

# GOSPEL WORKERS MINISTRY

SERMON OF THE MONTH

## “TAKE HEED, AND BEWARE OF COVETOUSNESS”

May 2022

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This morning we're going to study about a prophet of God gone wrong, or we could say a true prophet who became a false prophet, and there's actually more than one example of this in the Bible. Now, would you say that someone chosen by God to be His spokesperson; someone who was filled with the Holy Spirit; someone who had become a new creature in Christ Jesus; would you say that a person like that was in a saving relationship with Jesus at that point in their life? Without question! I think we could say that that person was a recipient of eternal life, with the understanding that there's a difference, a big difference, between eternal life and immortality.

The moment one accepts Jesus as Lord and Master, they have eternal life, it's called justification by faith. **1 John 5:12** says, "He that has the Son has life, and he that has not the Son of God has not life." And in **John 3:36** it says something similar to that, but eternal life is not immortality. One can be forfeited, and one cannot.

According to **1 Corinthians 15:51-54** immortality isn't granted until Jesus comes in the clouds of heaven. And so, eternal life can be taken away if we don't continually have the Son, but when one receives immortality they will never be in danger of losing it, and this blows a big hole in the false teaching of eternal security, or once saved always saved, doesn't it?



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Now that's not my subject this morning, but I didn't want to pass up an opportunity to expose a false teaching that will cause millions of people to be eternally lost. This is one of the big lies of the devil to think that a person can accept Jesus as their Saviour and have ongoing sin in their life and still be able to go to heaven. That's not going to happen, and we should never get the idea that we are right with God when we are transgressing His Ten Commandment law, because that's the definition of sin according to *1 John 3:4*.

OK, now let's find out who this prophet of God gone wrong is. The Israelites had just conquered the land of Bashan and were about to invade Canaan as God instructed them, and as they camped near the borders of Moab, the Moabites became fearful that they were going to be next. Up until now Israel hadn't bothered the people of Moab at all, but as they had watched the success Israel was having as they battled with the surrounding nations, they began to get a little nervous, and you know, many times that's the way wars start. One country thinks another country is looking to conquer them, when in reality that might not be the case at all.

And since I mentioned war, I'll briefly mention something about what's going with Russia and Ukraine, because there are many people that are afraid of World War 3 and the danger of destroying the planet with nuclear bombs. Now I wouldn't say that this thing couldn't escalate into a world war, but the planet and all life on it is not going to be destroyed, because that's totally against Bible prophecy, which is much more reliable than all the conjecture going on in the news and in social media. In *Matthew 24* Jesus warned about wars and rumors of wars, but He said the end is not going to come until this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations. Besides, in *Genesis 8:22* God promises that "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease", and that pretty well takes care of the global warming hoax as well. So, we need to relax, because God is in control, and nothing is going to happen that He has not already warned us about and made provision for.

It has always been interesting to me why nations just can't seem to be satisfied with what they have, and it seems that most individuals are the same way, and do you know why? it's because the carnal nature; the carnal heart, is never satisfied. Never! The carnal heart is the main reason why Jesus didn't get involved in politics. He knew the answer to these kinds of problems lie in the heart of mankind, and try as we might, peace will never come to this planet as long as there's even one person that refuses a heart transplant. And by the way, God doesn't charge for His services. All that's required is a willingness to be changed. No, peace is never going to happen here, but it will happen in the earth made new, because everyone, without exception, will have received a new heart and a new mind.

In *Ezekiel 36:25-27* God gives us a wonderful promise where He says, "I (*will*) sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and (do what?) cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."

Did you notice how large God's part is when it comes to our salvation? He cleanses us, He takes away the stony heart and He gives us a new heart and He puts the Holy Spirit within us. And when this happens, we will walk in His statutes and keep His judgments, why? Because we want to! It's as simple as that! The carnal heart doesn't want to do what God wants, but the new heart is different, it delights in the law of God and therefore there's no conflict between the two. The conflict comes when we don't nurture the new heart experience by prayer and the study of God's word. When we begin to neglect the

new birth experience, that carnal heart is right there to kick the new heart out and take up residence once again. So, once we're given a heart of flesh, it's up to us to cultivate the soil around that new heart; and fertilize it by fortifying it with Scripture truth and prayer so it stays healthy and strong.

