

## Balaam

### Introduction

1. The idea that you or I should persuade God to do something against His will is ludicrous. Paul highlighted the folly of such an attempt when he wrote to the Galatians to counter the influence of Judaism (Gal 1:10).
2. Can you think of an OT prophet who actually acted in this way?

### I. Balaam Was The Man

#### A. The political setting.

1. In fact, Balaam expressed this truth: “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?” (Num 23:19).
2. Israel was in the ascendancy. They had recently defeated Arad, the king of the southern Canaanites, Og the king of Bashan and had conquered and occupied the land of the Amorites along the Jordan River which had been ruled by Sihon (Num 21).
  - a. “Arad stood on a small hill, now called Tel-Arad, 20 miles south of Hebron” (Barnes).
3. They now presented a potential threat to Moab, which must have been intensified by their encampment in the plains of Moab, across the Jordan from Jericho (Num 22:1-3). Notice the following geographical landmarks:
  - a. The river Jabbok flowed into the east bank of the Jordan about midpoint and had formerly formed the boundary between Moab to the south and Ammon to the north.
  - b. The Arnon flowed into the Dead Sea again about halfway along its eastern border.
  - c. The Amorites had driven the Moabites southwards beyond the Arnon and dwelt in the territory between the Jabbok and Arnon (Num 21:26).

#### 4. Balak’s plan.

- a. He formed an alliance with the Midianites (Num 22:4), a nation living to the east between Moab and Mesopotamia.
- b. Then sought to enlist the help of Balaam (22:4-6), quite possibly learning of him through the Midianites.

#### B. Personal background.

1. Our knowledge is limited.
2. He lived in Pethor, which was on the banks of the Euphrates in Mesopotamia. It was known as a city of soothsayers. He would seem to have been a Midianite (Num 22:5).
3. He was relatively well off having two servants (Num 22:7).
4. He was a magician/soothsayer (Num 22:7; 24:1) yet the text shows he was also in communication with God.
  - a. Balaam means “devourer or “swallower-up”.
  - b. He was the son of Beor which denotes a “burner-up” or “destroyer” (see Num 22:5).
5. His background explains why Balak solicited his help.
  - a. The people of that time thought that “gods” could be induced to transfer their favours from one nation to another.
  - b. Hence it was a logical step to make such an approach through the prophet of the “god” concerned.

### C. His character.

1. The statements he made would suggest a sincere, incorruptible, courageous, God-fearing man (Num 22:17-18; 22:37-38; 23:7-8, 12; 23:18-24; 24:13).
2. But his actions demonstrate otherwise.
3. Peter records that he was covetous through and through (2 Pe 2:15-16; see Jude 11).
4. This search for riches -
  - a. distorted his judgment.
  - b. caused him to try and turn God from His people.
  - c. trick God's people into being unfaithful to their God.

## II. A Man Whose Judgement Was Distorted

### A. Apparent commendable behaviour (Num 22:7-11).

1. Balaam's first response to the request of the envoys was to determine God's will – promising!
  - a. When we are confronted by a new situation, is our first thought to find out God's view on the matter – e.g. company, venue and action?
2. However, subsequent developments show that he simply wanted God to rubber-stamp his own desires.
  - a. We too can read into the Bible our own wants.

### B. Some illuminating mistakes.

1. He suppressed part of God's message (Num 22:12-13).
  - a. God said:
    - 1) "You shall not go with them."
    - 2) "you shall not curse the people,"
    - 3) "for they [are] blessed" (12).
  - b. Balaam said only: "for the LORD has refused to give me permission to go with you" (13).
  - c. By so doing he made the Lord's reply seem less final and gave Balak hope that God might change His mind.
  - d. Are we sometimes selective in the use of God's word so as to give ourselves room to manoeuvre (wriggle room – as it is sometimes called).
2. Balaam was in no doubt of God's will as regards Israel, but he was reluctant to accept it and was therefore ready to raise the same question again (Num 22:15-19).
  - a. We need to ensure that our motive in re-examining God's word is lack of clarity and not lack of commitment.
3. He disobeyed God and accompanied Balak's servants (Num 22:12 compared with 22:20 and 22a).
4. He failed to turn back when warned by the angel (Num 22b-35; NB vs. 32, 34).
5. In summary: Balaam was driven by a lust for riches and power. This distorted his judgement Resulting in being with the wrong people, at the wrong place at the wrong time. It was in these circumstances that he attempted to persuade God to turn against His people.
  - a. Application: We live in a world of materialism, immorality and wickedness. We cannot get out of the world, but we can choose our friends, the places where we go and the things which we do.

### III. The Prophet's Attempts To Persuade God

#### A. His purpose.

1. Knowing that it was God's intention to bless Israel, he tried to persuade God to curse them so that Balak would reward him (Josh 24:9,10).

#### B. His method.

##### 1. By offering sacrifices.

- a. On the first two occasions he offered sacrifices of seven bullocks and seven rams on seven altars and then proceeded to seek solitude so that the Lord could speak to him but also in order to use sorcery (Num 23:1-12; 23:13-26 cf. Num 24:1).
- b. On the third occasion he recognised that God's will could not be thwarted (24:1).

2. The folly of trying to please or persuade God on the basis of what man does for Him (Ac 17:24-26). We cannot bribe God - if you do this, I will do that.

### IV. Failing To Persuade God, Balaam Tricked God's People Into Being Unfaithful

#### A. Balaam's counsel.

1. Israel committed harlotry with the children of Midian and was beguiled into worshipping Baal of peor and bringing God's anger upon themselves (Num 25:1-5).
2. The Midianites were guided in their actions by the advice of Balaam (Num 31:16).

#### B. The consequences that followed.

1. Physical death (Num 31:8).
2. Spiritual death (2 pe 2:14,15).

### Conclusion

1. Jesus said that no man could serve God and mammon (Mt 6:24).
2. The life of Balaam illustrates the folly of trying. He attempted and failed. In his service to God, he compromised and tried to leave the door open to wealth and honour. He should have passed on the totality of God's message to Balak's servants and flatly refused to accompany them. In consequence of not doing this he was drawn deeper and deeper into sin until he lost his life and his soul.
3. Neither can we serve God and mammon. Surely the example of Balaam is as strong a warning as there could be against trying!