

BALAAM

Numbers 22

One of the most fruitful ways of studying the Bible is to study principles of truth and righteousness as we see them demonstrated in the lives of the men and women we read about in the Bible. Men such as Abraham, Moses, Joseph, David, and Job inspire us to greater faith and devotion. In the New Testament, there are men such as Paul, Peter, Barnabas, and Andrew, and women such as Dorcas, Priscilla, Lois, and Eunice. The poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow said:

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.

But our study this morning is not about one of the great and good men of the Bible. It is rather about one of the infamous and ignoble characters in the Bible. We can profit also by studying the lives of these bad people. Many lessons can be learned by studying characters such as Judas Iscariot, Ahab, and Jezebel. We can and should profit by their mistakes. This lesson has to do with a man we read about in Numbers 22. His name was Balaam. (Relate the account, pausing at the proper places to make the following points.)

DISCUSSION

I. OUR FIRST IMPRESSION IS ONE OF ADMIRATION AND RESPECT.

- A. He would not give any answer at all until he had consulted the Lord.
 - 1. What we do must be according to the word of the Lord.
 - 2. I Peter 4:11; Psa. 119:105 "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."
 - 3. "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (Psa. 119:130).
- B. The "rewards of divination" at first could not entice him to go beyond the word of the Lord.
- C. Even when Balak sent the second time--this time with princes more honorable than the first, and offering him *carte blanche* ("I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me.")--he still said, "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."
- D. How wonderful it would be if all had that attitude toward the word of the Lord.

II. BALAAM WANTED GOD TO CHANGE HIS WILL.

- A. "Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the LORD will say unto me more."
- B. Knew God's will, but didn't like it. Wanted it changed to suit himself. Perhaps more people like that in the world today than we like to think. II Thessalonians 2:10-12 says, "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

C. We must delight in God's law.

1. "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver" (Psa 119:72).
2. Verse 103 says, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"
3. Verse 127 says, "Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold."

D. But some would like God to change his will concerning:

1. baptism
2. the church
3. the frequency of the Lord's supper
4. how we worship, etc.

E. Some in the church wish God would change what he said about:

1. Not forsaking the assembling (Heb. 10:25)
2. Giving (I Cor. 16:2)
3. The role of women in public worship (I Tim. 2:8-10)
4. Wearing modest apparel (I Tim. 2:9).
5. Divorce and remarriage (Matt. 19:9)
6. etc.

F. Like Balaam, they keep looking until they find something they falsely interpret to justify what they wish to believe.

III. BALAAM'S FAITHFUL BEAST OF BURDEN BECAME HIS ENEMY BY TRYING TO SAVE HIM FROM DEATH.

A. The angel of the Lord stood in the way. The ass turned aside into a field, and Balaam smote the ass. Then the angel stood in a narrow passage way, and the ass went to the side and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall. He smote her again. Then the angel stood in a narrow place where there was no way to pass by him, and the ass simply fell down under Balaam, and he smote her again, this time with a staff. The ass was trying to save Balaam's life, but Balaam was so determined to follow a certain course that he did not realize it.

B. How many times do faithful friends become our enemies because they tell us what we do not wish to hear.

1. When wicked Ahab met Elijah after Ahab had murdered Naboth and took over his vineyard, he said to Elijah: "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" (I Kings 21:20).
2. In Galatians 4:16 Paul asked: "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?"

C. Our best friends may not be those who always tell us what we like to hear. They may be those who try to get us to change our way of living.

D. If I know my own heart, I have never preached a sermon to be vindictive or mean to anyone. I always preach--even when I preach things unpleasant for you to hear--for the purpose of helping you be what God wants you to be.

IV. BALAAM COULD NOT SEE THE ANGEL STANDING IN HIS WAY.

A. Could it be because he could not see anything that said "Go back"?

- B. A prejudiced person sees only what he wants to see. This is one reason many people never learn the truth and obey the gospel; they already have their minds made up, and they will not listen to the truth.
- C. God told Balaam, "Thy way is perverse before me." Even made the ass talk in human language with Balaam, but Balaam refused to believe he was doing anything wrong.
- D. The attitude of the Christian is that expressed by Samuel in I Samuel 3:10: "Speak; for thy servant heareth."

V. BALAAM DID FOR THE LORD WHAT HE WAS FORCED TO DO.

- A. He pronounced a blessing on Israel, but he did it against his will.
- B. He evidently thought he could bribe God into doing what he wanted God to do. Look at the various sacrifices he had Balak to offer.
- C. Some serve God because they feel compelled to do so.
 1. Look what the Bible says about our giving: "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Cor. 9:7).
 2. To elders about their work: "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (I Pet. 5:1-3).
 3. To all of us concerning whatever we do for the Lord: "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Col. 3:23).

VI. BALAAM WANTED TO DIE THE DEATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS, EVEN THOUGH HE HAD LIVED THE LIFE OF THE WICKED.

- A. "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!" (NUM. 23:10).
- B. But it cannot be done. We die like we live. If you want to die the death of the righteous, then live the life of the righteous.
- C. Nobody wants to die the death of the wicked, but most die that very death, because most live that kind of life.

CONCLUSION

In Numbers 31 God commanded Moses to go to war against the Midianites. Numbers 31:7-8 says: "And they warred against the Midianites, as the LORD commanded Moses; and they slew all the males. And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; namely, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian: Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword."