



L.E.A.D. TRAINING

What is the Doctrine of Balaam?

From Torah portion Balak/Pinchas

READ: Numbers 22:1-6

King Balak is highly confident that Balaam can bless and curse at his own will.

READ: Numbers 22:7-18

DISCUSSION:

Balaam appears to be a servant of the true God YHWH. In verse 18 he even says that no matter how much money Balak offered, he would not go beyond the word of the Lord. It sounds so noble.

*Is Balaam a true prophet of God? Is he being genuine? What do we know about Balaam that allows us to doubt he is genuine? At this point in the story, we know that he is a prophet for hire and that he had the reputation that he could bless, curse, and manipulate the gods into doing his will. To be a prophet for hire he had to be cunning, devious, and a master at witchcraft. He was **not** a prophet of God, even though he calls Yahweh "my god,". In order to manipulate the gods, he was respectful to them, however the next verse brings out what was truly in his heart.*

Numbers 22:19

"Therefore, please, you also stay here tonight so that I may know what more the LORD will say to me."

QUESTION:

Why does this verse begin to unveil what is really in Balaam's heart?

ANSWER:

- Because God had already told him *no*! Going back to the Lord to ask again shows the witchcraft in his heart. He believes he can manipulate the God of Israel like he manipulated all the other gods.

QUESTION:

- Do you ever find yourself asking God for something that He has already said *no* to? Is it because deep down you don't like the answer and you are hoping that He will change His mind? Try to remember the last time you pressured God into changing His mind. How did that work out? Like children, sometimes we keep pushing our Father to say 'yes' in an area that He has already ruled 'no' on. It usually doesn't work out too well for us.



READ: *Numbers 22:20-22*

QUESTION:

- If God just told Balaam to go with them *if they called on him*, why was God so angry with him when he rose in the morning and went with the men? Is God schizophrenic? Why would God punish him for something he just told him he could do?

ANSWER:

- Go back to verse 20 – what were the conditions in which he was *allowed* to go? Which critical two-letter word did the entire instruction depend on? The word “IF.” God said IF the men come to call upon you. This was a great company of men who were *not* staying in Balaam's tent but would have had to set up their camp near his. God's instructions were to *wait* for the men to *call* upon him. Balaam couldn't wait and he jumped at the opportunity and ignored the direct command in which God had allowed him go. He got up early and went with the men. God *only* punishes for disobedience.
- Therefore, we know for a fact that Balaam did *not* obey the instructions as he was punished for going. He was a prophet for hire and probably was feeling pretty good because he felt he was able to manipulate the God of Israel. The Hebrew makes this clear. Instead of the text saying הלך כי (*ki*

halach), “that he went”, it says הוא הולך כי (*ki holech hu*), which means he went of his own head—“without being called”.

QUESTION:

- Have you ever jumped the gun on something? Have you ever gone beyond the word of the Lord? If you have children, ask them if they have ever gone beyond your instructions because they really wanted to do something? It is our nature to do what we want to do. We do what’s in our heart and we constantly look for ways to get around God or the authority in our life to do it.

READ: Numbers 22:22-33

QUESTION:

- How do you think Balaam was feeling when the donkey was not going in the direction that Balaam wanted him to go? Do you think he is still traveling with the bishops from Balak? How would this affect the situation?



ANSWER:

- Although not mentioned, it is clearly implied that he is still with the large company that came from King Balak. This would have amplified his anger and embarrassment that he couldn’t control his own donkey.

QUESTION:

- Why did YHWH open the eyes of the donkey and not Balaam’s first? Later, the Angel of the LORD says in verse 33 that if the donkey had not turned aside the Angel would have killed Balaam. So why did God seemingly protect Balaam from the Angel of the LORD three times?

ANSWER:

- Balaam’s normal contact with the gods came through witchcraft and divination. To experience a god outside of that context would have been extremely unusual. I believe God was letting him know that he would not be manipulated and had full control over the earth. Also, I believe by giving Balaam three chances, God was being consistent with His own nature of mercy. He could have allowed the Angel to just kill him, but He did not. He was reinforcing His own strength and power with Balaam.

READ: Numbers 22:34

QUESTION:

- Balaam says that he did not know that God was standing against him. Now that we can understand what was happening with the donkey, what could Balaam have done that would have opened his eyes sooner to what was happening?

ANSWER:

- Sometimes in life, because we are not continually seeking the direction of the Holy Spirit, God must get our attention through the circumstances along our journey. Many times, He allows negative things to happen. This is not to hurt us—but to protect us from an even greater danger. His hope is that in those negative circumstances, where things don't go as we have planned, that we would take some time out and question whether or not we are in line with His will. God not only speaks to us through His Word and through prayer, but also through the physical world around us. We simply don't take time to perceive what is happening around us that might be from Him. He is ALWAYS speaking. We are just not *always* listening or perceptive enough to realize it or interpret it.

In Numbers 23-24 Balaam gives three prophecies in the land of King Balak and all three ended up being blessings and not curses as Balak desired. At the end of his third prophecy, something amazing happens.

Numbers 24:9

*'He bows down, he lies down as a lion;
And as a lion, who shall rouse him?'
"Blessed is he who blesses you,
And cursed is he who curses you."*

Balaam actually quotes the covenant promise given to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 when God said, *"I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

While King Balak believed that Balaam had the ability to bless and curse at will for money, Balaam sets the record straight. Under the Holy Spirit's power, no one can curse Israel because they are blessed. They are blessed simply by being His people and staying in covenant with Him.

NOTE:

While it would appear that Balaam learned his lesson and had developed a respect for the god of Israel, later he proved that Balaam was still for hire and did everything he could to curse Israel.

2 Peter 2:15

"They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;"

Jude 1:11

"Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah."

Revelation 2:14

"But I have a few things against you because you have those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality."

Josephus further illustrates this by telling us that it was Balaam's idea to help Balak curse the Israelites by getting them to curse themselves. Balaam knew that it was against God's law for the Israelite men to marry the daughters of Moab. He instructed them to send out their most beautiful women to entice the men of Israel, which would then bring a curse upon them. It worked. God brought a plague upon Israel that killed 24,000 men. It wasn't until Phinehas took it upon himself to kill one of the men of Israel and his Moabite woman in front of the tabernacle and elders of Israel that the plague stopped.

You can find this in Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, William Whiston, A.M., Ed. book 4, chapter 6, section 126

FINAL QUESTIONS:

What was the doctrine of Balaam?

- *That what we want in life is most important and we can use people or even God to get it*
- *That somehow making sacrifices to God justifies us for doing what we want*
- *That one can follow the ways of the world and still serve God*
- *That compromise is okay as long as it benefits you*
- *Mixing sexual immorality with the service of God is acceptable*

Blessings and shalom!

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