

NUMBERS 22:1-20

SAVED? OR LOST?

BALAAM: WAS HE A PROPHET OF GOD?

“The people of Israel set out and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan at Jericho. And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. And Moab was in great dread of the people, because they were many. Moab was overcome with fear of the people of Israel. And Moab said to the elders of Midian, ‘This horde will now lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field.’ So Balak the son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the people of Amaw, to call him, saying, ‘Behold, a people has come out of Egypt. They cover the face of the earth, and they are dwelling opposite me. Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.’

“So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand. And they came to Balaam and gave him Balak’s message. And he said to them, ‘Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you, as the Lord speaks to me.’ So the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam. And God came to Balaam and said, ‘Who are these men with you?’ And Balaam said to God, ‘Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, saying, “Behold, a people has come out of Egypt, and it covers the face of the earth. Now come, curse them for me. Perhaps I shall be able to fight against them and drive them out.”’ God said to Balaam, ‘You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.’ So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, ‘Go to your own land, for the Lord has refused to let me go with you.’ So the princes of Moab rose and went to Balak and said, ‘Balaam refuses to come with us.’

“Once again Balak sent princes, more in number and more honorable than these. 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. So you, too, please stay here tonight, that I may know what more the Lord will say to me.’ And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, ‘If the men have come to call you, rise, go with them; but only do what I tell you.’¹

Like smoke drifting before a forest fire, Balaam wafts through the pages of Scripture. The New Testament invokes his name several times. Never does the sacred page speak of Balaam in a positive manner. For instance, in the General Epistles, we read a censure delivered both by Peter and by Jude. In his Second Letter to Jewish believers scattered in the Diaspora, Peter writes of false teachers, “Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet’s madness” [2 PETER 2:15, 16].

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Jude delivers a similar censure against individuals who even then threatened the Faith. The Lord's brother wrote, "Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion" [JUDE 11].

One other reference to Balaam is found in the New Testament. The Risen Lord delivers a stern message to the Church then located in Pergamum. He instructed John to warn that congregation, "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" [REVELATION 2:14].

None of these references are positive; each leaves the distinct possibility that Balaam is forever marked as a man divinely cursed. His life serves as a warning against setting oneself in opposition to God's people. These statements against Balaam reveal that He "loved gain from wrongdoing" and that he counselled the wicked in how they could trip up the faithful. Assuredly, these are dark blots staining the life of the mad prophet.

In similar manner, the writings of the Old Testament likewise do not present Balaam in a positive light. He is named in a few Old Testament books where we learn something of his character.² The later Old Testament references demonstrate that Balaam was hired to curse the people of God [see DEUTERONOMY 23:4, 5; JOSHUA 24:9, 10; NEHEMIAH 13:2]. The actions that brought Balaam into opposition against God are recorded in CHAPTERS 22, 23 and 24 of the Book of NUMBERS. With the exception of a summary statement provided in NUMBERS 31:8, Balaam is named fifty-two times in the Book of Numbers and he is referred to well over two hundred times in this Book. Obviously, if we wish to know who Balaam was and why he is such a negative example in the remainder of the Word, we must review these three chapters of Numbers.

The question to explore in this message is whether Balaam was saved or lost. In studying his life and death, perhaps we can draw precepts that will warn those who think to set themselves against God and His people. Perhaps we will take to heart the warning against presumptive sin that leads even believers into opposing God and His work.

BALAAM—PROPHET OF GOD? OR CHARLATAN? – Who is Balaam? We know little of him before he is introduced in the text for today's study. There are a few aspects concerning his life suggested in Scripture that may help us understand who he was. Balaam was a diviner with some renown in the ancient world during the days of Israel's wilderness wanderings. This brings up a significant issue that must be addressed in order to understand who Balaam might be.

Balaam is nowhere identified either as a prophet (*nābî*) or as a seer (either *hōze* or *rō'e*); he is a diviner (*qôsem*)—one who divined the will of the gods through manipulative means and he is identified as such in JOSHUA 13:22. A diviner plied his calling for money. Drugs, music and emotional frenzy were the stock in trade of the diviner as he or she sought to imply discovery of the will of the gods. The diviner would resort to sorcery, augurs or omens as evident from this verse: Balaam "did not go, as at other times, to look for omens" [NUMBERS 24:1].

