

Balaam: the Light that was Darkness

Numbers 22:1-25:18

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Have you ever heard of Balaam the son of Beor? Have you ever studied his story? Probably not, He is one of those little-known characters tucked away in the Old Testament, and yet he is an extremely interesting one. The story of his life is found in the book of Numbers.

I would like to embark this year on a new selection of studies on Old Testament characters. I do this for a number of reasons. I love the Old Testament, and I love to teach it. But paramountly, I have found that the stories which are told in this older covenant have the power to change lives. In the New Testament, Paul says that these historical accounts in the Old Testament "happened to them" i.e., they are trustworthy history, and yet they were "written for our instruction."

Though the characters of the Old Testament may have experienced these events initially, the ultimate benefit accrues to us. The term which Paul uses there, and which is translated "instruction," is a term which means "to set in mind," to place in mind in such a way that these truths are unforgettable. And this is the way I feel about the Old Testament. It takes the principles which are found in the New Testament and portrays them in pictorial form in an unforgettable way, in a way which has an impact upon us that the New Testament perhaps may not have at times. So I am convinced that as we look at these Old Testament stories the Lord is going to change our lives. He is going to put these truths in our minds.

Secondly, I would like to stimulate you in your own study of the Old testament. I Find that many Christians simply do not read and study the Old Testament, perhaps because they feel that the Old Covenant is superseded by the New Covenant and therefore is outdated and outmoded, and perhaps is not even intended for Christians to read, much as we might refer only to an up-to-date copy of the Sears catalog to order some merchandise, rather than to the 1936 edition, But that is not true. The Old Testament is not outmoded, not outdated, not irrelevant. It is exceedingly relevant, and it presents to us the truth that we have in The New Testament in a very vivid way. It anticipates almost all the truth revealed in the New Testament.

Before we got into our study of Balaam, I would like to share with you some of the characteristics of biographies as they are found in the Scriptures. I will add to this list as we continue in our studies. The first thing which impresses me about Old Testament character studies is that the Lord is brutally honest about these people. There is no attempt to cover up their misdeeds or to portray them in some artificial way. Their virtues, and their vices as well, are presented honestly. Every thing is "out front". They are pictured as real men and women coming from a common source. The Scriptures tell us that man came from the dust of the earth. We all are made out of the same stuff; we have the sane origins. No one, as Jack Crabbtree once pointed out, is made out of superdust! We are all the same. We are all limited, all weak. And the colossal failures of these Old Testament men are presented as well as their victories. Therefore we can identify with them, because we are like that. We fail abysmally at times. So when we read these stories our hearts go out to them, because that is where we are.

David was an adulterer, a murderer, and a man filled at times with massive pride for which he was very severely judged. Abraham, despite the fact that he was "exhibit A" of the Man of Faith, as a husband was just a great oaf, jeopardizing the life of Sarah at least twice in order to save his own skin. Jacob, whose name means "Usurper," was the sort of man who is always trying to take somebody else's place, who is always pushing into line - a con artist. These men are portrayed in all of their failures. And we can look at them and say, "These are our kind of people!" Yet God is not ashamed to call them "brethren". He loves them and accepts them the way they are, and he is available to them to change their lives. So when we see men portrayed

as they really are, not as super saints but as men with all of the weaknesses that we have, we can identify with them readily. That is why I enjoy studying these Old Testament characters.

Another thing that I see in these biographical accounts is a certain selectivity which the Holy Spirit employs. He doesn't tell us everything about everyone. God is not portraying merely a history of the nation of Israel nor an account of the outstanding men and women. This is a spiritual history. These episodes are selected in order to present spiritual truth to us, and we need to keep that in mind as we study these accounts. They are very selective.