God makes it clear that "we can accomplish nothing without God, and God has arranged His plans so as to accomplish nothing in the restoration of the human race without the cooperation of the human with the divine." (*God's Amazing Grace, 319*) Our part may be immeasurably small compared to God's part, but it's just that part that's needed to make the work of salvation a success.

God can actually change the way we think. He can transform a stubborn heart and make it a tender heart and make us eager to obey His commandments and His teachings. And as I have said many times in the past, when it's in the heart to obey, it becomes a delight rather than drudgery to do what God says. That's how real victory over sin comes, and that's also the way a righteous character is formed. Hard stern battles with self will have to be waged in order to sustain the new heart that God has placed within us, that's our part, and it can't be done without our fallen nature surrendering daily to the divine nature that that new heart was planted in.

Now I need to get back to the subject at hand. The Moabites had been forced to retreat before the Amorites, and as a result, the Amorites took some of their territory. And so as Israel had no problem conquering the Amorites and taking their land and also some of the land that had previously been taken from Moab by the Amorites, the Moabites became anxious that they were going to be next on the list. And what bothered the Moabites was that they had watched the supernatural way that the God of the Hebrews fought in their behalf and they knew that they dare not risk attacking Israel preemptively.

So the Moabites thought, hum, what are we going to do to protect ourselves from this hoard of people that are conquering all the nations they come up against? And they got the idea, inspired by the devil, to go to their neighbors, the Midianites for help, because they were connected to them both nationally and religiously. And so Balak, king of Moab went over and talked to the elders of Midian and convinced them that they had better put their heads together and come up with a way to either defeat Israel or show a strong enough coalition so Israel wouldn't dare to attack them. Sort of a peace through strength strategy. So you know what they decided to do? They got their heads together and decided to enlist the power of sorcery in hopes of bringing a curse upon Israel. Since they knew Israel had some kind of supernatural help in conquering the surrounding nations, they were going to fight fire with fire. And by now you may have guessed who this prophet of God gone wrong is.

Now let's pick up the story in *Numbers 22:4*, "And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time."

Now, the prophet Balaam, the prophet of God gone wrong, lived way away from Moab in Mesopotamia, and it was reported that he had supernatural powers, and evidently his fame had reached all the way to the land of Moab, so they decided to call for him to come and use his divination to curse Israel. So ambassadors from the two nations were sent out to fetch Balaam and bring him back to Moab.

In *verses 5 and 6* it says, Balak "sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me:



come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot (*or I understand*) that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed.”

Now, at one time Balaam was a good man and a prophet of God; but for whatever reason, little by little he had abandoned himself to covetousness, but he still claimed to be a true prophet, and as such he knew something about God's work in behalf of Israel, and he knew also that it was his duty to refuse whatever rewards he might receive from Balak, and refuse also to go back with those who came with their message from the king.

You see, Balaam had the same problem that many people have today, he dallied with temptation, and what happens when we do that? We lose the battle with the enemy every time. Now understand, temptation is not sin, because Jesus was tempted, wasn't He? And yet He was without sin. The problem comes when we toy with it. Jesus never did that! When we tempt ourselves to be tempted it always becomes sin, because at that point we have gone so far that sin is going to happen; it's the guaranteed result of messing with temptation.

I want you to notice what it says in *James 1:13-15*, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust (*or his “longing for what is forbidden”*) and enticed (*or “entrapped”*). Then when lust hath conceived (*the word conceived means “to capture or seize” in the Greek. In other words, when a person allows sin to captivate the mind*), it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”

I don't know if you've ever thought about this before, but these are the steps to sin. Sin happens when an impure thought is tolerated or an unholy desire cherished, and as soon as this happens, the soul becomes contaminated just that fast; it's unavoidable when unholy thoughts are entertained. And so, if we would not commit sin, we have to reject it right off the bat. In other words, we must not go there. Every single unholy thought has to be instantly rejected as soon as that thought comes, otherwise we become guilty of sin. And here's another thing, don't accept evil thoughts as being in harmony with our own mind, because Satan is able somehow to put thoughts into your head, and when they come from him, they're never pure thoughts, because he lost the ability to think pure thoughts long ago.