We are introduced to this man as "Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the people of Amaw" [NUMBERS 22:5]. Pethor has been identified with Pedru listed in the topographical lists of the Egyptian king Thutmose III and with Pitru, a city listed in the military itinerary of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III. The city is traditionally identified with Tell el-Ahmar on the west bank of the Euphrates River.³

² See DEUTERONOMY 23:4, 5; JOSHUA 13:22; 24:9, 10; NEHEMIAH 13:2; MICAH 6:5

³ M. W. Chavalas, "Balaam," **Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch** (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 2003) 77

It is not possible to say how Balaam became acquainted with the LORD God or with God's covenants with Israel. That Balaam was familiar with the Name of the LORD God is obvious from his response to Balak's messengers. Balaam responded to the messengers' invitation, "Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you, as the LORD speaks to me" [NUMBERS 22:8]. It should surprise no one that when Balaam attempted to employ magical arts against Israel, he was thrown into conflict with the Living God. Consequently, the diviner would find himself under the control of Yahweh—the LORD God, Who debarred him from attempting to pronounce a curse against God's chosen people. In fact, even before leaving Pethor, Balaam had to seek God's permission even to accompany Balak's emissaries [see NUMBERS 22:7-20].

When Balaam at last arrived and Balak pleaded with him to curse Israel, Balaam was quite circumspect in his response. "Have I now any power of my own to speak anything? The word that God puts in my mouth, that must I speak" [NUMBERS 22:38]. The next morning, Balak took the diviner high up on a mountainside where he could see a portion of the people. There, the king sacrificed oxen and sheep. Though we are not told to whom he sacrificed these animals, we can speculate that he sought the blessing of Chemosh, national god of Moab. Then the king urged the diviner he had hired to curse Israel.

Urged on by Balak, Balaam pronounced a series of four oracles concerning Israel [NUMBERS 23:7-10, 18-24; 24:3-9, 15-24]. Reading that particular account, it seems apparent that Balaam is surprised that he receives these oracles. He attempted to manipulate the LORD God, offering multiple bulls and rams, even though the beasts he presented were not his own animals. Nevertheless, He clearly sought to coerce God through these offerings, as revealed when he said, "Stand beside your burnt offering and I will go. Perhaps the LORD will come to meet me and whatever he shows me I will tell you" [NUMBERS 23:3].

It would appear that Balaam was seeking permission to enrich himself through cursing Israel. Instead, we read that God did meet him, "And the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth" [NUMBERS 23: 5]. This happened a second time [NUMBERS 23:16]. Each time the diviner returned with an oracle that spoke of blessing. There would be no attempt at manipulation the third time, instead we read, "When Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not go, as at other times, to look for omens, but set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. And the Spirit of God came upon him, and he took up his discourse" [NUMBERS 24:1-3].

Though the king was enraged, Balaam would deliver yet one further oracle. The exchange leading up to that oracle is merits careful consideration. "Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he struck his hands together. And Balak said to Balaam, 'I called you to curse my enemies, and behold, you have blessed them these three times. Therefore now flee to your own place. I said, 'I will certainly honour you,' but the LORD has held you back from honour.' And Balaam said to Balak, 'Did I not tell your messengers whom you sent to me, "If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I would not be able to go beyond the word of the LORD, to do either good or bad of my own will. What the LORD speaks, that will I speak?" And now, behold, I am going to my people. Come, I will let you know what this people will do to your people in the latter days"' [NUMBERS 24:10-14].

For this brief period, despite attempting to function in what was for him with familiar divinations and augurs, though he is not identified as a seer, he nevertheless functions as a seer. That he is functioning as a seer becomes apparent in the opening words of his third oracle. Balaam appears to express surprise at what is happening when he states,

“The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor,
the oracle of the man whose eye is opened,
the oracle of him who hears the words of God,
who sees the vision of the Almighty,
falling down with his eyes uncovered.”

[NUMBERS 24:3, 4]

Again, he appears to be startled, struggling to find a way to resist God’s intervention in order to secure the promised riches for pronouncing a curse.

What was said in the third oracle is iterated in the fourth when Balaam says,

“The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor,
the oracle of the man whose eye is opened,
the oracle of him who hears the words of God,
and knows the knowledge of the Most High,
who sees the vision of the Almighty,
falling down with his eyes uncovered.”

[NUMBERS 24:15, 16]

The same sense of bewilderment, of astonishment is apparent from what is said as Balaam begins delivery of this particular oracle. Following this, Balaam delivered three additional brief oracles. Though these oracles are not said to have been given by the LORD God, it appears obvious that the Spirit of God was compelling Balaam to inform Balak of what lay ahead.

I believe it is fair to say that Balaam knew *of* God, though it is difficult to say with any degree of certainty that he *knew* God. The LORD is God of all the earth. After the Flood, the descendants of Noah all knew the LORD was God. As in our own day, with the passage of time people moved away from worship of the LORD God. It is possible that Balaam retained a fragmentary knowledge of the True and Living God; and though he practised divination, he knew of a God who was above all gods. This would not be unlike the situation in many cultures. I’m always struck by the Norse mythology that spoke of the gods and the frost giants, and yet behind Odin, Thor, Freyja and Óðr stood a shadowy figure known as Allfather, appearing to refer to the God of Creation. Comparative religion studies demonstrate that this is not an exception among the ancient religions. Mankind had forgotten God, though they retained a rumour of God. I suggest that this is likely to have been the case with Balaam.

IN THE CAMP OF THE ENEMY – “Balaam rose in the morning and saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab” [NUMBERS 22:21]. Most people know the story of Balaam’s donkey. Many don’t know how the story unfolded or how Balaam became involved with the king of Moab. It will be helpful for us to review the account provided in the Word in order to understand why Balaam is viewed in such a negative light.

Balak, king of Moab, sought to curse Israel, and sent a delegation of honoured representatives to invite him to come to Moab. The text says their straight forward message was, “Behold a people has come out of Egypt. They cover the face of the earth, and they are dwelling opposite me. Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed” [NUMBERS 22:5a, 6].

The LORD proscribed Balaam from going with these emissaries. Balaam was bluntly told, “You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed” [NUMBERS 22:12]. The elders departed, returning to Moab with Balaam’s refusal to come. A second time Balak dispatched princes, more in number and more honourable. These carried an even more urgent message to the diviner. “Thus says Balak the son of Zippor: ‘Let nothing hinder you from coming to me, for I will surely do you great honour, and whatever you say to me I will do. Come, curse this people for me’” [NUMBERS 22:16, 17]. This time, for reasons we do not know, the Lord permitted Balaam to accompany them with this one stricture, “Only do what I tell you” [NUMBERS 22:20].

Subsequently, though the text does not say so, we are left with the impression that Balaam was scheming somehow to turn this trip to his advantage. The story is told in the following verses. These verses relate the account of Balaam and his donkey carrying on a conversation. The account is humorous on several levels. Somehow, the irate diviner doesn’t think it odd that he is talking with a donkey. People question whether such a thing could happen. Dr. R. G. Lee contended that it should not be thought funny that a watery-eyed, floppy-eared donkey could talk. She did have an advantage, he argued, being the female of the species.

What is always disturbing to me is that people focus on the donkey speaking without realising the reason for the donkey’s speech. The donkey was more sensitive to what was happening than was Balaam. Animals often seem more sensitive to spiritual beings—both angels and demonic beings! The donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the path, prepared to kill Balaam. Twice, she pressed against a wall on either side of the narrow path and at last lay down rather than move forward. Enraged, Balaam appears to have begun beating her. What is sometimes overlooked is that “The LORD opened the mouth of the donkey” [NUMBERS 22:28]. When Moses demurred to obey God, the Lord rebuked him, asking, “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD” [EXODUS 4:12]? As Creator, God can do what He desires in permitting any creature within His creation to communicate with mankind.

As already intimated, the reason the donkey balked at going forward is that she saw the angel of the LORD with a drawn sword. The key to understanding the pericope is found in VERSES THIRTY-ONE through THIRTY-THREE. “The LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. And he bowed down and fell on his face. And the angel of the LORD said to him, ‘Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to oppose you because your way is perverse before me. The donkey saw me and turned aside before me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, surely just now I would have killed you and let her live’” [NUMBERS 22:31-33].

