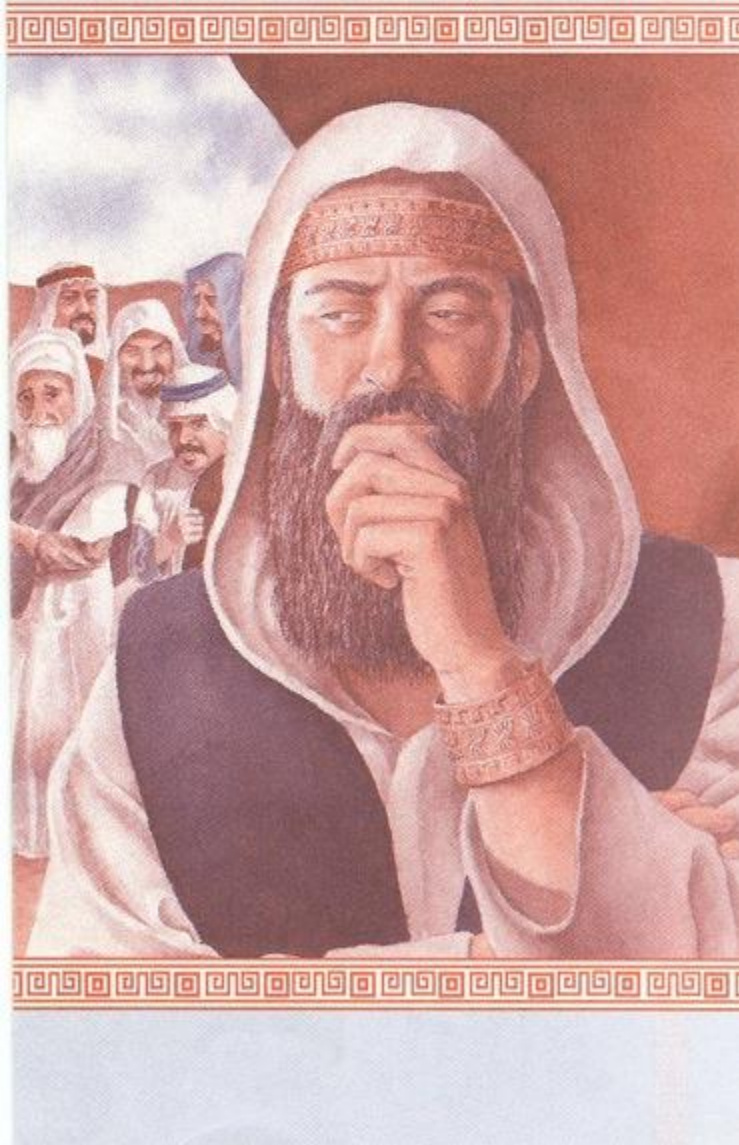


GETTING WHAT YOU WANT FROM GOD

The Error Of Balaam

By Keith Green



Getting What You Want From God (The Error Of Balaam)

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and folly of a man named Balaam. We're going to take a look at the life Balaam. He was a prophet of God who misused his gifts and his relationship with God for personal gain. Hopefully we can learn the invaluable lesson that Balaam learned the hard way.

The curtain opens in Numbers 22. The children of Israel are wandering through the desert, and have just beaten up, killed, and plundered the Amorites. Balak, the king of Moab, has just seen all of this, and he begins considering what might happen to them! Worried that his people might be next in line for defeat, Balak tries to get some "insurance" by getting God's prophet, Balaam, on their side. *"So he sent messengers to Balaam saying, 'Behold a people came out of Egypt, and they are living opposite me. Please come and curse this people for me; perhaps I may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that he whom you bless is blessed and he whom you curse is cursed.'"*

Apparently Balaam had established a great reputation! If he said a person was blessed, they were really blessed - and if he said they were cursed, it was all over for them! After all, who would hire a guy to come and curse their enemies if they didn't think it was going to work? Now, we don't know the history of Balaam, but we do know that God speaks to him in this story, and He does it as if He's familiar with speaking to him. Balaam knew the Lord, and everybody knew that he did.