You see, Satan is watching every single move we make, and he's trying to trip us up at every turn. And if we would escape his snares, we've got to have help from God, that's the only way, but at the same time we've got to help ourselves. That's why it's important to fortify our minds with Bible truth. The sword of the Spirit is to be our weapon of choice, because that's what it takes to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. When an evil thought comes, replace it with a verse of Scripture, or with some of the good old hymns you've learned, and before you know it that evil thought will be gone. If we don't do that, we will end up taking the steps to sin that will end only in eternal death, unless of course we repent. That's our only way out of a lost condition.

So, rather than Balaam telling these messengers that came to just be on their way, because he wasn't even going to entertain the thought to curse Israel, he dallied with temptation by urging these heathen men to stay with him that night, and that he would give no decided answer till he had asked counsel of the Lord. But here's the problem, Balaam already knew that the Lord would not have him curse Israel, why? Because he knew God was on their side! So long as they were true to Him, no power of earth or hell could prevail against them, and he knew it.

And here's one of the main points I want you to get this morning. If we are true to God, the devil cannot prevail against us any more than he could prevail against Israel. This was one of those rare occasions when Israel was being obedient to God's commandments, and as a result, Satan could not have access to do them harm. It's much like Eve in the Garden of Eden. As long as she stayed away from that tree in the midst of the Garden she was safe, because that's the only place the serpent had access to her. But we know what happened, don't we? Disobedience gave the serpent access to her that he would not otherwise have had.

Don't you suppose Balaam's pride was flattered a little bit when the messengers said, "Those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed?" I can almost see Balaam saying, "That's right boys, when I decide to bless someone, only good things are going to happen to them, but when I decide to curse someone, only bad will happen." I can almost see his chest puff out a little bit as these men talked to him like this and as they bribed him with costly gifts if he would just accept their invitation to go back with them. And guess what? These offered gifts excited Balaam's one main weakness of covetousness and he thought he could greedily accept the offered treasures, comply with the desires of king Balak, and still be in favor with God, which of course couldn't be done, but such is the deception of the devil once temptation is entertained.

That night, as these heathen men were sawing logs under Balaam's roof, God came to Balaam with the message recorded in *verse 12* "Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed." So, in the morning Balaam reluctantly told the kings messengers they would have to go back home without him, but he didn't tell them exactly what the Lord said, which gave them the idea that he might yet be persuaded with more money and gifts. So in *verse 13* Balaam told them, "Get you into your land: for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you." And I'm sure he said it in such a way that they got the idea that he really wanted to go, but that mean old God said no. What he failed to tell them was that as long as Israel was being obedient to God it would be impossible for them to be cursed, he just said the Lord refuses to let me go with you.

Now why can I be so confident that Balaam was this type of character? Well, it's because of what it says in *2 Peter 2:15*. There we're told that Balaam, "loved the wages of unrighteousness", and *1 John 5:17* says, "all unrighteousness is sin." In other words, Balaam loved sin more than he loved God. He loved what he could get, even if it meant doing what was wrong to get it. Did you know that covetousness is the basis of just about every single sin that can be committed? Covetousness has its roots in selfishness and it's one of the most common sins there is. That's why, in *Luke 12:15* Jesus said, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness", and in *Colossians 3:5* Paul tells us that covetousness is idolatry. And what is idolatry? "I want this thing, whatever it is, more than I want to do what God says." That was Balaam's problem, and I don't think it's a coincidence that "I" is the middle letter in sin. Covetousness was Satan's problem according to *Isaiah 14*, and it was Balaam's problem as well, because he was being led by the one in whom covetousness first began.

And so, these things tell us a lot about Balaam's character, don't they? Balaam was like a chameleon, or an opportunist who changes their position in order to get what they want. Kind of like what politicians are like today, and through this one fault Satan gained entire control of him, and this is what ultimately caused his ruin. The warning against covetousness is in the tenth commandment, and there are many people that fall for this snare of the devil.

