

October 8th
BALAAM'S WICKED GREED

"And they came to Balaam and said to him, 'Thus says Balak the son of Zippor: 'Let nothing hinder you from coming to me, for I will surely do you great honor, and whatever you say to me I will do. Come, curse this people for me.' " But Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of the Lord my God to do less or more."

NUMBERS 22:16-18

In a few weeks, we will have our mid-term elections. You've probably already been bombarded with junk email, texts, junk physical mail, and commercials that want to sway you to vote for certain candidates. With elections come formal debates about policy. Iain Duguid makes a wise comment when he states that voters can learn just as much from what is not said during a public debate than what is said. Indeed, voters must listen carefully and do some diligent study to see what candidates truly stand for. Duguid uses his commentary on Numbers to compare our democratic political world with the world of Balaam and Balak. There is much that God can teach us here, even more than the odd donkey speaking to Balaam (more on that in a later devotion).

At first glance from Numbers 22, it appears that Balaam is the good prophet. He only says to Balak that He can only do what Yahweh says. This is a key point: even as Balaam is a false prophet, he calls God by His covenant Name Yahweh. So which is it? Is Balaam a good prophet or a bad one? Our first clue is how many times he goes with Balak's people to seek another word from the Lord. I counted six times that Balaam seeks a word from God to curse the Hebrews. If God truly blessed His people, would God change His mind and now curse His own people? The repeated attempts show that Balaam is truly in it for the money. A big clue to his true intentions is what he says to Balak the second time: *"Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of the Lord my God to do less or more."* James Boice comments that Balaam's statement confirms his price: money. 2 Peter 2:15 confirms Balaam's greed: "...They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing." These confirmations from Scripture show that Balaam is a wicked, money hungry prophet.

There's more to the story about Balaam. He dies in the Hebrews' raid on the Midianites in Numbers 31. Why is Balaam's name singled out here? Because God has a point to make. No, Balaam isn't a prophet of integrity. While he's not able to curse the Israelites, he tries something else. Something that has been quite successful to sway the Hebrews (and us). It's cultural immersion: simply have the Moabites give an invitation to join them in worship to Baal. They convinced them [Israelites] that they weren't abandoning God, just adding another god. Revelation 2:14 states the case clearly: "But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality." Balaam's motive is uncovered here. His greed drove him to seek any way to gain Balak's favor (and money). It's a bad move every time.

Men, we will have plenty of time to unpack more about Balaam. Let's move away from the tendency to see this solely as a moral lesson. Sure, we must avoid the love of money and you can't serve God and money. It's clearly taught in the Bible. Yet, that's not the point of these passages in Numbers 22-31. Duguid rightly points out the relentless promise of God to bless His people. Read through some of the passages again and see how much blesses the people. He cannot be stopped in showing His grace to an unlovable people that have done nothing but deserve His judgement. They have grumbled time and time again. But God. God made the promise and He is faithful to fulfill His promise to bless His people. It's not because the people are worthy, it's all because of God's grace and love. Men, are we any different? We deserve judgment; God gives grace as His gift. We deserve shame; He gives unconditional love. Behold the greatness of your God!

Spend some time thinking God's blessings that He's given you. Start with your salvation from sin and move to more physical and relational blessings. Thank Him for His amazing grace.

For Further Reading: Jude 1