For instance, in the book of I Kings there is the account of a king by the name of Omri, who was the king of Israel after Solomon. In the account only a very few things are said about him. It is recorded that he moved the capital city from Tirzah to Samaria, and that he was the father of Ahab. Perhaps the most significant statement made about him is that "Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, and acted more wickedly than all who were before him." And nothing else is written about him. Yet if you were to look at contemporary annals of the people who lived around Israel you would discover that Omri was a very capable political leader, one of the most powerful kings that Israel had - perhaps even more politically astute than Solomon or David. For 150 years after Omri died the Assyrians referred to the Israelites as the "People of Omri." That is the kind of impact he had on his age, and yet in the Scriptures his only significant mention is the statement, "He did what was evil in the sight of God."

So, you see, in picking these stories the Holy Spirit is selective regarding the incidents he portrays, because his concern is not merely to tell us the secular history of Israel but rather to reveal spiritual truth to us, to give us the facts which will minister to our spiritual needs. Therefore as we study these accounts we need to ask ourselves the questions: "What truth is here which I can apply to my life? Why did the Holy Spirit lead the writers to depict these men in a certain way?" The significance of everything is in terms of its impact upon us spiritually.

The third thing I see which is characteristic of these Old Testament studies is that they teach us to take truth seriously, because the law of reaping what is sown is so evident in these accounts - the old law of inevitable consequence. We do reap what we sow. We cannot reject the truth without suffering the consequences, and these Old Testament characters portray this so vividly. That is why I chose the account of Balaam. Perhaps as no other character in the Old Testament he reveals this truth.

With that as background, let's go to the 22nd chapter of Numbers and begin reading with verse 1:

Then the sons of Israel journeyed and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan opposite Jericho. Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. So Moab was in great fear because of the people, for they were numerous; and Moab was in dread of the sons of Israel. And Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this horde will lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field. "And Balak the son of Zippor was king of Moab at that time. So he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor, at Pethor, which is near the River, in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying, "Behold, a people came out of Egypt; behold, they cover the surface of the land, and they are living opposite me. Now, therefore, please come, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me; perhaps I may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed."

We need a bit of background to this passage. As you may know, forty years prior to this event the nation of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, had traveled down to the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula, and there at Mount Sinai had received the Law, the commandments which dealt with moral and religious and civil life. They had constructed a tabernacle, appointed a priesthood, and begun to institute the sacrifices. Then after spending about ten and a half months at Mount Sinai they had begun to travel north through the peninsula until they reached Kadesh-bainea at the end of the second year from their exodus.

At Kadesh the unbelief of the people, which had been under the surface all this time, made itself known, and the people refused to go into the land. So God turned them back, and for 38 years that generation wandered

aimlessly in the wilderness and all the men 20 years and older who were a part of that generation died. I calculated once that, given 600,000 men dying over a thirty-eight-year period, they must have held something like 50 funerals a day. This was a horrible time, a very dismal time in the life of Israel, while they were being judged for their failure to go into the land. They abandoned the sacrifices, they no longer circumcised their children, the priesthood was abandoned, and they broke up into little bands roving all over the wilderness.

But after 38 years the new generation gathered again at Kadesh and began to make plans to go into the land. They left Kadesh and traveled in a northeasterly direction. They attempted to go through the country of Edom but the Edomites turned them back, and so they had to make a great loop to the east around the borders of the Moabites. Finally they arrived on the plains of Moab, just across the Jordan River from the city of Jericho. There they engaged in battle with some of the kings who lived in that area - the Amorite king, Sihon, and Og the king of Bashan - and defeated them. Og is referred to in Scripture as one of the Rephaim, one of the giants whose size is given in terms of the dimensions of his bed - 6 feet by 9 feet. These were very imposing enemies, but Israel was victorious.

Now, when Israel had traveled around the borders of Moab, the Moabites had given them food and water and had provided for their needs because they were intimidated by the Israelites. They thought that when the Israelites reached the plains of Moab the Amorites would defeat them. But they didn't. The nation of Israel defeated the Amorites. And so the Moabites panicked. They knew they had to do something. Balak, the king of Moab, formed an alliance with the king of Midian, and they sent emissaries off to Mesopotamia to hire a sorcerer to come and curse the nation of Israel for them. They knew they couldn't defeat them in battle, normally, but they felt that if they could hire this wizard to cast a spell over Israel they would then be able to defeat them.

