



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

JULY 08 2023

Scripture Story: Numbers 22–24.

Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets (or Beginning of the End)*, chapter 40.

greed: the bottomless pit



Photo by Bill Wolf

flashlight

“Balaam ‘loved the wages of unrighteousness.’ 2 Peter 2:15. The sin of covetousness, which God declares to be idolatry, had made him a timeserver, and through this one fault Satan gained entire control of him. It was this that caused his ruin. The tempter is ever presenting worldly gain and honor to entice men from the service of God. He tells them it is their overconscientiousness that keeps them from prosperity. Thus many are induced to venture out of the path of strict integrity. One wrong step makes the next easier, and they become more and more presumptuous” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 439).

key text

“Then the LORD opened Balaam’s eyes, and he saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand; and he bowed his head and fell flat on his face.”

(Numbers 22:31, NKJV)

what do you think?

Desperate for money, a young man held up a store, even though his conscience told him it was wrong. Before long he committed more and more crimes, and the more he committed, the less it bothered him. The more wrong he did, the less wrong it seemed. He finally became completely immune to his guilt over the thievery.

Why did the young man become immune to his guilt?

did you know?

Even one wrong trait of character, one sinful desire, persistently cherished, will eventually neutralize all the power of the gospel. Every sinful indulgence strengthens the soul's aversion to God." —Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 34.

INTO THE STORY

"That night God came to Balaam and said, 'Since these men have come to summon you, go with them, but do only what I tell you.'

"Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the Moabite officials. But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the LORD stood in the road to oppose him. . . . When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, it turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat it to get it back on the road.

"Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path through the vineyards, with walls on both sides. When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, it pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat the donkey again.

"Then the angel of the LORD moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, it lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat it with his staff. Then the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and it said to Balaam, 'What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?'

"Balaam answered the donkey, 'You have made a fool of me! If only I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now.'

"The donkey said to Balaam, 'Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?'

" 'No,' he said.

"Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell face-down.

"The angel of the LORD asked him, 'Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me. The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If it had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now, but I would have spared it.'

"Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, 'I have sinned. I did not realize you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now if you are displeased, I will go back.'

"The angel of the LORD said to Balaam, 'Go with the men, but speak only what I tell you.' So Balaam went with Balaak's officials."

(Numbers 22:20-35, NIV)



OUT OF THE STORY

Why did the Moabites call to Balaam for help?

Why did Balaam refuse to go with the Moabites? Was it his love for God or his pride?

What was Balaam's reaction when he saw the Angel of the Lord before him?

Why did God open the mouth of the donkey and let it speak?

Why did the Moabites want Balaam to curse the Israelites?

Name some of Balaam's good attributes.

Name some of Balaam's bad attributes.

Why did Balaam decline the bribe of the princes? Was it his love for God that made him decline it, or did he do so because he wanted to appear as if he were faithful and obedient?

What can we learn from this story about how God communicates with us?

punch lines

"O thou that dwellest upon many waters, abundant in treasures, thine end is come, and the measure of thy covetousness" (**Jeremiah 51:13, KJV**).

"Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!" (**Habakkuk 2:9, KJV**).

"But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication" (**Revelation 2:14, KJV**).

"Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gain-saying of Core" (**Jude 11, KJV**).

"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (**Hebrews 13:5, KJV**).

further insight

"It is a perilous thing to allow an unchristian trait to live in the heart. One cherished sin will, little by little, debase the character, bringing all its nobler powers into subjection to the evil desire. The removal of one safeguard from the conscience, the indulgence of one evil habit, one neglect of the high claims of duty, breaks down the defenses of the soul and opens the way for Satan to come in and lead us astray. The only safe course is to let our prayers go forth daily from a sincere heart."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 452.

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read Habakkuk 2:9.

Do you see yourself as being more like Balaam, or more like the donkey, when it comes to relating to God?

Ponder your actions. Consider whether or not you do things that you once thought were sinful, but now believe to be harmless. How can we protect ourselves from falling into that trap? Balaam was greedy; he wanted the riches the Moabites offered him, even though he knew that to curse the Israelites was not what God wanted. How can we stay conscious of what's wrong and what's right?

Sunday

Read Jeremiah 17:8-10.

Think about the young man in the *What Do You Think?* section. Do you ever find yourself doing things you know are wrong, and yet justifying them in your mind? What are ways you justify doing wrong?

Do you guiltlessly do things now that you used to think were wrong? If so, what brought about the change? Is there any way to return your conscience to its former state? Would you want to?

Monday

Read Proverbs 12:10; Psalm 36:6; 147:9.

Review the *Key Text* and ponder the fact that it took Balaam a lot longer than the donkey to realize a heavenly being was present.

Animals suffer along with the rest of humanity

because of sin. When Balaam struck the donkey that he rode, he was causing this innocent animal to suffer. God wants us to make the lives of His creatures as bearable as possible; actually, He says that our righteousness is revealed by our regard for our animals.

What are ways that you could help innocent animals that are being abused? One way would be to volunteer at an animal shelter.

Tuesday

Read Matthew 6:3.

Read this week's *Punch Lines*. Even though Balaam had fallen short on his love for God, he first told the Moabites he would not curse the Israelites in order to make himself seem full of integrity. He put on a disguise that made him appear righteous, when he really cared only about his own benefit, not what God wanted.

Ponder your own character and whether you do things for God or just to make yourself appear more righteous. Pray and ask for God's guidance, and do what God wants you to do because you love Him, not because you're worried about what others think of you.

Wednesday

Read Psalm 17:5.

Look at the quote in the *Further Insight* section. What does this quote warn about? What do you need to surrender to God to keep greed and sin from ruling in your life? Write them down and share them with someone else.

Thursday

Read Revelation 2:14.

Remember that God is all powerful. When God told Balaam not to curse the Israel-

ites, He meant it. Balaam thought he could hide from God by appearing to be righteous, but God knows the heart; He knows when we are sincere and when we aren't. God also knew that Balaam desired the wealth the Moabites offered him. He pretended not to want it, but God knew his heart. Ask yourself: Are there ways in which I am putting on masks, pretending to be what I am not?

Friday

Read Hebrews 13:5.

Read the *Flashlight* quote again. In what ways does covetousness work against your soul? What are ways in which you can combat covetousness in your own life? Is it possible to fight it in our own strength?

Consider volunteering with friends to work in a soup kitchen, or work with your church on another project to help the homeless. Active service to help others is one of the best ways we can work with God to combat covetousness in our own hearts.

this week's reading*

Patriarchs and Prophets (or Beginning of the End), chapter 40.

**Beginning of the End* is a special adaptation of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.