

February 13, 2011
"The Teaching of Balaam"
Revelation 2:13a, 14 -16 (NLT)

"I know that you live in the city where Satan has his throne, yet you have remained loyal to me... (v14) "But I have a few complaints against you. You tolerate some among you whose teaching is like that of Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel. He taught them to sin by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual sin. In a similar way, you have some Nic-o-la-i-tans (nick-oh-LAY-ih-tuns) among you who follow the same teaching. Repent of your sin, or I will come to you suddenly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

If you have been keeping up with the daily Bible readings we post in the bulletin (as Pastor Nick encouraged you to do a few weeks ago), you know we have been reading about Balaam. You remember Balaam and his talking donkey don't you? Balaam was summoned by a king (Balak) to come and curse the Israelites, and his donkey was trying to prevent Balaam from going. It's incredible that God would use an animal to speak sense to a human (maybe that is where the idea came from for the old TV show, "Mr. Ed," a talking horse).

Did you ever hear about the guy who was driving around and sees a sign in front of a house: "Talking Dog For Sale." He rings the bell and the owner tells him the dog is in the backyard. The guy goes into the backyard and sees a Labrador retriever sitting there.

"You talk?" he asks.

"Yes, I do," the Lab replies.

"So, what's your story?"

The Lab looks up and says, "Well, I discovered that I could talk when I was pretty young. I wanted to help the government, so! I told the CIA about my gift, and in no time at all they had me jetting from country to country, sitting in rooms with spies and world leaders, because no one figured a dog would be eavesdropping. I was one of their most valuable spies for eight years running.

But the jetting around really tired me out, and I knew I wasn't getting any younger so I decided to settle down. I signed up for a job at the airport to do some undercover security wandering near suspicious characters and listening in. I uncovered some incredible dealings and was awarded a batch of medals. I got married, had a mess of puppies, and now I'm just retired."

The guy is amazed. He goes back in and asks the owner how much he wants for the dog.

"Ten dollars," the guy says.

"Ten dollars? This dog is amazing. Why on earth are you selling him so cheap?"

"Because he's a liar. He never did any of that stuff."

The Story of Balaam

The complete story of Balaam and Balak is recorded in Numbers 22-25. Balak was king of Moab. He feared the large number of Israelites traveling through his country. So he sent messengers to call upon Balaam, a sorcerer, to come and curse the Israelites because he feared they were too powerful for him. He offered Balaam some money which tempted Balaam. So, he had the messengers stay the night, and that night God told Balaam, "Do not go with them. You are not to curse these people, for they have been blessed!"

The next morning Balaam told Balak's officials, "Go on home! The LORD will not let me go with you." (Nu.22:12-13). He did not say, go and tell the king I will never curse these people, he simply said the Lord will not let me go with you. This gave the messengers hope and an opening to come back to tempt him, and come back they did. But this time they bring even more distinguished officials and the promise by the king to pay him very well just to come and curse these people. We must resist temptation, not be wishy-washy about it; or else the enemy will return with an even more intense temptation.

Well, just as sometimes the Lord in love says no to a prayer request, sometimes in anger He gives us over to our lusts, and that is what happens with Balaam. The next day he saddles up his soon-to-become-famous-talking donkey and sets out with the Moabite officials.

God sent an angel of the Lord to stand in the road to block his way. God is always giving us a way to escape temptation, but we have to take it when it comes. Balaam didn't see the angel at first, but, his donkey did. God uses a donkey to help Balaam, eventually even allowing the donkey to speak.

Finally, the Lord opens Balaam's eyes, he sees the angel, and he confesses that he has sinned. Then the angel of the Lord allows Balaam to continue the journey, but now Balaam had a different attitude. He was going not to sin, but to serve God. He was told he could go, but to only say what the Lord tells him to say.

In the end king Balak could not get Balaam to curse God's people. Balak becomes enraged because he brought Balaam there to curse Balak's enemies, the Israelites, and instead Balaam blesses them - not once, but three times. Yet, Balaam basically blames God as he says to the king, "it's God you should be displeased with, not me." Later

Balaam tries to make it up to king Balak by telling him how to trip up the Israelites. A plan that worked quite well.

The Teaching of Balaam

Numbers 25:1-3 describes the Israelite men getting involved with pagan women and then worshipping the gods of Moab.