It's interesting to me how people can change when enticed with whatever object they think will give them power or monetary gain or that which would satisfy their carnal nature. It is Satan's object,

through covetousness, to tempt us to leave God's service. That's his ultimate goal. One wrong step always makes the next one easier, doesn't it? And like Balaam, we can become more and more presumptuous thinking that we can depart from strict obedience, just this once, for the sake of some worldly advantage, and that once we have gained our coveted prize, we think we can change our course whenever we please, but it's not so easy once we've entangled ourselves in Satan's snare, and once caught, people seldom escape. So we can thank Balaam for giving us an example of what not to do.

Well, when the messengers got back to Moab and told the king that Balaam refused to come back with them, that he really wanted to, but his God said no, the king figured that Balaam was holding out for more money. And so the king sent even more dignitaries with even more gifts than he did the first time. The king was desperate by now to get Balaam to curse Israel, and in *Numbers 22:16, 17* it says, "And they came to Balaam, and said to him, thus saith Balak the son of Zippor, let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me: for I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people."

This was the second time Balaam was tested. God was giving him another chance to see his folly and to renew his faithfulness to Him, but because Balaam had already taken the first step in the downward spiral, he chose to ignore the still small voice of the Holy Spirit, which was now even smaller than it was at first, as he caved to his fleshly desire for wealth and honor.

When the men came to back to Balaam with the offer of more money and honor and gifts, Balaam sounded very determined not to accept it, but in his covetous heart he really longed to comply with the king's request. So, in *verse 18* it says, "And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, if Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more." Do you suppose Balaam knew God meant what He said the first time? He should have, and could have, but he took the next step anyhow and urged the king's messengers to stay the night once again that he might further inquire of God as though He were a man to be persuaded. And sure enough, that night the Lord appeared to Balaam, and in *verse 20* He said, "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."

At this point Balaam must have thought, "Oh good, I get to go back to Moab with these men and I'll become rich and receive the honor and glory I deserve. What was the Lord doing here? Was the God who never changes, changing? Did He think maybe Balaam's desires would be good to follow? No! God was allowing Balaam to follow what he really wanted to do in his heart. Certainly, he wasn't following the will of God, because previously he was told not to go. But in his stubbornness to do what he wanted, he was allowed to choose his own course, and at the same time he thought to secure the sanction of the Lord as well. How foolish, but this is what happens to an individual who chooses to turn off their hearing aids when God tells them to do something they really don't want to do.

So, what can we learn from Balaam at this point? Aren't there thousands, perhaps millions of Christians today doing the same thing? Because the evidence God gives is contrary to their own desire they set aside God's counsel and at the same time go to God to learn their duty. Isn't that insane? But isn't that what Balaam did? It's like a person studies and prays about a certain situation and God answers through His word and through the convictions of the Holy Spirit and they say, "I don't like that particular option, isn't there a second one?" But we need to understand that God will not be trifled with like this, because like Balaam He will permit us to follow our own desires and suffer the results. The God of heaven doesn't use force, that's the devil's tactic. He says, "come now and let us reason together", but Balaam couldn't be reasoned with at this point. He had gone too far and enticement to sin turned into

the sin that leads to death like we read in James.

In *Psalm 81:11, 12* God said of Israel, “My people would not hearken to My voice. . . . So I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lust: and they walked in their own counsels.” And that’s exactly what God did and what Balaam did, and too many times that’s what we do. When we clearly see our duty, we shouldn’t go to God with the prayer that we might be excused from performing it or ask for option two instead, because there is no option two that will result in a better outcome. Option two will end in disaster every time, because it’s doing our own thing.

So God allowed Balaam to have things his way, to follow option two, and *Numbers 22:21* says, “And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab.” I bet he couldn’t saddle his donkey fast enough, don’t you think? But at this point I’m sure he wasn’t thinking things were not going to go well once he arrived in Moab. Balaam professed to be God’s prophet and all he was supposed to say was what God wanted him to say, that’s what prophets do, but he had no idea once he got there that he would only be able to say what God wanted him to say. That part didn’t register. All he could think about was that God was allowing him to go and that he would be able to collect his riches. Evidently the messengers thought Balaam was going to refuse their invitation to go with them and left earlier, because as we’ll see in a minute, he wasn’t actually riding with these men who called on him.