So Balak sent some of his leaders to go see Balaam, and to bring him "fees of divination." *"And they came to Balaam and repeated Balak's words to him. And he said to them, 'Spend the night here, and I will bring word back to you as the Lord may speak to me.' Then God came to Balaam and said, 'who are these men with you?' And Balaam said, 'Balak the king of Moab has sent word to me, 'Behold, there is a people who came out of Egypt; now come, curse them for me; perhaps I may be able to fight against them, and drive them out.' And God said to Balaam, 'Do not go with them; you shall not curse the people; for they are blessed.'"*

That's it. **Do not go with them.** You can't get any clearer than that! Now, God doesn't always tell you why. He might just say "No." But apparently Balaam had such

a good relationship with God that He even told him *why* he wasn't supposed to go. *"You shall not curse the people; for they are blessed."*

Silver And Gold

"So Balaam said to Balak's leaders, 'Go back to your land, for the Lord has refused to let me go with you.' And they went

to Balak, and said, 'Balaam refused to come with us.' Then Balak again sent leaders, more numerous and more distinguished than the former. And they came to Balaam and said to him, 'Thus says Balak, "Let nothing, I beg you, hinder you from coming to me, for I will indeed **honor you richly**. Please come then, curse this people for me."' Let's take a close look at Balaam's answer in verse 13. A bunch of guys came and said to him, "We want you to come and curse these people." But when Balaam asked God, He said, "No. These people are blessed, and I don't want you to hurt them." The obvious thing for Balaam to have told the messengers would have been, "I can't curse these people because God said they are blessed."

But what **did** Balaam say to the messengers? "Go back to your land, for the **Lord** has refused to let me go with you." What does **that** mean? **He wishes he could go, but "God won't let him."** Remember those "fees of divination"? Balaam got paid for his work. There wasn't anything strange about that in those days - it was customary to bring a gift when you sought the word of God from a prophet. Balaam knew there was some big money to be made, and what he was really saying was, "I'd like to go, but I can't."

Let's put this in a modern setting. Someone asks Suzy out on a date, but her mom says, "No, I don't think he has enough character for you," or something like that. Now there are two ways Suzy can respond to this fellow. "Well, I asked my mom, and she pointed out some really good reasons why I shouldn't go. She doesn't feel that this is a right relationship, and I trust her, and I really believe I'm supposed to obey her." Or, "Boy, I'd really like to go, but **my mother** just won't let me!"

If she uses method number two, all she does is encourage this guy to find a way to get her to disobey her mom. If someone knows that you **really want** to do something, even if you

shouldn't, it will inspire them to keep trying to get you to change your mind. But if they know that you are convinced because of strong convictions in your own heart, they're more apt to give up.

Many of you go to God and say, "God, I really want a husband." "I really want a wife." "I really want this job." "I really want this ministry." "I really want this whatever." And maybe God says "No." Now if you can't obey with joy in your heart, then you're asking for trouble. If your response is, "Gee, I'd really like to go, but **the Lord won't let me**," you need to see how wicked that is, and realize that you're opening yourself up for all sorts of attack. If the devil knows you're convinced that God is the wisest, and that you know it's best to follow His counsel, then he doesn't have a point of attack. But if he knows you lack conviction, then all he's got to do is get you to believe that your opinions are better, smarter, or more pleasing than God's principles. There's a big difference between just obeying God on the outside, and obeying from a thankful, joyful, agreeable heart.

What's Your Price?

Now, getting back to Balaam. Balaam obviously wishes he could go. "*The leaders of Moab went to Balak, and said, 'Balaam refused to come with us.' Then Balak again sent leaders, more numerous and more distinguished than the former.*" Balak figures, "Well, I'm gonna have to razzle dazzle this guy." So he sends a bigger group of more distinguished leaders. And when Balaam sees them coming, you can just guess what he's thinking - "Well, well, well... now they're sending the important people. Last time it was just the messengers. This time it's the corporate vice-president of the Moab General Chariot Company. I must be pretty important... Balaam was obviously open for temptation, so Balak sent a more "tempting" temptation, greater in quality and quantity.

A poll was taken in the U.S., and they asked men and women how much money it would take for them to agree to sleep with a stranger. The average amount for the men was \$10.00. The average for the women was \$10,000. But as the dollar amount got higher, almost everybody said, "Yes, I'd sleep with a stranger for a million dollars." And what I'd say to all of them is - you're willing to be a prostitute. All you're changing is the price. You're willing to set aside your convictions for money. If you can be bought at any price, then God doesn't care about the price. He only cares that you can be bought.

