

## Message 5 Balaam, Learning from Animals

This is the last message in our series from *2 Peter 2, Powerful Lessons from History*. Peter here (v9-16) gives a detailed description of the false teachers and uses the story of Balaam. It is quite emotional because of the damage caused to the progress of Christianity. (This actually happened in history in the early church, where those who are now called the Gnostics spread their teaching.)

Balaam was a wayward prophet in the Old Testament (*Numbers 22-24*) at that time Israel was about to enter the Promised Land. Israel had just defeated the Amorites and Balak, the king of Moab, was greatly disturbed because this showed they had a more powerful army than his own. He realised he couldn't defeat Israel militarily, so he turned to the spiritual realm. He invited a famous diviner, Balaam, to pronounce a curse on them. At first Balaam refused but soon could not resist the promise of reward. On the journey, his donkey stopped because an angel of the Lord blocked the pathway. Not seeing it, Balaam beat his animal harshly. It then miraculously spoke warning him of the danger. The prophet proceeded to meet King Balak but when he tried to pronounce the desired curse on Israel, the Spirit of God intervened. The curse was turned into a blessing. As a matter of interest, ancient writings external to the Bible clearly reveal the existence of Balaam. We can learn from his story.

### 1. Characteristics of corrupt desires.

Peter describes (v9-12) the false teachers as being corrupt, despising authority, bold & arrogant, verbally abusive in ignorance (sounding like contemporary comedians!), and having eyes full of adultery. And they were experts in greed! He concludes they are *v12 .... like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct ...*

Humans are below angels but above animals. In rejecting God, they lower themselves to being like the brute, unreasoning animals. They follow feelings without moral restraint. We must not judge but realise all face the same temptations. Desires in themselves are good but, outside of boundaries, they become dangerous and harmful.

Balaam loved the wages of wickedness more than pleasing God. ... *the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. ... 1 Timothy 6:10*. At a party, I met a well-dressed person asking me about Christianity. It turned out he was a high-level, business person and very rich. I had to fight off inappropriate thoughts and quickly refocused in quietly praying for his coming to Christ. We cannot compromise. The salvation of a soul is of infinite value. Our hearts must be kept pure. *Woe to them! ...; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; ... (Jude 11)*.

### 2. Impact of sinful desires

Peter writes, *v12 .... They are like unreasoning animals, ... born only to be caught and destroyed, ... v13 They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done.*

The inordinate desire for gain brings harm to the cause of Christianity. Later, Balaam schemed with Balak to entice Israelites to sin morally, “...so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality.” (*Rev.2:14; church of Pergamum*). Balaam was eventually put to the sword, (*Joshua 13:22*).

### 3. Restraint of sinful desires

A dumb animal came to the rescue of the wayward prophet. He was rebuked by a donkey!

God can speak to us even through animals and we must be humble enough to receive.

Despite his later failures, Balaam did something good in prophecy, put into the words of an early chorus. He proclaimed about Israel, *“God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? Behold, I have received a command to bless; He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it..”* (Numbers 23:19-20; NKJV).

As Moses comments, *“... the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you.”* (Deut.23:5)

God’s loving blessing was on Israel. Now that blessing can be on you. People from all nations are receiving new life in Christ.

Learn from the history that it repeats – don’t be surprised there are present day false teachers and philosophers. Learn from the angels – God will judge the unrighteous. Learn for Noah and Lot – God knows how to rescue the righteous from trials. Learn from Balaam – to keep your heart right.

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