Here we encounter this man Balaam, who is said to come from the land of the great Rive the Euphrates, from the city of Pethor. The Hebrew word "pethor" means "to interpret dreams". Evidently this was a community of wizards, or sorcerers, astrologers, people who were occultists, who worshiped demons. These were the magi who lived in Mesopotamia. Balaam apparently was a very powerful wizard - his name means "the devourer of people." He had a reputation for strength and power. His father's name, Beor, means "one who burns up," so Balaam may have come from a long line of powerful sorcerers. And Balak felt that if he could bring Balaam down to cast a spell over the nation of Israel, given the kind of power that this man had, then Israel would be impotent.

It is interesting, as we look at the account, that though Balaam was a sorcerer, a wizard, he also knew about the God of Israel. He refers to him by his covenant name, Jehovah. He was a man who had an immense amount of truth about the true God. He came from the same area as did Abraham, and perhaps there was a great deal of truth about God available to him there at this time. And yet he drew from occult sources, from demonic sources, as well.

In verses 7 through 14 we have the account of the emissaries who were sent from Balak to Balaam:

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 repeated Balak's words to him. And he said to them, "Spend the night here, and I will bring back word to you as the Lord [Jehovah, the covenant name of God] may speak to me." And the leaders of Moab stayed with Balaam. Then 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 word to me, 'Behold, there is a people who came out of Egypt and they cover the surface of the land; now come, curse them for me; perhaps I may be able to fight against them, and drive them out.' "And God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them; you shall not curse the people; for they are blessed." So Balaam arose in the morning and said to Balak's leaders, "Go back to your land, for the Lord has refused to let me go with you." And the leaders of Moab arose and went to Balak, and said, "Balaam refused to come with us."

Hurray for Balaam! He would not transgress the Lord's word. There are at least two ways in Hebrew to negate an idea, and God, in his revelation to Balaam, uses the strongest possible terms, the same terms which are used in the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not go. Thou shalt not curse." Balaam knew exactly what

God wanted. There was no question in his mind. God had clearly revealed his will to Balaam, just as God clearly reveals his will to us. We are never in doubt; God has given us his word. And Balsam knew that God's word was not in question, because later on, in one of his oracles, he says, "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should repent." That is, "God speaks the truth, He does not lie, and he does not change his mind." Balaam knew that.

The reason that God speaks the truth is that he knows what is profitable in this world, what will make life worthwhile . . . and what will destroy us. He knows. And he reveals the truth, not to cramp our style, but because he wants us to avoid the things which ultimately are destructive in life. Therefore he cannot change his mind. He loves people, and to change his mind would mean that we would be exposed to things which would destroy us. God knew that if Balaam cursed Israel, Balaam would suffer. God wasn't concerned about Balaam's curse that somehow it would frustrate God's efforts with Israel and would destroy them. No, that wasn't God's concern. God was concerned for Balaam, because back when God had given the Abrahamic Covenant he had told Abraham, "He who blesses you will be blessed, and he who curses you will be cursed." And that has been true down through history. God knew that if Balaam cursed Israel, Balaam would be cursed. And so, because God loved Balaam, he said, "No, you cannot go." And Balsam knew that was the truth, and he said, "I won't go. Hurray for Balaam! Verses 15 through 20:

Then Balak again sent leaders, more numerous and more distinguished than the former.
[The Hebrew says that he sent "heavier" leaders!] And they came to Balaam and said to him, "Thus says Balak the son of Zippor, 'Let nothing; I beg you, hinder you from coming to me; for I will indeed honor you richly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Please come then, curse this people for me.' " And 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 do anything, either small or great, contrary to the command of the Lord my God. And now please, you also stay here tonight, and I will find out what else the Lord will speak to me. "And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men have come to call you, rise up and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you shall you do."