Would you leave the Lord's will for a tall, dark, and handsome Prince Charming? He's a pastor and he's been to Bible school, and everybody loves him. He can sing beautifully, and he can lead people to the Lord by the droves. He's gentle and loving, and he's everything you ever wanted. He thinks the Lord wants you two to get married. He likes you and you like him. There's only one hitch - God has told you "No." Would you still marry him? Got the picture? What's your price? At what point are you willing to disobey God? What is there that can buy you. Are you for sale? Is God for sale in your life? Is obedience for sale?

"Let Me Pray About It..."

So these "distinguished fellows" bring a message to Balaam. "*Thus says Balak, 'Let nothing, I beg you, hinder you from coming to me; for I will indeed **honor you richly**. Please come then, curse this people for me.'*" So what's Balaam going

to say? Remember, he was a prophet of God. He really was! He wasn't a devil worshipper. *"Balaam answered and said, 'Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, either small or great, contrary to the command of the Lord my God.'" Well, that's a very zealous statement, but it's his next line that gets him in trouble. "And now please, you also stay here tonight, and I will find out **what else** the Lord will speak to me."*

Balaam should have said, "Go away. Get thee behind me. Split! I won't do this, and I don't even want to be tempted." The Bible says to flee temptation; to resist the devil, and he will flee from you. But Balaam is essentially saying to these guys, "Hang out and let me go talk to God. Let me pray about it. Maybe God will change His mind by the morning." The error of Balaam is - obedience to God, **plus**. Or obedience to God, but. Or obedience to God, and... something else. It's saying, "Yes Lord, I'll obey You, **but...**"

How many people have gone to hell "praying about it"? How many people have disobeyed God saying, "Well, I really have a burden for this," or "I really feel led to do that." I can't believe the number of people that say, "Well, I've really prayed about it..." What I want to know is **what did God tell you?** *Praying* about something is not spiritual. Mormons pray. Krishnas pray. Buddhists pray. **Hearing from God and doing what God says is spiritual.** Don't ever say, "Well, I'm gonna do this, because I've really prayed about it," unless you can finish the statement: "I prayed about it, and God has answered me. He told me I'm supposed to do this." It doesn't impress me that you've prayed about it. And it doesn't impress God that you prayed about it, because the most selfish prayer is one-way prayer. It's like picking up the phone, dialing a number, and doing all the talking - then hanging up before the person can talk back.

Balaam thinks, "Maybe I can get the consolation prize. Maybe I won't get the riches and the honor and the house full of silver and gold, but I might be able to tell them a little something and get a pig. You know, maybe instead of a million dollars, they'll give me a thousand."

You Asked For It - You Got It!

"God came to Balaam at night and said to him, 'If the men have come to call you, rise up and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you shall you do.'" Now, on the surface it doesn't seem like there's anything harmful or angry in God's answer to Balaam. But Balaam had asked God once, was told "No," and then asked a second time. "We'll find out what else the Lord will speak to me." "God, I know you told me 'No,' but what else can you tell me about this?" Don't ever ask God again once He gives you the final word on something. He gave Balaam a definite word - NO! And He told him why. But Balaam said, "I want to go find out what else." Well, God gave him "what else." When Balaam came back a second time, what I consider a disobedient and greedy man, God gave in and told him what he wanted to hear. "Sure, go ahead." Why? You'll see.

"So Balaam arose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the leaders of Moab. But God was angry because he was going." Now, why would God tell Balaam to do something, and then be angry when he did it? Let this be a warning. God will never tell you to do something He once told you not to do, unless He explains why He's changing His path. God told Abraham, "Go offer your son as a burnt offering," but later said, "Do not harm the boy, for now I know you fear Me. Now I know you love Me more than anything else." (Gen. 22:2-12) God said, "I'm changing My direction, and this is why." But here God says "No" to Balaam one time, and the next time He just tells him, "All right, go," without giving any reason. Beware. If God says "No," and then you keep asking, He may say, "All right, if you're not going to be obedient, go ahead. Do what you want."