At least superficially, Balaam relented from his devious scheme; thus the angel of the LORD allowed him to go with the men, giving one proviso, “Go with the men, but speak only the word that I tell you” [NUMBERS 22:35]. Superficially, Balaam received the divine warning, for he was adamant in asserting that he can say only what the LORD revealed to him [see NUMBERS 23:3].

After delivering multiple oracles that revealed God’s blessing on Israel we read, “Balak’s anger was kindled against Balaam, and he struck his hands together. And Balak said to Balaam, ‘I called you to curse my enemies, and behold, you have blessed them these three times. Therefore now flee to your own place. I said, ‘I will certainly honor you,’ but the LORD has held you back from honor’” [NUMBERS 24:10, 11]. Like many people to this day, Balak believed that money could persuade anyone to do his will. Wealth perverts the will, and legions of otherwise good people have turned aside from the path of honour and righteousness for a pittance.

Balaam responds to Balak's tirade, "Did I not tell your messengers whom you sent to me, 'If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I would not be able to go beyond the word of the LORD, to do either good or bad of my own will. What the LORD speaks, that will I speak'?" [NUMBERS 24:12, 13]. Balaam says the right thing, but a dark shadow looms over his heart. Prompted by the LORD God, he delivers the remaining three statements, and then we read, "Then Balaam rose and went back to his place. And Balak also went his way" [NUMBERS 24:25]. Would that this had truly been the end of the matter! There is more that is not immediately written down in the divine text.

Whether Balaam turned back to speak again with Balak, or whether Balaam discussed his scheme before departing is not apparent. I suspect that Balaam did leave, but a scheme percolated in his devious heart. Perhaps he made it back to Mesopotamia; perhaps he didn't make it back. At some point he turned back to advise Balak of what could be done to remove the perceived threat of Israel. Balak wanted Israel cursed, but God prevented Balaam from cursing the people whom God blessed. Balaam knew enough about the Lord that he was able to advise Balak that though he was not able to curse Israel, Israel could be cursed, bringing curses upon themselves through turning aside to pursue their own desires.

THE DIVINER ALMOST SUCCEEDED – The account of Balaam is not complete until we go to the **TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER** of NUMBERS. There, we read, "While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. And the LORD said to Moses, 'Take all the chiefs of the people and hang them in the sun before the LORD that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel.' And Moses said to the judges of Israel, 'Each of you kill those of his men who have yoked themselves to Baal of Peor.'

"And behold, one of the people of Israel came and brought a Midianite woman to his family, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the whole congregation of the people of Israel, while they were weeping in the entrance of the tent of meeting. When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose and left the congregation and took a spear in his hand and went after the man of Israel into the chamber and pierced both of them, the man of Israel and the woman through her belly. Thus the plague on the people of Israel was stopped. Nevertheless, those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand" [NUMBERS 25:1-9].

The implication is that Balaam found a way to secure the riches he was promised. Balaam almost succeeded in destroying Israel without a single battle. We wouldn't actually know of Balaam's involvement from the extended passage in Numbers, but the New Testament allows us to see into the dark heart of this wicked man. Exposing false teachings, Peter compares them to Balaam when he writes, "Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness" [2 PETER 2:15, 16]. Balaam "loved gain from wrongdoing"; he was prepared to do evil in order to enrich himself.

The Risen Son of God commands the Revelator to deliver a message to the congregation in Pergamum that allows us to see what specific evil Balaam did. John writes, "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" [REVELATION 2:14].

This fits with the account of Israel's descent into sexual immorality and concomitant idolatry and the consequences that attended their embrace of paganism. This is what is written. "Moses sent [Israel] to the war, a thousand from each tribe, together with Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, with the vessels of the sanctuary and the trumpets for the alarm in his hand. They warred against Midian, as the LORD commanded Moses, and killed every male. They killed the kings of Midian with the rest of their slain, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba, the five kings of Midian. And they also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword. And the people of Israel took captive the women of Midian and their little ones, and they took as plunder all their cattle, their flocks and all their goods. All their cities in the places where they lived, and all their encampments, they burned with fire, and took all the spoil and all the plunder, both of man and of beast. Then they brought the captives and the plunder and the spoil to Moses, and to Eleazar the priest, and to the congregation of the people of Israel, at the camp on the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho.