How strange of God! The God who does not change his mind, changes his mind. He says on one hand, "Balaam, don't go. You shall not go." And then later he says, "Balaam, go." Why? Well, the key to this whole issue is found, I believe, in Balaam's words to the emissaries, found in verse 18, when he says, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything." The thing which crossed my mind when I read that was, "Who said anything about silver and gold?" You see, the real heart of this man begins to surface. Balaam wanted silver and gold. The reason he had not gone before was not that he wanted to be obedient to God, but that there really was no conflict of wills. The price wasn't right before. They hadn't offered enough. But now there is a conflict of wills. His love for money is conflicting with his love for God, and he is determined to get what he wants.

Peter picks this up in his second epistle when he writes about men in the church who were false teachers, who Peter said, " . . . followed the way of Balaam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness . . ." That was Balaam's problem. He loved money more than he loved God. And so he says, "I'll go ask God again." Now, he already has God's word. It is clearly revealed. But Balaam, says, "I'll ask him again. Maybe he'll change his mind."

But God is not that kind of God. He is not a softie. We sometimes think of God as stern on the outside but made of putty inside - and if we just wheedle and cajole, sooner or later we'll get our way. But God does not want us to have our way because he knows that ultimately it will destroy us. Yet he gives in to Balaam, not because he is a softie but because he will not control Balaam to the point that Balaam cannot act according to his own will if he insists upon it. He lets him go. And that is the way that God deals with us. If we insist upon going our own way, then God takes his hands off of us and he lets us go. There is a passage in Psalm 106 in which David says with reference to Israel, "He [God] gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul." And this is what he does with Balaam. He says, "All right, Balaam, I know your heart. I know what you are after, and so I'll let you go." Notice what happens in verses 21 and 22:

So Balaam arose early in the morning, and saddled his donkey, and went with the leaders of Moab. But God was angry because he was going and the angel of the Lord took his

stand in the way as his adversary against him.

You see, though the Lord will let us go, he still loves us and he wants to stop us. And he will do everything he can to reach us and to get us to turn around and go back to the place of obedience. He will put roadblocks in our way. And this is what he is doing with Balaam. As Balaam mounts his donkey and starts for the land of Moab the angel of the Lord appears before him as his adversary to stop him. Verses 22 through 27:

Now he was riding on his donkey and his two servants were with him. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand, the donkey turned off from the way and went into the field; but Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back into the way. Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path of the vineyards, with a wall on this side and a wall on that side. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she pressed herself to the wall and pressed Balaam's foot against the wall, so he struck her again. And the angel of the Lord went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn to the right hand or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam was angry and struck the donkey with his stick.

Balaam was enraged. Peter, in commenting on this, says that Balaam was "beside himself". He had lost all reason. "This ignorant animal! It won't do what I want it to do!" First it had run off into a field and he had beaten the donkey and moved it back onto the path. Then it crushed his foot against a wall. Eventually it will go no further and it lies down under him. Notice what the Lord does, verse 28:

And the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have stuck me these three times?"

And we say, "Come on, now! You've got to be kidding. That is something right out of Aesop's fables!" What strikes us is that this is so incongruous, so unlike God. But that is precisely the way God is. God wants to communicate his will to us, and he is infinitely creative. He has the right to do anything He pleases. He can employ any variety of means to reach us. He is not limited in any way whatever. He wants us to know his will, and he will speak to us in any way possible in order to get through to us. Balaam was so blinded, so intent upon having his own way that he couldn't see what God was trying to say. So God spoke to him through the donkey. And Peter says, in commenting on this, that because Balaam was beside himself he was irrational and so he was rebuked by a dumb animal - Balaam, the Ph.D., rebuked by his ass! - because God was concerned about Balaam, and he wanted to reach him. But Balaam was still so blinded that I don't think he realized at it was the donkey speaking to him, because he speaks right back to the donkey! Verses 29 through 31:

Then Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a mockery of me! If there had been a sword in my hand, I would have killed you by now." And the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden all your life, to this day? Have I ever been accustomed to do so to you?" And he said, "No." Then 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 all the way to the ground.

