

## WAS BALAAM A PROPHET OF GOD?

Prophets for hire, talking donkeys, seemingly schizophrenic instructions from Yahweh, and blessings coming from a rogue prophet hired to curse Israel. There is no doubt that a cursory look at the Balaam narrative can leave us scratching our heads in many regards. Is Balaam a good guy, a bad guy, or a former good guy gone bad? Ultimately, I believe there is sufficient evidence to conclude that Balaam was no prophet of Yahweh, the God of Israel, but was, instead, an internationally known seer and sorcerer of the gods. This article will not only detail for you the evidence for such a conclusion but will also unveil some attributes that show up in our own lives. Attributes we need to avoid at all costs.



The following are the top ten reasons why Balaam was not a true prophet of Israel:

**10. If he was a prophet of Israel, Balaam would most likely not be living 400 miles away in Pethor but would already be with Israel coming out of Egypt.**

**9. According to scholars, the etymology of his name either has the meaning of “Bel is my kinsman” or “to swallow up, destroy.” The latter reference would be alluding to the potency of his spells and execrations. According to the Encyclopedia Judaica:**

This understanding of the name gains support from its uncanny similarity to the name of the first Edomite king, Bela, son of Beor, as recorded in Genesis 36:32. This resemblance can hardly be coincidental and may argue for the identification of Balaam as a nearby Ammonite, Moabite, Midianite, or Edomite by origin, rather than as a more distant Aramean.

Furthermore, the Vulgate and Samaritan versions of Num 22:5 state “to the land of the Ammonites” instead of “the land of his people,” which further suggests an Ammonite origin and would preclude any connection to the Israelite people.

**8. A true prophet of Yahweh would never entertain taking money for prophesying. In 2 Kings 5, the great prophet Elisha refused to take payment from Naaman when Elisha instructed him to dip in the river Jordan seven times and he was healed. His assistant Gehazi gave into temptation and took a payment from Naaman. As a result, Elisha caused the Naaman’s leprosy to cling to Gehazi. Only false prophets in pagan circles take bribes. In Acts 8, Simon the sorcerer is another example of a false prophet who was for hire.**

**7. A true prophet would NEVER have gone to the high places of Baal worship in Moab to offer sacrifices to Yahweh. It would be an abomination to Yahweh to offer sacrifices on the high places and on altars made by pagans. Hebrew altars had to be made according to the exact specifications of the Torah and the round, pagan altars found on the high places in and around Israel today were forbidden for Hebrews to use. A true prophet would have known this. It is also worthy to note that the offerings Balaam makes are strikingly similar to the offerings made to Marduk and Shamash from the Babylonian text: seven sheep poured out on seven altars.**

**6. Balaam tried three times to get Yahweh to change His mind on the matter of cursing Israel, exposing his true heart. This, no doubt, was due to the large sums of money he was being offered.**

**5. Balaam shows his deep desire to curse Israel and win the cash purse by devising a final strategy to get Israel to curse themselves by intermarrying with Moabite women. This cost Israel thousands of lives, causing the sons of Israel to worship other gods through the taking on of foreign wives. While Balaam SAYS that Yahweh is his God (Num 22:18), it’s only in the moment, for in the moment he is, in fact, subject to the god he is divining. As a soothsayer, he would say this about every god he was enchanting. Balaam was a sorcerer that was “connecting to” and communicating with the gods (demonic spirits) in an effort to manipulate them to do his bidding. Taking ownership of that “god” would be par for the course. The Romans, Babylonians, Greeks, etc. would all say that “this god is my god,” regardless of how many gods they served.**

**4. Revelation 2:14 speaks of the doctrine of Balaam, which “taught Balak...to eat things sacrificed to idols...and to commit sexual immorality” (NKJV). Balaam could not have been a prophet of Yahweh in any capacity because John, under the**

**inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says that his main doctrine was causing others to serve other gods through cultic prostitution and animal sacrifice.**

