

“DOCTRINE OF BALAAM”

A TEACHING WIDELY TAUGHT AND ACCEPTED
THROUGHOUT CHRISTENDOM TODAY

By Arlen L. Chirwood

Jude 11 records “the error of Balaam,” II Peter 2:15 records “the way of Balaam,” and Rev. 2:14 (in the message to the Church in Pergamos) records “the doctrine of Balaam.” All three of these verses are used in passages referring to Christians entering into a state of affairs within Christendom which *not only defiles their high calling but also dishonors the Lord who paid the price for their salvation with His Own blood.*

The error and way of Balaam appear in companion passages of Scripture and would seem to refer basically to the same thing. *The error of Balaam* is associated with “reward” in Jude, and *the way of Balaam* is associated with the “wages of unrighteousness” in II Peter.

Thus, *the error and way of Balaam* have to do with “monetary gain.” And, according to the Old Testament account of Balaam, monetary gain derived through this means was acquired through his willingness to compromise the principles of God and proclaim things contrary to the revealed Word of God (though Balaam was prevented from doing this and could only utter that which was in accord with the revealed Word of God).

The error and way of Balaam can be found

in Numbers chapters twenty-two through twenty-four.

Balak, king of the Moabites, hired Balaam to come into his land and pronounce a curse upon the children of Israel. Balak had seen that which Israel had done to the Amorites; and knowing that this nation would soon be passing through his country, he was afraid because of the exhibited power which Israel exercised through the nation’s God.

Balak knew that the only way Israel could be defeated was through *bringing about a change in Israel’s relationship with their God.* Thus, Balak hired Balaam to come into Moab and pronounce *a curse* upon the Israelites, incurring God’s wrath upon them in order to ultimately bring about their defeat at the hands of the enemy.

However, once in Moab, on three separate occasions, being unable to curse the one whom God had not cursed (Num. 23:8), only *blessings* proceeded from the lips of Balaam. Balak, angered by the turn of events, sent Balaam out of Moab to his own country.

The doctrine of Balaam though was different than *his error and way.* *His doctrine* had to do with that part of his teaching which was contrary to doctrine in the revealed Word of God, and it is seen in Scripture following the account of his error and way.

Past Teaching

Scripture pertaining to the doctrine of Balaam and its tragic results is given in Num. 25:1-3:

“And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab.

And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods.

And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.”

The Israelites, after coming into Moab, began to commit fornication with the “daughters of Moab,” eat meat sacrificed to idols, and bow down and worship the false gods of the Moabites.

In order to put a stop to these sins and stay the hand of God’s judgment upon the entire camp of Israel, Moses was instructed to slay every Israelite who had “joined himself unto Baal-peor.” Because of their sins, twenty-four thousand Israelites perished under God’s judgment.

What caused the Israelites to depart from the one true and living God Who had delivered them from Egypt and begin serving false gods and following the idolatrous ways of the Moabites? The answer is given in Num. 31:16:

“Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord.”

As previously seen, Balaam could not curse Israel. Only beautiful prophecies filled with blessings flowed from his lips when he was called into Moab by Balak. But Balaam did succeed in leading the Israelites astray through *his counsel.*

The Israelites, through *the counsel of Balaam*, were led to commit fornication, eat things sacrificed to idols, and bow down before other gods. And because of these sins, the judgment of God fell upon His people.

The counsel of Balaam — i.e., “the doctrine of Balaam” — in the light of his prophecies (Num. 23, 24), could only have had to do with sins committed by the Israelites in view of promises and blessings associated with their covenant relationship with God. In this respect, briefly stated, this doctrine could only have had to do with the fact that the Israelites were the covenant people of God, and God’s covenants (Abrahamic and Mosaic at that time) could not be broken; consequently, the Israelites, in relation to realizing covenant promises and blessings, could sin with immunity.

However, such was not the case at all. It was true that the covenants established between God and Israel could not be broken; it was also true that Israel’s position as firstborn could not be changed; but it was not true that the Israelites, in relation to realizing the promises and blessings associated with God’s covenants, could sin with immunity (cf. Gen. 22:17, 18; Ex. 19:5, 6).

A realization of promises and blessings within Israel’s covenant relationship with God was conditioned on obedience (Lev. 26:1ff; Deut. 28:1ff). And as a result, with thousands of Israelites succumbing to the counsel of Balaam, God’s wrath was manifested because of the sins of His people; and these individuals — saved individuals — were overthrown in the wilderness, short of the goal of their calling.

Present Teaching

The doctrine of Balaam is one of the most widely taught doctrines in the Church today. Christians know — as their counterparts in the Church in Pergamos (Rev. 2:12-17) — that they have been saved by grace through faith, and nothing can change or alter this fact.

Christians presently possess eternal life, which can never be taken from them; and, because of *the unchangeable nature of the spiritual life which they possess*, they often reason that they can conduct their lives in any manner which they choose, apart from this manner of living making any difference in their one day realizing that to which they have been called.

However, as in the case of the Israelites, so in the case of Christians. *It makes exactly the same difference as seen in the type concerning how Christians conduct their lives.*

Christians, as the Israelites under Moses, have been saved *for a specific, revealed purpose*. Every Christian is enrolled in a race (I Cor. 9:24-27), engaged in a conflict (Eph. 6:10-18; II Tim. 2:4, 5). *And the goal set before every Christian is to win the race, be victorious in the conflict.*

God has made provision for Christians in order that they, at the end of the race, might say with Paul,

“I have fought a good fight [‘I have strained every muscle in the good contest’]. I have finished my course [‘race’], I have kept the faith:

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness...” (II Tim. 4:7, 8).

The enemy, Satan, on the other hand, is doing all within his power to bring about defeat in the lives of Christians. Satan’s main objective in the present warfare is *to prevent Christians from qualifying for crowns and thus positions of rulership with Christ in His coming kingdom.*

God is presently bringing into existence a new order of *sons* to replace the order now ruling from the heavens; and the incumbent rulers — Satan and his angels — *are doing all within their power to retain their present governmental control over the earth.*

The main facet of the doctrine of Balaam which is being promulgated in Churches today is the teaching that *future blessings and rewards have been set aside for every Christian solely on the basis of Christ’s finished work at Calvary and the Christian’s positional standing “in Christ.”* In this respect, all Christians — regardless of their conduct during the present time — will receive crowns and positions of power and authority with Christ in the kingdom.

However, that which is clearly taught throughout the Word of God is to the contrary.

The Israelites did not sin with immunity, and neither can Christians. Sin in the camp of Israel resulted in the Israelites being overthrown in the wilderness, short of the goal of their calling. And it will be no different for Christians (Heb. 3:18-4:2).

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