Let me ask you, which is more difficult: to open the mouth of the donkey, or to open the eyes of Balaam? For Balaam was blinded by his greed. He was going to have that money if it cost him everything! It took a supernatural act on the part of God to open his eyes to what he was doing. Then the angel of the Lord speaks to him, and notice Balaam's response, verses 32 through 34:

"Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out as an adversary, because your way was contrary to me. [He wants Balaam to understand that the route he is traveling is contrary to the will of God,] But the donkey saw me and turned aside from me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, I would surely have killed you just now, and let her live. " And Balaam said to the angel of the Lord, "I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing in the way against me. Now then, if [IF?!] it is displeasing to you, I will turn back."

How often does the Spirit of God have to speak to Balaam before he gets the point? God has said, "Thou shalt not go. I am your adversary. I stand against you. Your way is contrary to me." And Balaam says, "Well then if I have sinned, I'll go back." And so God says, "All right, Balaam. I've done everything I know in order to stop you; so go ahead." Verse 35:

But the angel of the Lord said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but you shall speak only the word which I shall tell you." So Balaam went along with the leaders of Balak.

The following chapters give us the account of a number of oracles which Balaam delivered regarding the nation of Israel. He was sent to curse, but he couldn't curse. He could only bless them, Notice verse 41 of chapter 22:

Then it came about in the morning that Balak took Balaam, and brought him up to the high pieces of Baal; and he saw from there a portion of the people.

Then Balaam has Balak build seven altars and offer sacrifices on these altars, and, in verses 5 through 10 of chapter 23:

Then the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth and said, "Return to Balak, and you shall speak thus." So he returned to him, and behold, he was standing beside his burnt offering, he and all the leaders of Moab. And he took up his discourse and said, "From Aram Balak has brought me, Moab's king from the mountains' of the East, 'Come curse Jacob for me, And come, denounce Israel! How shall I curse, whom God has not cursed? And how can I denounce, whom the Lord has not denounced? As I see him from the top of the rocks, And I look at him from the hills; Behold, a people who dwells apart And shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob,

[He brings back the memory of the Lord's statement to Abraham: "Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth."]

**Or number the fourth part of Israel?
Let me die the death of the upright,
And let my end be like his!"**

In this amazing, prophetic discourse he points out the absolute uniqueness of the nation of Israel. They were separated from all the other nations. There is no other nation like them. Isn't that true? What nation has endured like the nation of Israel? All the great empires of the ancient Middle East have passed, and yet the nation of Israel endures. They are a unique people, separated unto God. This is amazing truth for Balaam to know. Not many men knew that fact. But Balaam knew.

In verse 22 Balak is understandability upset. He says, "I asked you to curse them, and here you've actually blessed them!" So he takes Balaam to the top of Pisgah, where he could only see a small portion of the people. There Balaam utters another oracles, beginning inverse 18:

**"Arise, 0 Balak, and hear; Give ear to me, 0 son of Zippor!
"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 it?
Or has He spoken, and will he not make it good?
"Behold, I have received a command to bless;
"When he has blessed, then I cannot revoke it.**

**"He has not observed iniquity in Jacob;
Nor has He seen trouble in Israel . . . "**

And he goes on to speak of God's perfect justification of the nation of Israel. God has declared them to be righteous. Interestingly enough, at the time Balaam was delivering this discourse, the nation of Israel, encamped below him in the plains of Moab, were murmuring and complaining and crying out against Moses and the other leaders. Yet God did not see them in those terms. God saw them as perfectly justified, declared righteous his sight. And so Balaam sees the nation of Israel in a way that no man could see them. He sees them from God's point of view: as a people who are justified. God sees no sin in his people.

Then in chapter 24 you have the third oracle of Balsam, beginning with verse 2:

**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 and said,
"The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor,
And 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, yet having his eyes uncovered . . ."**

Then he goes on to portray in a very vivid way the ultimate victory of the nation of Israel over all of their enemies, right down to the time when Jesus reigns as Messiah. Again, who could predict this of this small, seemingly impotent nation? Yet Balaam, looking down through history, sees them as a great nation over which no one can prevail. By this time Balak is thoroughly disgusted. He says, "Balaam, if you can't curse them, then go home!" And so Balaam's final oracle comes in verses 14 and following:

"And now behold, I am going to my people; come, and I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the days to come."