So, Balaam is hurriedly riding along with his two servants in pursuit of his reward, when suddenly his donkey leaves the road and turns into the field, and he’s thinking, what is this dumb animal doing? And so, he begins to beat his ride and he’s able to get it back on track, but a little way down the road they come to a narrow spot with walls on either side, probably rock walls, and unbeknownst to Balaam his donkey sees an angel with drawn sword standing in the way, and in order to avoid this scary figure the donkey tries to move away, and Balaam gets his foot crushed against the wall and begins beating his donkey again. And yet a third time the donkey sees the angel, and because it was still a narrow place with nowhere else to go, the donkey just lays down and Balaam totally loses it and begins beating the animal unmercifully, when suddenly in *verse 28* the donkey begins to speak with a man’s voice and says, “What have I done to you, that you have beat me these three times?”

Now understand, a person can get so caught up in their own ambitions and pursuits that even a talking donkey can’t open their blind eyes to see that they are not following God’s express will. And I know this because Balaam begins to talk back to the animal, not yet realizing that this is a bit unusual. He was in such a hurry to catch up with the messengers and receive his reward that all he could think of was how this donkey was slowing down the process.

Well, after talking like this to the animal for a while, *verse 31* says, “Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face.” Then in *verse 32* the angel said to him, “Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? Behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me: and the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive.”

And so, Balaam owed the preservation his life to an animal that had more sense than he had. Here’s a man who claimed to be a prophet of the Lord and yet he was so blinded by covetousness and personal ambition that he couldn’t see what the donkey saw.

In **2 Corinthians 4:4** Paul says, “The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not.” And this is exactly what happened to Balaam. He didn’t believe God meant what He said the first time, and we need to personalize these things. How many of us are blinded in the same way? Too many times we rush on in forbidden paths, transgressing God’s law, and can’t see that God and angels are against us, and like Balaam we get mad at those who are trying to prevent our ruin. This is the way it is with many teenagers today who are blinded to the fact that their parents are trying to stop them from making shipwreck of faith. They get angry with those who love them most and would rather take the advice of their friends who are just as clueless as they are.

And think about this, Balaam gave evidence of the spirit that controlled him by the way he treated his donkey, didn’t he? **Proverbs 12:10** says, “A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.” I think we can all agree that Balaam was a cruel man for the way he treated his donkey, can’t we? There are some professed Christians today who have no idea that by the way they treat their dog or their cat or their farm animals, is a reflection of their religious experience and their connection to the Lord, or the lack thereof. Animal abuse or allowing them to suffer neglect is sin, plain and simple. Just because animals were created for the service of mankind is no reason to cause them pain or treat them badly. **Romans 8:22** says, because of man’s sin, “the whole creation groans and travails in pain together.” Not the animal’s sin, but man’s sin!

I read a statement not long ago that I believe is true. It said, “He who will abuse animals because he has them in his power is both a coward and a tyrant. A disposition to cause pain, whether to our fellow men or to the brute creation, is satanic. Many do not realize that their cruelty will ever be known, because the poor dumb animals cannot reveal it. But could the eyes of these men be opened, as were those of Balaam, they would see an angel of God standing as a witness, to testify against them in the courts above. A record goes up to heaven, and a day is coming when judgment will be pronounced against those who abuse God’s creatures.” Pretty serious, isn’t it? (*Patriarchs and Prophets, page 443*)

When the angel of the Lord explained to Balaam that he was lucky to be alive, in **verse 34** Balaam said, “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.” Sounds like Balaam finally got the message, doesn’t it? Sounds like maybe he had true repentance. And if this was the end of the story we might conclude that Balaam sincerely had a change of heart, but we’ll see in the end that this was not the case, unfortunately.