Watch out - if you keep whining and whimpering to God about that cute little blonde, after He's already told you "No," you'd better be very careful...you just might get what you're after. He may finally say "Yes," and you will have to live with the disastrous results.

A Fool And His Donkey

So Balaam is riding on his donkey with the leaders of Moab, *"And the angel of the Lord took his stand in the way as an adversary against him. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way with his drawn sword, the donkey turned off and went into the field; but Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back."* Three times this happened - the donkey saw the angel and got out of the way, **fast!** Finally, she just laid down right in the middle of the road. *"Balaam was angry and struck the donkey with his stick. And the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, 'What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?'"* And Balaam is so shocked that he answers her! *"Because you have made a mockery of me!"*

Picture this - Balaam is riding with the officials, the princes, the president of Moab General Chariots, and they're about to have a "pileup" because Balaam's donkey has stopped dead in the road. And this guy is supposed to be a prophet? He doesn't even know how to handle his donkey! *"Because you have made a mockery of me! If there had been a sword in*

my hand, I would have killed you by now." That's how mad he was. He was foaming at the mouth. He'd never been so embarrassed in all his life! *"And the donkey said, 'Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden all your life? Have I ever been accustomed to do so to you?' And he said, 'No.'"* Here he is, having a conversation with his donkey again!

Then God opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing there with his sword drawn. *"And the angel said to him, 'Why have you struck your donkey? Behold, I have come out as an adversary, because your way was contrary to me. But the donkey saw me and turned aside. If she had not, I would surely have killed you just now, and let her live.'"* God speaks to him and says, "Look buddy, your donkey just saved your life. She was trying to keep you out of trouble."

"And Balaam said to the angel, 'I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing in the way against me. Now then, if it is displeasing to you, I will turn back.'" Now, when I first read Balaam's statement here, my impression was that he had a pretty good attitude. It showed that he was willing to turn back. But now I see that it's actually a wicked answer. Total wickedness. What did he mean by, "If it is displeasing to you"?! What more do you need? Your donkey is talking to you, and you've got the angel of the Lord Himself standing before you with a drawn sword telling you that your way is contrary, and you're saying, "If it is displeasing I will turn back"!

God wrote Balaam off right there. That was the ultimate. He should have said, "God, I've sinned. I'm repenting, and I'll meet You back at the cave. You told me not to go, and I'm turning back right now." But he doesn't repent, and he's written off; he's had it. He's not God's chosen anymore.

Lip Service?

"But the angel of the Lord said to Balaam, 'Go with the men, but you shall speak only the word which I shall tell you.' So Balaam went along with the leaders of Balak. Then Balak said to Balaam, 'Did I not urgently send for you? Why did you not come to me? Am I really unable to honor you?' So Balaam said to Balak, 'Behold, I have come now to you! Am I able to speak anything at all? The word that God puts in my mouth, that I shall speak.'" There is something in there that reveals Balaam's attitude. Let me translate it for you - "Hey look, don't bug me, I've come, but I'm not allowed to say what I want to say. I don't even have a will left. God's got me. What He tells me to say, I'll say." Balaam is *not* happy being the mouthpiece of God.

I've met people who were always grumbling, "I could be doing this, and I could be doing that." Listen, nobody does God a favor. Nobody has "given up" anything for God. Nothing! Everything you've given up is a piece of junk, a clod on the ground compared to what God has given to you. You haven't given up **anything!** There is no greater privilege or calling than serving the Creator of the universe.

Balaam is really mad. In the morning, Balak and Balaam head up the nearest mountain, so that they can look out and see the people of Israel. Balaam has them build some altars and offer sacrifices, and then he goes off a little ways to "seek the Lord." *"Then God met Balaam, and the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth and said, 'Return to Balak and you shall speak thus.' So he returned and said, 'How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce whom the Lord has not denounced?'"*

"Then Balak said to Balaam, 'What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, but you have actually blessed them.' And Balaam said, 'Must I not be careful to speak what the Lord puts in my mouth?'" Then Balak figures maybe things will be a bit different over on the next hill, so he takes Balaam somewhere else, and they repeat the same thing all over again. And Balaam brings Balak a word from the Lord. *"'Arise, O Balak, and hear. God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; or has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? Behold, I have received a command to bless; when He has blessed, I cannot revoke it...' Then Balak said to Balaam, 'Do not curse them at all nor bless them at all!' But Balaam said to Balak, 'Did I not tell you, whatever the Lord speaks, that I must do?'"* That's Balaam's catch-all, and it's just religious hogwash. Sure he's saying what God has said to say, but he hasn't *done* what God has said to do.

