



August 25, 2013
Numbers 22
“Beware of Balaam”
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We are introduced to Balaam in Numbers 22-24. These three chapters, as well as a few other biblical references outside of the book of Numbers, are dedicated to this “hard to figure out” man, which explains why there is a difference of opinion among many Bible scholars about whether he is a good prophet or a bad prophet.

In this study, Pastor Gary will provide insight into Balaam’s character, etc. Additionally, we’ll learn more about the trouble we’ll experience if we choose to live a compromised life, especially when it comes to idolatry and sexual immorality.

Balaam – The Good Prophet

1. Balaam called God, “*the Lord my God.*” ([Numbers 22:18](#))
2. God spoke “*to him*” and “*through him.*” ([Numbers 22:9, 23:5](#))
3. “*The Spirit of God came upon him.*” ([Numbers 24:2](#))

Balaam – The False Prophet

4. The Bible describes sorcery, divination, and witchcraft as methods of tapping into demonic power, and God condemns these practices.
5. Balaam received payment as a “*fee for divination.*” ([Numbers 22:7](#))

6. When we read in [Numbers 24:1](#) that “[Balaam] did not resort to sorcery as at other times,” the obvious implication is that he usually practiced sorcery.
7. Balaam was killed by the Israelites because he “*practiced divination.*” ([Joshua 13:22](#))
8. New Testament references to Balaam come in the form of specific warnings.
 - a. God warns against “*the way of Balaam.*” ([2 Peter 2:15](#))
 - b. God warns against “*Balaam’s error.*” ([Jude 11](#))
 - c. God warns against “*the teaching of Balaam.*” ([Revelation 2:14](#))

Balaam – The Complex Man

9. Balaam is a classic example of someone who:
 - a. “Talks the talk, but doesn’t walk the walk.”
 - b. “Professes, but doesn’t practice.”
 - c. “Is convinced, but not converted.”
10. Balaam was like many people today who have a spiritual appearance, but no spiritual substance.
11. The best we can discern about Balaam is that:
 - a. He was a false prophet with a reputation for sorcery and occult practices.
 - b. He was familiar with and respectful of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but he had no real relationship with God.
 - c. Because of his widespread reputation for using sorcery, Balak, king of Moab, knew of him, even though he lived 300 miles away (in Pethor, near the Euphrates River), and he sent for him to come and curse the Israelites.

Historical Background

12. The Israelites have made their way to Moab on their way to the Promised Land.
13. King Balak had heard about the mighty acts God performed on behalf of the Israelites, and he knew that conventional warfare wouldn’t be effective, so he figured the best option was to engage in spiritual warfare.
 - a. King Balak basically said, “Let’s hire a wizard who will use demonic incantations over God’s people to curse them, and when that happens, we’ll be sure to defeat them!”
14. King Balak was wrong on two levels:

- a. The Israelites posed no threat to Balak or the Moabites; they just wanted to pass.
 - i. [Deuteronomy 2:18-19a](#) - *“Today you are to pass by the region of Moab at Ar. When you come to the Ammonites, do not harass them or provoke them to war, for I will not give you possession of any land belonging to the Ammonites.”*
- b. No amount of demonic sorcery, witchcraft, or spiritual forces of evil are a match for God.
 - i. God has no equal, and he is infinitely more superior and powerful to all other beings, both natural and supernatural, in every way.

A Talking Donkey!

- 15. God can do whatever he wants, so a talking donkey is not impossibility.
 - a. God used a raven to feed Elijah. ([1 Kings 17:1-5](#))
 - b. God used a fish to supply the temple tax for Jesus. ([Matthew 17:24-27](#))
 - c. God used a donkey to speak to a man. ([Numbers 22](#))
- 16. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn, the donkey veered off the road, pressed up against a wall, and finally, laid down under Balaam.
 - a. In every situation Balaam became angry and beat the donkey.
 - b. Balaam’s eyes were finally opened and he saw the angel.
 - c. The angel told Balaam that he had come to oppose him because he was on a reckless path, and that each time the donkey saw him and turned away, Balaam’s life was spared!
 - d. The angel told Balaam to go, but only say what he was told to say.
- 17. Balaam’s meetings with King Balak.
 - a. The first time he met the king, he was taken up on a mountain (Bamoth Baal), which overlooked the Israelite camp, and King Balak encouraged Balaam to pronounce a curse, however, when Balaam opened his mouth, God put a blessing on his lips! ([Numbers 23:7-10](#))
 - b. The second time he met with the king, he was taken up on Mt. Pisgah, and told to try again.
 - i. The scene was repeated when Balaam opened his mouth, he offered a blessing instead of a curse. ([Numbers 23:18-24](#))
 - c. The third time, Balaam was taken up on a high hill in Peor, and told to try again.
 - i. In the same way as the first two times, Balaam offered a blessing instead of a curse! ([Numbers 24:1-9](#))
 - ii. That was the last straw; Balak was done with Balaam!