So, the Lord allowed Balaam to continue his journey, but with the understanding that He would control his words. Why did God do things this way? For two reasons: #1, by doing this God would give evidence to the people of Moab that Israel was under divine protection, and # 2, at the same time show how powerless Balaam really was to even utter a word without God’s permission.

As Balaam was getting close to the borders of Moab, the king went out to greet him and asked why it had taken him so long to accept the invitation to come, in view of the offered rewards, and Balaam answered the king in **Numbers 22:38** “Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say anything? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak.” Do you think Balaam regretted this restriction? Of course he did, because he feared that his purpose to curse Israel wouldn’t be able to be carried out and thus he would lose his reward.

So, the king takes Balaam to a high place where they worship Baal so he can get a good view of Israel’s camp. And as this prophet gone wrong stands there looking down over the encampment of God’s chosen people, he’s struck with how beautiful and orderly things look, and the children of Israel have



no idea at this point about Satan's design to destroy them. And you know, if we could just realize God's care and protection over us at all times today, don't you think we would more often have thoughts of gratitude and love for His protection and power in our behalf? But sadly, I think most of the time we are as unaware of God's watch care over us as was Israel as Satan was trying his best to work through Balaam in laying his plans to get Israel to disobey God so He would have to then withdraw His hand of protection over them.

Now, this is a bit hard for me to understand, but Balaam was not a part of Israel, and yet he was a prophet of God. I don't know that he ever had any connection with them at all, and yet God chose to use him at some point to make Himself known to those in his own homeland. Balaam knew something of the sacrificial offerings of the Hebrews, and so in order to please God and yet be able to still have hopes of cursing Israel and receiving the offered gifts and honor the king promised, he had the Moabites erect seven altars so he could offer a sacrifice on each one. Then he told king Balak he was going to go commune with God to see what He would say about cursing Israel. This all seems a little convoluted I know, but such is the blindness that comes upon an individual after they take the first step to try and please themselves instead of following God's implicit instructions.

So, as Balaam went to a high place to talk to God, the king and his nobles waited there beside the sacrifices watching eagerly for Balaam to return, and when he finally came back the people were hoping that he would say something that would paralyze the strange power that worked in Israel's behalf. Somehow the king didn't realize that the God Balaam professed to follow, and the God of the Hebrews, was the same God. Even Balaam didn't figure that out somehow, but such are the deceptions the devil can play upon those who go for option 2 instead of option 1. We read earlier that Balaam loved the wages of unrighteousness, and when you love the wages of unrighteousness more than you love to do what God says, you become an idolater, and once you've gone that far, you're totally oblivious to the still small voice of the Holy Spirit and Satan can have his way with you.

So Balaam comes back, and the king's thinking, "this is going to be good, finally Israel will be cursed and I won't have to worry about them anymore", but something else happens, doesn't it? In **Numbers 23:7-10** Balaam could only say what God wanted him to say. He said, "The king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel. How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? Or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied? For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" And king Balak says, "what have you done?" And Balaam says, "I told you all I could say was what God wanted me to say, so don't get upset with me." Balaam must have been upset with himself, don't you think? He came with the purpose of cursing Israel, but the words he spoke were directly contrary to the sentiments of his own heart. He could only pronounce blessings, while his soul was filled with curses.

At this point, Balaam should have come to his senses, he should have repented and turned around and went home, but no, because of covetousness, he became even more determined to figure out a way to get God to curse Israel so he could get what he wanted.

Well, Balak thought Balaam may have been a little intimidated by the full view of Israel there from the mountain top, so he had him go to a place where he could only have a partial view, and once again sacrifices were offered and Balaam inquired of the Lord, and once again a blessing was pronounced upon Israel, and this happened yet a third time, and the same thing.

Now I want you to notice why Balaam could not curse Israel. In *Numbers 23:21* Balaam had no choice but to say, “(God) hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel: The Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them.” And in *verse 23* Balaam couldn’t help but say, “Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel.”

It seems that Balaam was more like the devil’s magician than God’s prophet at this point, doesn’t it? Because try as he might, the power of his enchantments, or the curses he wanted to speak, had no effect whatsoever upon Israel as God’s people. Make no mistake, it was the devil that was trying to speak through Balaam, and no matter how hard he tried he couldn’t succeed. Israel was blessed of God because they were not living in sin. And so, don’t ever get the idea that God will bless you as long as you are engaged in sin.