"Moses and Eleazar the priest and all the chiefs of the congregation went to meet them outside the camp. And Moses was angry with the officers of the army, the commanders of thousands and the commanders of hundreds, who had come from service in the war. Moses said to them, 'Have you let all the women live? Behold, these, on Balaam's advice, caused the people of Israel to act treacherously against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and so the plague came among the congregation of the LORD'" [NUMBERS 31:6-16].

Let's put the information together as it probably played out. Balaam was struggling with his inordinate desire to possess the riches that had been promised. He was fearful of going against what the LORD had warned, but like many of us he thought he would see how close he could approach the line segregating sin and righteousness. From the day our first parents fell, we have been contaminated with a desire to see how close we can come to sin without bringing judgement on ourselves. When beguiled by the serpent, Mother Eve "saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit and ate" [GENESIS 3:6]. The tragedy of our condition is that we now know good from evil, but we haven't power to turn from evil.

At some point after turning to go back to his home, Balaam returned to Balak with a plan that would lead to the destruction of Israel. If Israel could be induced to embrace idolatry, God would curse them and they would be destroyed. God had warned Israel, just as He warns us, "You shall have no other gods before Me.

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me" [EXODUS 20:4, 5].

God had also warned Israel, "When my angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, and I blot them out, you shall not bow down to their gods nor serve them, nor do as they do, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces" [EXODUS 23:23, 24].

When the people of Israel had made the golden calf while Moses was on the Mountain receiving the Ten Commandments, the result was a rapid descent into gross immorality. The result was God's anger and the death of about three thousand men [see EXODUS 32:1-28]. A close relationship between idolatry and immorality is witnessed both in the Word of God and in life. Failure to pursue the Lord God disposes mankind to indulge every sort of wickedness.

“The people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel” [NUMBERS 25:1-3]. Based on Moses’ statement after battle with Moab, Balaam taught Moab how to destroy Israel. “Have you let all the women live? Behold, these, on Balaam’s advice, caused the people of Israel to act treacherously against the LORD in the incident of Peor and so the plague came among the congregation of the LORD” [NUMBERS 31:15, 16].

The picture that is painted is that the women of Moab came down to the Hebrew camp. We must imagine that these women dressed seductively, moved provocatively with deliberate intentions of enticing the men of Israel to engage in sexual immorality. The Moabite culture was debased, not unlike western culture today. When nine in ten teenage boys and six in ten teenage girls have viewed pornography before age eighteen, when thirty-five percent of teen age boys and almost twenty percent of teenage girls view pornography on multiple occasions,⁴ when a majority of teenage girls either engage in sexting or know someone who is sexting, when virginity is no longer valued among youth in our day, it is difficult to imagine that contemporary culture differs greatly from the culture of the Moabites and the Canaanites. Make note of a startling statistic: only 3% of boys and 17% of girls have *never* seen Internet pornography.⁵

Canaanite religion, regardless of whether we speak of Moab or any of the nations beyond the Jordan in the land God had promised to Abraham, all alike sought to manipulate the gods through magic. Sexual acts were thought to be among the strongest magic when it was coupled to ritual designed to compel the gods to do the bidding of mankind. Through sex in the name of religion, the gods could be induced to ensure fertility of crops, of livestock and even of mankind.⁶ Though we have not turned sex into religion—yet, our culture is preoccupied with sex to the point that it has become a major aspect of daily life.

