

SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS FOR ADULTS

LESSON 11



Contend
for the faith
which was
once delivered
to the saints
Jude 1:3

THE ERROR OF BALAAM—PART 1

Scripture Text: *Jude 11*

In this lesson, we will begin to study the second Old Testament character in **verse 11: Balaam**. This character study has been divided into two parts because the *error of Balaam* has at least two major aspects to it. We will learn that he committed an act that Jude used to show the sad condition of apostates.

MEMORY VERSE: *And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

—*Luke 12:15*

Balak Summons Balaam

Balaam. What relation did *Balaam* have to Jude's day and even to our day? We must know what occurred historically to understand the reasons Jude referred to him. Israel entered Canaan in B.C.1451, but as they were nearing the end of forty years of wandering in the wilderness, they met the elders of Moab and Midian, who feared what Israel might do to them (see **Numbers, Chapters 22-24**).

Balak, the king of the Moabites, had seen all that the Israelites had done to the Amorites. He sent messengers to *Balaam* (the name means "destruction of the people") saying, "Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people . . . for I wot [know] that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed" (**Numbers 22:6**).

One Aspect of the Error

The error of Balaam. When Balak's representatives came and presented their request to *Balaam*, he initially said the right thing. **Numbers 22:8** reads, "Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the LORD shall speak unto me." He started out right because, before he made any decision or commitment, he prayed. God told him, "Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed" (**Numbers 22:12**). After praying, *Balaam* told the men that the Lord refused to give him leave to go with them. That should have been the end of it! However, Balak sent more princes who offered *Balaam* more honor and riches; then, he committed the first aspect of his error.

The Greek word for *error* is the word *plane*, meaning "a wandering, a forsaking of the right path." *Balaam* had already prayed, and he knew the will of God, but he said, "Tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the LORD will say unto me more" (**Numbers 22:19**). This was the fatal part of the error: he prayed again hoping for a different answer to the same question. This is always a grave mistake! **Malachi 3:6** states, "For I am the LORD, I change not," and **Psalms 119:89** says, "Forever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven."

The erring, or the "forsaking" of the right way, comes when one knows to do good but does not do it, then to him it becomes sin (**James 4:17**). *Balaam* knew what was the good and right thing to do, but he left what he knew was spiritually right to willingly follow what his flesh craved. Even so, God was as faithful to him.

Running for Reward

Ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward. One translation of this phrase says that they "abandon themselves for the sake of gain." Another translation says, "For the sake of gain they have rushed on headlong." Each translation shows the sad reality that once a person has forsaken the truth, the restraint of God's grace is not there anymore. The flesh takes hold of the individual with a dominant control, and that person rushes to fulfill fleshly desires.

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What would prompt people to do as *Balaam* did? **2 Peter 2:14-15** says: “. . . an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of *Balaam* . . . who loved the wages of unrighteousness.” In **verse 16** Peter called the Prophet’s actions “madness.” Certainly, ones are mad to forfeit eternal reward for temporal gain.

Conditions of Today

In Jude and Peter’s day, people who had known the truth and been established in it were being duped by a spirit that appealed to the flesh. **2 Peter 2:20** says, “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.”

In this day, we are having an evening-time apostasy much like that of the morning time. Many have been able to get hold of God, hear from God, and take a clear stand on revealed truth; but over time, something has happened. Just as *Balaam* was offered great honor and riches, the enemy has his agents who are trying to lure the saints away from truth. They appeal to your sense of reason and make it seem reasonable for you to forsake truth. You must be watchful that seducing spirits do not cause you to follow the flesh.

Many people today determine the stand they will take or the moves they will make by first deciding which will gain them the greatest reward or be the most favorable for their flesh. They suppose “that gain is godliness But godliness with contentment is great gain” (**1 Timothy 6:5-6**).

Haggai 1:6 says, “He that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.” The more you put into “a bag with holes,” the more it needs. This is exactly the way the flesh is. Once you begin to cater to it, you can never satisfy it. You will only turn from fulfillment to frustration and become enslaved by trying to satisfy fleshly passions and desires.

JUST A THOUGHT

**When you hear something about a brother,
go to the throne instead of the phone.**