Now this is the positive point in this story, and we don’t want to miss it. While Israel was under divine protection, nobody, even though they were aided by all the power of the devil, could prevail against Israel, and the favor God showed toward them in this instance is an assurance of His protecting care for His obedient, faithful people today. When Satan should inspire evil men, like he inspired Balaam, to misrepresent, harass, and destroy us, this very story should be brought to our minds, and if we do that, it will strengthen our courage and faith in God’s promised protection.

Well, king Balak finally had enough, and in *Numbers 24:10*, 11 it says, “And Balak’s anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together: and Balak said unto Balaam, I called thee to curse mine enemies, and behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times. Therefore now flee thou to thy place: I thought to promote thee unto great honour; but, lo, the LORD hath kept thee back from honour.”

Balaam was certainly disappointed in his hopes of wealth and promotion, wasn’t he? He had not only fallen into disfavor with the king but was conscious of the fact that he had also provoked the displeasure of God, and so he went back home. However, after he had reached his home the Holy Spirit left him for the last time, and his covetousness, which had been held in check by God for a time, prevailed, and he was ready to resort to any means possible to gain the reward promised by Balak.

All the way home he must have been trying to figure out a way to get God to curse Israel, and as he cogitated about it, he thought, “of course, the prosperity of Israel depends upon their obedience to God, how could I have missed it? and there’s no way to cause their overthrow except to seduce them into sin.”

And so, after reaching home he turned right around and went back to the land of Moab and laid his new plan before the king, and Balaam convinced him that so long as Israel remained true to God, He would be their shield and protector. He told the king that if they could just get Israel to become involved with Baal worship, God would become their enemy, and they would then be able to easily defeat them. And Balak said, “sounds like a plan.”

Well, as the story continues, Balaam witnessed the success of his Satan inspired scheme. He saw the curse of God visited upon Israel because many of the Israelite men became infatuated with the daughters of Moab, and because of it 24,000 men fell under God’s judgments, and the plague wasn’t stopped until “Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest,” took a javelin in his hand and went after one of the men of Israel who had brazenly taken a Midianitish woman into his tent and

pinned them both to the ground. Sometimes it takes harsh measures to get a people back on track, doesn't it?

But what about Balaam, what happened to him? The divine justice that punished sin in Israel didn't permit Balaam to escape, oh no, because in the war between the two nations, Balaam not only lost his temporal life, but he forfeited eternal life as well. You can read about that in *Numbers 31*.

Speaking to the church at Pergamum in *Revelation 2:14*, the angel of the Lord said, "I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication."

When we read things like this we need to realize that they are written for who? "For our admonition, upon whom the end of the world is come." And surely, the end of all things is at hand.

You may not have thought about this before, but the fate of Balaam is very similar to that of Judas, and who of us wants to be associated with either of these two men. Both men tried to unite the service of God with worldly wealth and honor, and they met the same demise. Balaam believed in the true God and professed to serve Him, and Judas also believed in Jesus as the Messiah, and united with His followers, but that connection didn't save them, did it? Balaam and Judas both had received great light and enjoyed special privileges, but the single cherished sin of covetousness poisoned the entire characters and in the end caused their destruction.

Oh, brothers and sisters, it's a perilous thing to allow even one evil trait to live in the heart. One cherished sin is all it takes, and it will, little by little, ruin the whole character and bring all the nobler powers into subjection to evil desire. The removal of one safeguard from the conscience, the indulgence of one evil habit, one neglect of the high claims of duty to God, will break down the defenses of the soul and open the way for Satan to come in and lead us astray. And so, our only safe course is to let our prayers go forth daily from a sincere heart, and that we do nothing to violate our Bible educated conscience.

I'd like to close by reading the words Balaam uttered but failed to realize, and may it not be so with us. In *Numbers 23:10* he said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" Unless we are alive when Jesus comes and get to experience translation without seeing death, my hope is that we might all die the death of the righteous, and that our last end will be like his.