Music is disproportionately preoccupied with sex. Artists are often quite blatant in speaking of private acts in a way that would make a Marine blush. I know! When these “artists” aren’t being blatant, they invent ways to be suggestive. Dress for youth, especially, focuses on inordinate fashion that displays sexual assets in the most provocative manner imaginable. We train our children at ever younger ages to accept every conceivable sexual perversion as natural, assuring them that it is quite normal for them to degrade their own bodies. The conscientious soul who urges purity is seen as extreme, as inhibiting what cannot be inhibited or as deliberately hurtful. When our youth finally act out what SJWs⁷ trained them to do they are then assured that everything can be easily remedied. The father won’t need to accept responsibility and the mother can simply rid herself of “the product of conception” through abortion. Thus, we train our children to sacrifice the unborn to the god of convenience in much the same way that the Canaanites sacrificed their children to Moloch or to Chemosh. How do we differ from the Canaanites that nearly destroyed Israel? When even professing Christians are unabashed in pursuing gratification of their own desires at the expense of purity, how are we different?

⁴ Luke Gilkerson, “Teens and Porn: 10 Stats You Need to Know,” CovenantEyes, <http://www.covenanteyes.com/2010/08/19/teens-and-porn-10-stats-your-need-to-know/>, accessed 6 February 2016

⁵ Gilkerson, op. cit.

⁶ See Gene Rice, **Nations under God: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Kings, International Theological Commentary** (Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1990) 134; see also Ralph Gower and Fred Wight, “Canaanite Religion,” (art.), **The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times** (Moody Press, Chicago, IL 1987); B. W. Powers, “Adultery,” in T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (ed.), **New Dictionary of Biblical Theology** (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 2000) 378-381

⁷ Social Justice Warriors

Yet, God did hold Israel to account. There is an obscure verse in the final book of the Pentateuch—obscure because we don't know the full impact of what is written. God, speaking through Moses reminded the people, "Your eyes have seen what the LORD did at Baal-peor, for the LORD your God destroyed from among you all the men who followed the Baal of Peor. But you who held fast to the Lord your God are all alive today" [DEUTERONOMY 4:3, 4]. Those men who joined in the immorality were enticed into the idolatry introduced by the pagan women. Candidly, when our children are drawn into the immoral culture surrounding us, they are equally guilty of the idolatry of worship of their own desires, which is tantamount to adopting Canaanite religion. If we who are parents do not intervene, we are equally guilty. And if we who proclaim the Word of the Lord fail to instruct in righteousness, are we not guilty before the Lord?

What of Balaam? He is the individual on whom we focused when the message began. Balaam did not get off without divine retribution. Near the end of the Book we read of his demise. "[Israel] killed the kings of Midian with the rest of their slain, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba, the five kings of Midian. And they also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword" [NUMBERS 31:8].

So we ask, "Was it worth it?" Was it worth tempting God in order to gain some baubles? Reasonable people would argue that life is more precious than momentary pleasure, more precious than to be exchanged for transient comfort, more precious than to trade for an advantage that promotes for a brief moment. And that raises the original question, Was Balaam saved? Or was he lost?

I caution that I'm not in the place of God, so I cannot speak with authority on the salvation of any individual. I can say with certainty that the heart can deceive an individual. We are cautioned in the Word, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick" [JEREMIAH 17:9]. Evidence for that assessment is seen every time some notable individual dies. At the funeral of people who have lived without thought of God, lived only for their own pleasure, lived as though garnering fame and fortune was all that really matters in life, editorial cartoonists and opinion writers will affirm that they are now in Heaven singing in God's choir. The assumption is that God is lucky to have them. I caution that none other than the Master has warned mankind, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" [MATTHEW 7:21].

Though I cannot affirm Balaam's salvation, I will say as I have of many people who are offended because I will not affirm their Christianity, "I can only assess what I see." Of Balaam, I would ask, "What is there in his life to make me imagine that he is saved?" Neither one's statements nor the profession that one makes will demonstrate whether one is saved or lost. Know that the life lived to the glory of God reveals the presence of God's Spirit.

The question to us is whether we possess that life. If we do possess that life, are we walking in the presence of the Saviour? Or are we fighting against Him? Let each of us determine whether we have faith in the Son of God. He gave His life as a sacrifice because of our sinful condition. Though He was buried, He conquered death, rising from the tomb for our justification. Thus, we declare, If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," believing with all your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with the Father and with the mouth that one agrees with God and is set free. Our prayer is that each one listening this day has this freedom that is found in Christ alone. With the Apostle we avow, "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved" [see ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13]. Amen.