**And he took up his discourse and said,
"The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor,
And the oracle of the man whose eye is opened,
The oracle of him who bears the words of God,
And knows the knowledge of the Most High,
Who sees the vision of the Almighty,
Falling down, yet having his eyes uncovered.
"I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near:
A star shall come forth from Jacob,
And a scepter shall rise from Israel,
And shall crush through the forehead of Moab . . ."**

Do you see what Balaam actually sees? Balaam says, "I see the Lord, but not here off in the future. I see him as a star that comes forth from Jacob, and a scepter that rises from Israel." To whom is he referring? To Jesus the Messiah. Isn't that amazing? This, I believe, is the promise which eventually brought the magi to look for Jesus after his birth. Do you remember what they said when they arrived in Jerusalem and sought out Herod? "Where is he who is born King of the Jews? [A scepter shall rise from Israel.] For we have seen his star in the east . . ." That is what brought the magi. Evidently this discourse found its way into the literature of the East, and the magi accepted it as a promise of the coming Redeemer, and they went to search him out. So, how much did Balaam know? He saw the Lord Jesus Christ. He saw things that none of his contemporaries saw. He had an amazing amount of truth available to him.

But what did he do with it? Well, as the rest of the story unfolds, you have in chapter 25 an account of a great apostasy which swept through the nation of Israel. They turned away from the Lord and worshiped Baal and other idols, and they were involved in all sorts of immoral practices with the Midianites and the Moabites who were living around them, committing fornication with the Midianite and Moabite women. And the Scriptures tell us, in Numbers 31, that it was Balaam who counseled Balak and the kings of Midian to seduce the nation

of Israel in this way. He could not curse them, he could only bless them, because God would not let him curse them. But he sold out in another way. He evidently received the rewards of divination that he was looking for by counseling the Moabites to seduce the Israelites in this way. And Jesus picks this up in Revelation 2. He says through John that there are some in Pergamum who, like Balaam, have seduced the people to immorality.

And in chapter 31 there is an account of the invasion of Midian and the destruction of the Midianites by the nation of Israel, and it says in verse 8 that "they also killed Balaam the son of Beer with the sword." So Balaam died the death of the wicked, in contrast to the death of the righteous which he said he would like to have died in his first oracle. He died separated from God. He died not only physically but spiritually.

Now, what can we learn from Balaam? Well, he was a man who had an amazing amount of truth. He knew the truth about God. He knew the truth about God's people. He even saw the Lord Jesus Christ, prophetically. And yet he had another love, a greater love: he loved Mammon. He loved things, he loved gold and silver. And whenever there was a conflict of wills - between his love for the Lord and his love for money it was his love for money which won out, because way down deep inside he was committed to that love. Whenever there was a conflict of wills it revealed, by contrast, that inner commitment.

The way the Lord dealt with Balaam was to let him go, because that is the way he deals with rebellion. When we insist upon going our own way he lets us go. But, as David's Psalm tells us, though he gives us our request, he sends leanness into our souls. And in the process, as he lets us go, he tries in every way he can to get our attention. He will speak to us in ways which we never anticipated in order to stop us. But ultimately, if we insist upon going our own way, he will take his hand off us and he will let us go. The result is an inevitable death which begins in our personalities as our lives begin to disintegrate. And then ultimately that decision is sealed in concrete by physical death, and there is an existence of eternal separation from God which follows.

Let me point out one thing: Balaam never lost his salvation. He never lost his relationship with the Lord, because he never had a relationship with the Lord. He trafficked in unlied truth. He knew about God, and he knew his truth, but he never responded to it at the deepest level. He looked good on the outside, but way down deep inside there was a rock-hard area of rebellion. He would never let the Lord rule in that area. Jesus said, "If the eye is single, the whole body will be full of light. But if the eye is evil, the body will be filled with darkness. And if that light is darkness, how great is that darkness." Balaam was a man who had light But that light became darkness because he spurned the truth of God. And so he died, separated from God.