Balaam's Wicked Scheme

18. Before Balaam went home he thought out a plan, which was in the spirit of, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em."
 - a. Balaam advised King Balak to infiltrate the Israelite camp by introducing pagan, Moabite women to seduce the fighting men into sexual sin and idolatry. ([Numbers 25:1-3](#))
 - b. In [Revelation 2:14](#), we find evidence this was Balaam's idea. ¹
19. Balaam realized that if he couldn't get God to remove his blessing from the people, he could get the people to remove themselves from the blessing of God!

The Results Of Wickedness

20. The results of Balaam's plan were devastating, because a plague broke out against the Israelites, because God's anger burned against them.
21. Incredibly, while Moses and others were weeping before the Lord, one of the Israelite men, Zimri, had the chutzpah to come into the camp with Kozbi, a Moabite woman on his arm, and brazenly, he took her to his tent!
22. Phineas, son of Eleazar, the priest, followed them to the tent and drove a spear through the Zimri into Kozbi. ([Numbers 25:14-15](#))
23. God commended Phineas for taking a stand against wickedness. ([Numbers 25:10-11](#))

Compromise, Idolatry And Sexual Immorality

24. Balaam's name means, devourer (Hebrew - bil'am), which is a description of Satan. ²
25. [1 Peter 5:8-9](#) - *"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."*

¹ "Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality." (from International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Electronic Database Copyright (c) 1996 by Biblesoft)

² Bil'am - (bal'ahim) "devourer"

26. Satan practices the same tactic toward us that he used to incite Balaam to introduce to the Israelites.
27. Satan knows that if he can't get God to remove his blessing from us, he can entice, seduce and tempt us to remove ourselves from under the blessing of God through a compromised life.
28. Since nothing has changed concerning human nature, these same two areas must be guarded against: idolatry and sexual immorality.
 - a. There are idols of the hand, but there are also idols of the heart.
 - b. Idolatry is giving an object, a person, or a passion more worth than God.
 - c. Idols aren't usually bad things; they are often good things that become ultimate things.
29. Sex is the number one topic for Internet searches, and there are more than 1.3 million porn sites available.
 - a. The annual revenue from pornography in the U.S. exceeds \$13 billion!
 - b. Porn industry revenues are larger than the revenues of the top technology companies combined (Microsoft Corp., Google Inc., Amazon.com Inc., eBay Inc., Yahoo Inc., Apple Inc., and Netflix Inc.³

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Numbers 22:21-35](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Read and discuss [1 Corinthians 2:9](#).
 - a. In light of this Scripture, what are some of the reasons we believe that all God has for us is not and won't be enough to satisfy?
4. Allow the people in your group to share experiences when they've made choices that have taken them out from under the covering and blessing of God.
5. Have there been times in your life when you would say you had a spiritual appearance but no spiritual substance? (See #9 above for further discussion)
6. Would others say there is enough evidence to convict you of being a Christian?

³ <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/jul/11/more-women-lured-to-pornography-addiction/?page=1>

- a. Use this link to read an article by Pastor Greg Laurie, a Calvary Chapel pastor in California, which may help generate discussion.
 - i. <http://www.christianity.com/god/how-do-i-know-god/are-you-a-christian-11546248.html>.

7. Spend time talking about what modern-day idolatry looks like. (See #27 and #28 above)
8. Who or what is seducing you away from the blessing of God?
9. What have you sacrificed on the “altar of compromise”?
10. What did the Holy Spirit do in your life to help you become a different person?
11. Read and discuss [1 Peter 5:8-9](#).
12. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: stand firm in the Lord and resist the temptation to live a compromised life, as well as resisting the temptation to be seduced by idolatry and sexual immorality; (have someone ready to read [1 Peter 5:8-9](#)) pray the Scripture.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).