While the Israelites were camped at A-ca-cia (uh-KAY-shuh) Grove, some of the men defiled themselves by having sexual relations with local Moabite women. These women invited them to attend sacrifices to their gods, so the Israelites feasted with them and worshiped the gods of Moab. In this way, Israel joined in the worship of Baal of Peor (Baal means lord or master; it is the name given to false gods in the Old testament. Peor is a place. So they were worshipping the false gods of Peor), causing the LORD's anger to blaze against his people.

While these verses do not mention Balaam, **Numbers 31:16** explains that Balaam knew he could undermine Israel's worship and power by sending the Moabite women to entice the men of Israel.

"These are the very ones who followed Balaam's advice and caused the people of Israel to rebel against the LORD at Mount Peor. They are the ones who caused the plague to strike the LORD's people.

Balaam did not curse the Israelites but, teaches a way to trip up the Israelites – by tempting them to immorality, and idolatry, which would cause a separation from God and His blessing. See Revelation 2:14 again, where Jesus says,

"But I have a few complaints against you. You tolerate some among you whose teaching is like that of Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel. He taught them to sin by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual sin.

The way that satan trips us up is tempting us to immorality and idolatry, and convincing us that we are doing nothing wrong.

Immorality is all corruption, dishonesty, all immoral behavior. Here, sexual immorality is especially mentioned.

Idolatry is what you worship, trust in, and put in place of God. It is the things we become addicted to, they give us pleasure at first, but they are destroying our lives.

Idolatry is our plan-B that we have talked about; a strategy to make life work without having to trust and obey God and His will for us.

In Rev. 2:14 Jesus is telling us not to compromise our belief in Him by blending it with principles that are not in line with His teachings. We are in the world, and we should cooperate in our society, but are not of the world, and must avoid anything that could lead to immoral practices. There can be no compromise between our loyalty to Christ and the sinful practices of this world. We must not give into the pressure to accept the beliefs and practices of the world that contradict the beliefs and practices of our faith.

The group that was teaching the way of Balaam were called the Nic-o-la-i-tans. They are also mentioned by Jesus when He address the church in Ephesus, but there is a difference. In Revelation 2:6

But this is in your favor: You hate the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans, just as I do.

But in 2:15 it says: you have some Nic-o-la-i-tans (nick-oh-LAY-ih-tuns) among you who follow the same teaching (the same teaching as Balaam).

The Nicolaitans were professing Christians who taught a false freedom of being morally unrestrained especially in sexual activity, and the false freedom of eating food sacrificed to idols. They were against the churches teaching of refraining from the eating of "things sacrificed to idols" (Acts 15:29). Such a restriction, though seemingly hard, in that it prevented the Christian communities from joining in public festivals, and so brought upon them suspicion and dislike, was yet necessary to prevent a return to a pagan laxity of morals.

In v6 the Nic-o-la-i-tans were not in the church. The church in Ephesus hated their evil deeds. But, in v15 they are in the church, and they were being tolerated in the church. Not only were they in the world doing immoral things, they were in the church teaching their beliefs.

The church today is weak because of the teaching of Balaam. It is the false freedom of living anyway we want and thinking God will bless us anyway. It is living like the world and thinking we are still Christian. It is compromising our total devotion and loyalty to Jesus. The teaching or advice of Balaam to trip up God's people is to tempt them with immorality, to live like unbelievers, which leads to idolatry, and putting pleasure before God's will, then they don't need to be cursed to lose their favor with God.

The Lesson from the Story and Teaching of Balaam

If you want to be a follower of Jesus you must lessen the things that come between you and God, and increase the things that bring you closer to Him. Your devotion to Jesus must be total and complete. You must make a break with carnal ways, you can not be like the world, and treat God with little importance. Jesus tells us what to do:

Repent of your sin, or I will come to you suddenly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Christ was not only telling the "Balaams" and Nicolaitans to repent; he also wanted the church to repent of its leniency toward their advice. He is telling us to repent of attempting to compromise where there could be no compromise. A church who tolerates such people will find that Christ will come *suddenly and fight against them with the sword of [his] mouth*. This sword represents God's judgment against all forms of sin. If the church did not repent of its sin and deal with the compromisers, then God would come and do it — and that would be disastrous.

Repent means to turn from sin and turn to Jesus. We don't want the judgment of God we want the blessings of God.

"I know that you live in the city where Satan has his throne, yet you have remained loyal to me...