turned away before me these three times. Unless she had turned away from me, surely now I would have killed you, and saved her alive.”

Even though God told him to go, the angel would have killed him. If we don’t look at the rest of the story, this can seem hard to understand. He told him to go, why would he be killed? We have the start of the answer in the angel’s response, “your way is perverse”. Even while doing what was commanded, his way was perverse.

**Numbers 22:34** 34 Balaam said to Yahweh’s angel, “I have sinned; for I didn’t know that you stood in the way against me. Now therefore, if it displeases you, I will go back again.”

Balaam seems genuinely receptive to the message.

**Numbers 22:35** 35 Yahweh’s angel said to Balaam, “Go with the men; but you shall only speak the word that I shall speak to you.”

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Again he is told to go, but is given a reminder of his instructions. On the surface it sounds good, Balaam followed the letter of the instructions he had been given, but what was wrong? Why was he warned twice with instructions?

**Numbers 23:7-10** 7 He took up his parable, and said, "From Aram has Balak brought me, the king of Moab from the mountains of the East. Come, curse Jacob for me. Come, defy Israel. 8 How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? How shall I defy whom Yahweh has not defied? 9 For from the top of the rocks I see him. From the hills I see him. Behold, it is a people that dwells alone, and shall not be listed among the nations. 10 Who can count the dust of Jacob, or count the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous! Let my last end be like his!"

Balaam followed through and spoke the words God had given him. Then a second time in Numbers 24:14-19 he also gives God's words.

His actions followed the instructions, but had a problem. His heart, his self wasn't in it. After Initially told not to go, he asked the second time to go and was allowed. Reminds me of Israel asking for a king. It wasn't God's will (he considered it a rejection 1 Samuel 8:7), but he did allow it. We see that free will is important to God.

Even after allowing Balaam to go, he warned him twice on what he should do, and in the short term Balaam did it. God knew what was in Balaam's heart. Now, let us look at a couple of New Testament verses that fill in some of the rest of the story.

**2 Peter 2:15** 15 forsaking the right way, they went astray, having followed the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of wrongdoing;

While he did what he had to, his real love was the wages of unrighteousness. His heart wasn't set on God, but on the wages of unrighteousness. We also need to be careful that even while still doing the right things we can allow our heart to drift, we can lose our first love.

With this focus, and spending his time with unrighteous people (and kings), he ended up falling to temptation

**Revelation 2:14** 14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to throw a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. His wrong focus in his mind, came through now in his actions.

He counseled King Balak to put temptation in Israel's way. The children of Israel fell to the temptation, resulting in a plague that killed 24,000. (Numbers chapters 25 and 31 give more details).

The lessons for us.

First, we need to be careful of our mind, our heart. Just doing the right things isn't enough. If our heart isn't right, eventually the wrong will break through to our actions.

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**Matthew 12:35** 35 The good man out of his good treasure brings out good things, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings out evil things.

**Proverbs 23:7** 7 for as he thinks about the cost, so he is. "Eat and drink!" he says to you, but his heart is not with you.

**Colossians 3:2** 2 Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth.

Secondly, we need to be careful where we spend our time. Balaam managed to do the right things until he spent too much time with Balak. We need to be careful too, too much time around temptations and evil influences can similarly weaken our resolve.

Following God isn't a one-time action, but a lifetime service.