**NOTE:** There are some who have tried to tie the doctrine of Balaam to ministers who give into the temptation of greed. Although I can fully understand the emotional contempt for ministers who live lavishly on an abuse of the tithing principle, the **ONLY** way this connection could be made is if the minister knows *exactly* what he is doing and is using ministry donations as a kind of “fee” to practice his get-rich scheme. In other words, his heart must match that of Balaam, using his position to defraud the people of a blessing, thereby cursing them. If the minister simply gets caught up in the temptation of greed then the sin is not of Balaam but of greed. It’s no different than if he fell into the temptation of adultery. For it to be connected to the “doctrine of Balaam” there must be a heart intention of leading people astray for the purpose of self-gain. If the minister is telling people that they need to give to his ministry so that God can bless them financially when his heart intention is to simply become wealthy, this is the epitome of the doctrine of Balaam.

**3. Joshua 13:22 says that Balaam was a “ha-qosem” (“the diviner”). This is significant due to the fact that a qasam is, by definition, one who “is seeking after the will of the gods, in an effort to learn their future action or divine blessing on some proposed future action” (Strong’s 7080-2). Every definition given of qasam is that of demonic divination and the opposite of true prophecy.**

**2. Numbers 22:7 states that “the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the diviner’s fee in their hand...” This is the same word Joshua uses to describe Balaam. This fee was a well-known part of the process of hiring a seer. Unlike the gift Naaman tried to give the prophet Elisha, this was not a gift or a bribe. This was a diviner fee, the payment for service from an individual who was in the business of communicating with the gods.**

**1. And finally, in 1967, a Dutch archeological expedition discovered a Transjordanian site named Tell Deir ‘Alla. In the discovery were fragments of inscriptions written on plaster about a famous prophet in the area named Balaam, son of Beor. It was said that this man was “a divine seer” and was visited in the night by the gods who revealed to him that an imminent misfortune would devastate the land. He was compelled to save the land by working against those gods performing spells and enchantments in order to save the land from impending doom. He was successful in this endeavor and so became famous. Because the location of this discovery matches that of the Balaam of the Bible, along with the uncanny matching details of such a character, virtually all scholars attribute this discovery as having to do with the same Balaam of the Bible, unmasking him as the demonic sorcerer and fraudulent prophet he was.**

When you add up all the evidence on this topic, it’s pretty easy to conclude that Balaam was, in fact, not a rogue prophet of Yahweh but a soothsayer who used witchcraft to talk to the gods. But there is much more we can learn from Balaam than this. Although it may appear strange that Yahweh would play along with Balaam and seem to almost give him credibility at times – giving

him instructions on what to say and whether to go to Balak or not – He had the same type of dialogue with Satan in the book of Job. Satan asked God if he could curse Job and God instructed him to only do what He allowed. Yahweh is simply expressing His full power on earth by showing how He can take someone who has the occultist skill to manipulate the fallen angels who have become gods and use that person to bless His own people. He shows that He is not like other gods; He cannot be manipulated. There can be no doubt that Balaam’s heart was to curse Israel. He tried three times! Thankfully, he was trumped by the God of Israel each time and instead spoke a blessing. The one who was used to manipulating was now, himself, being manipulated. Oh the irony of the living God and how he takes what the enemy means for evil and turns it around for good!

Secondly, this story reminds us that we are not to judge people by what they say or by what others say about them. Instead, we are to judge by the fruit. What does the fruit of their actions say? Does what’s being said line up with the observable fruit coming from their tree? That will tell you who they *really* are and who they *really* serve. How often have you seen someone who claims to serve the God of the Bible but has very little in their life to support that claim in court? Someone can say “Yahweh is my God,” but if they have no idea what Yahweh requires of them or they choose not to serve Him or prove that love through real action, then that faith statement is dead.

We all have Balaam moments where we say we believe in this or that and then do the complete opposite. This is why there is “none righteous, not even one” (Rom. 3:10). We are all sinners who deserve death, but the true believer is constantly striving to learn what the Father desires and is continually adjusting his life to that end. Through Balaam’s life we can learn what a true prophet (minister) looks like. Even today. When all is said and done, may we all be found true ministers of His Word and true to the God we claim to serve.

Shalom,

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August 2018