Balak tries one more time. *"'Please come, I will take you to another place; perhaps it will be agreeable with God that you curse them for me from there.'"* Now this guy, Balaam, was really acting like a fool. God isn't telling him to continue going with Balak. But Balaam keeps right on going, hill after hill. Why? He's looking for payment. He really wants to be given some money! He knows he has to say what God wants him to say, but he's also been hired by Balak to curse, so he's trying to find a way to please God *and* to please man. So it's off to *another* mountain.

"And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping, and the Spirit of God came upon him. And he said, 'How fair are your tents, O Jacob, your dwellings, O Israel! Like valleys that stretch out, like gardens beside the river, like aloes planted by the Lord, like cedars beside the waters, God is for him like the horns of the wild ox... Blessed is everyone who blesses you and cursed is everyone who curses you.'" Well, that's it for Balak. He's had all he can take, and tells Balaam he better

run before he gets his head cut off! *"And Balaam said to Balak, 'Did I not tell your messengers, 'Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything contrary to the command of the Lord, either good or bad, of my own accord. What the Lord speaks, that I will speak.' I am going to my people; come, and I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the days to come.' Then Balaam arose and departed and returned to his place, and Balak also went his way."*

Where There's A Will, There's A Way

Now if you're just glancing over this, it might seem like Balaam has finally come to his senses, goes home, and everything's fine. But notice that "advice" Balaam offered to Balak. We aren't told right here exactly what that was, but if you keep on reading, you'll soon get the picture. In the very next verse, we see Israel playing the harlot with the daughters of (who else?) Moab. And sure enough, the Israelites joined right in with their pagan sacrifices, and bowed down to their gods. So the Lord instructed Moses and the judges to kill all the men who had joined themselves to Baal. God had also sent a plague because of this sin, which wiped out another 24,000.

Now take a look at Numbers 31:9-16. This is years and years later, right after Israel has fought a battle against the Midianites. (By the way, that's the battle that Balaam was killed in. His life was to be snuffed out - by God's people!) *"And the sons of Israel captured the women of Midian. Moses was angry with the officers of the army, and said to them, 'Have you spared all the women?'"* Now look closely at this next part. *"Behold, these caused the sons of Israel, **through the counsel of Balaam**, to trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, so the plague was among the congregation of the Lord."*

And if there's still any doubt in your mind, check out Rev. 2:14. *"But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality."*

There it is, folks. Balaam would not curse Israel, but he offered Balak a little friendly advice: "If you want to know how to get them, send your hookers, send your daughters, send your loose women down there to entice them and tempt them and intermarry with them. Then invite them over to your religious services, to your gods, and you'll steal their hearts away from their God." Balaam was pretty smart, you know. He said, "I can't curse them because God won't let me. But sin will curse them. If you can get them to sin, you won't need me to curse them. Sin will do it for you."

Balaam was really a fool. Oh sure, he only said what God told him to say... but instead of sharing God's feelings about Israel, he just obeyed outwardly. He didn't share God's heart for Israel. He wanted to make some money. And I'll bet that when he gave that little tid-bit of advice, Balak probably paid him, and Balaam went home a richer man.

Conclusion

The error of Balaam was twofold: He used the gift and calling of God for his own selfish gain, and he asked God a second time after He had already said "No" the first time. Balaam did his best to find a way around being obedient to God. He spoke God's words, but he didn't have God's heart. And if you don't share God's heart, you might think you're doing what He wants you to do, but you'll only be going through outward motions of obedience. You might read your Bible and say your prayers and keep the rules, yet in your heart be a wicked, wicked servant. You must know His heart and His attitudes; share His hatred toward sin, and His love for souls... His love for others and His love for you.

Lord, we ask that through Your Word, You would teach us instant obedience, and fear of coming to You a second time after You've made Your will clear to us. Help us to always let our hearts agree with Your position, rather than try to find a way around it and just obey in the outward surface things. God, I ask that You would burn this into our hearts and make this real to us in our lives for Your glory.

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