Do you know what this says to me? It says that I need to take truth seriously. God wants me to respond to the truth, not half-heartedly, but with a heart which is committed. We must have a willingness to say, "Lord, I'll do anything you want me to do, go anywhere you want me to go, be whatever you want me to be." We must come to the place where we're willing to say, "Lord, I want you to be Lord in every area of my life." It is at that point that we are born again. We may struggle and fail afterward. We may reject truth temporarily. But we cannot ultimately reject the truth, because of the ultimate commitment of our hearts, because our lives have been changed.

The proper response to the truth is such an important issue. For there may be some, like Balaam, who look good on the surface, who know the truth of God, yet down deep inside there is one area that they have walled off and reserved for themselves, and they say, "God, you will not have that area of my life." Now, I want you to make a careful distinction here I am not talking about the person who may be failing miserably in some area of his life, yet whose commitment to the Lord is genuine - he wants God to rule. I am talking about the one who deliberately, stubbornly resists the lordship of Jesus Christ in some area of his life. The Scriptures tell us that if we do that, the result will be servitude to sin. Sin will become our master, and there will be no end to the evil that we will do.

And the result is death - that slow and certain disintegration of life until eventually that decision is rendered permanent by physical death itself, and then there is ultimate separation from God, because that is what we have chosen.

A number of years ago a young friend of mine apparently met the Lord through a college student that we had in

our group. He was involved in Bible studies, even taught Bible studies, shared his faith with others, was a student of the Scriptures. Yet there was one area of his life which he was unwilling to yield to Jesus Christ. Many people knew about it, counseled him, came to him with the Scriptures and encouraged him to respond in that area, but he was unwilling to let Jesus Christ be Lord. It wasn't merely a question of his struggling and failure. It was a commitment of his heart; Jesus would not be Lord in that area.

I remember that one Sunday morning I was sitting in the auditorium over by the piano, and Pastor Stedman was speaking on the very issue in which this young man was unwilling to yield. After the service he got up, came across the auditorium so rapidly that I hardly had time to stand up, confronted me and said, "Dave, you can take Jesus Christ and you can shove Him!" He walked out the door and I haven't seen him since. Others have had contact with him and they report that today he makes no claim to be a Christian or ever to have been a Christian. When I look back now I realize what happened. Though he looked good on the surface, he was never born again. His heart was never changed. Because down at bedrock there was that rock-hard resistance to the authority of Jesus Christ in a particular area of his life. He didn't lose his salvation - no one ever loses their salvation. No one who is truly born again will ever lose that; we are secure. But there are some who look good on the surface, and yet down underneath there is that resistance to the will of God in some area of life. And that kind of person, the Scriptures tell us, is not regenerated, is trafficking in unlivid truth, and the result will be greater and greater unrighteousness.

Now, it may be that the Lord is speaking to you, and be wants you to acknowledge him as Lord in every area of your life. Please know that he will draw nigh to you. He will come in truly to change you and to empower you to be a new man or woman. Those who come to him he will not cast out. Will you trust him with all of your life?

Father, these seem to be such hard words, and yet we sometimes sense that they strike us as hard because the difficulty is really our hard hearts. We thank you, Lord, that you are able to turn us to yourself to soften our hearts and to give us a yearning to make you, Lord in every area of our life. Lord, if there is anyone among us with an unwillingness to submit to you, we pray as a body that that person would be willing to yield at that point and to let you be Lord. Father, what truth there is here for us who have been born again, who do know you. We know the truth, and we need to respond to the truth in obedience wherever you make it known to us. We thank you Lord, that underneath are everlasting arms, that there is forgiveness, and that there is grace and strength to respond properly, as we lay hold of it. We thank you in Jesus' name, Amen

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David H. Roper

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