

Gospel Doctrine Lesson 16: "I Cannot Go Beyond the Word of the Lord"

(Numbers 22–24; Numbers 31:1–16)

Lesson Goal: To encourage us to submit to God's will without hesitation.

1. Balaam refuses Balak's offer of rewards in exchange for cursing Israel. **Numbers 22:1-21**

Application: We are sometimes offered "rewards" to disobey God. Balaam was tempted by the promised rewards, but **we should resolve that riches and the honors of men will not tempt us.**

Application: As Joseph Smith found out centuries later when he asked the Lord about the 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript, **there are dangers in persistently seeking an exception to God's directions.** As we examine the things we petition the Lord to allow us to do, **are we sometimes persistent in an unworthy cause?**

2. The Lord shows the danger of Balaam's stubborn insistence on his own will. **Numbers 22:22-35**

Application: If we examine some common situations in our day, we see **modern parallels of both individuals and groups stubbornly trying to do what they want to do rather than submitting to God's will or the righteous counsel of parents or leaders.** As examples:

1. A child, unhappy with the answer from Mom goes to Dad seeking a different answer,
2. A member of the Church, unsatisfied with the counsel of a priesthood leader, seeks out another priesthood leader,
3. A member of the Church rationalizes that a commandment doesn't apply to him or her as it does to other members.

D&C 95:1-2: VERILY, thus saith the Lord unto you whom I love, and whom I love I also chasten that their sins may be forgiven, for with the chastisement I prepare a way for their deliverance in all things out of temptation, and I have loved you—Wherefore, ye must needs be chastened and stand rebuked before my face...

3. Balaam refuses to curse Israel. **Numbers 22:36-24:25**

Application: If we place ourselves in **temptation's path**, we will be confronted with unrighteous suggestions from friends, acquaintances, or the media. **Eventually, our resistance can be worn down and we can succumb to temptations that we otherwise would not have considered.**

President Spencer W. Kimball: "It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the devil to enter a door that is closed. He seems to have no keys for locked doors. But if a door is slightly ajar, he gets his toe in, and soon this is followed by his foot, then by his leg and his body and his head, and finally he is in all the way" (*Miracle of Forgiveness*, 215).

4. The Israelites destroy the Midianites and slay Balaam. **Numbers 31:1-16**

Members of the Church who seek earthly rewards and honors, who seek exceptions to God's counsel and commandments, or who try to introduce worldly ideas, practices, or standards into the Church are following Balaam's unrighteous example.

2 Peter 2:15-16: [Children] which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, **following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor**, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet.

Jude 1:11: 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 gainsaying of Core.

Revelations 2: 14: 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.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie: "What a story this is! **Here is a prophet of God who is firmly committed to declare only what the Lord of heaven directs.** There does not seem to be the slightest doubt in his mind about the course he should pursue. He represents the Lord, and neither a house full of gold and silver nor high honors offered by the king can sway him from his determined course. ...

"But greed for wealth and lust for honor beckon him. How marvelous it would be [for him] to be rich and powerful. ... Perhaps the Lord would let him compromise his standards and have some worldly prosperity and power. ... I wonder how often some of us get our direction from the Church and then, Balaam-like, plead for some worldly rewards.

"Balaam, ... inspired and mighty as he once was, lost his soul in the end because he set his heart on the things of this world rather than the riches of eternity" ("The Story of a Prophet's Madness," *New Era*, Apr. 1972, 7).

Although Balaam pretended to be strictly obedient, **the desires of his heart were to receive earthly rewards and honors.** As we consider his example, **we need to keep the desires of our heart pure** so that we do not make Balaam's mistakes.

5. Obeying the Lord

- a. **The Savior, aware of the agony before him in Gethsemane and on the cross Luke 22:41-42** And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.
- b. **Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son Isaac. Genesis 22:3** And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.
- c. **Mary was told that she would be the mother of the Son of God. Luke 1:38** And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.
- d. **Nephi was instructed to return to Jerusalem to get the brass plates from Laban. I Nephi 3:7** And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto my father: I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.
- e. **The sons of Helaman were successful in battle. Alma 57:21** Yea, and they did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness; yea, and even according to their faith it was done unto them; and I did remember the words which they said unto me that their mothers had taught them.

D&C 121:34-38,40: Behold, **there are many called, but few are chosen.** And why are they not chosen? Because their **hearts** are set so much upon **the things of this world**, and **aspire to the honors of men**, that they do not learn this one lesson—That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness. That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but **when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men**, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man. **Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself**, to kick against the pricks, to persecute the saints, and to fight against God. . . Hence many are called, but few are chosen.

6. The Lord's promises instead of earthly rewards:

D&C 81:6: And if thou art **faithful** unto the end **thou shalt have a crown of immortality, and eternal life** in the mansions which I have prepared in the house of my Father.

Ted Gibbons: "We cannot be too careful about this. **The desire for honor from the world, the lure of leadership**, even in the mission field, is a minefield. **The desire for riches**, the attraction of physical gratification, **the need for public recognition**—they can all be subtle and pernicious evils. We must remember that **the only true evidence of our worth comes from the Lord, and it comes only in one way: by the presence and the gifts of the Spirit in our lives.**

7. Conclusion

If Balaam had humbly submitted to God's will, much sin and suffering would have been avoided for himself and for Israel. **We should be steadfast rather than stubborn—seeking to follow the Lord's will without trying to get around it or change it.**

Ether 12: 27: And if men come unto me **I will show unto them their weakness.** I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and ... if they humble themselves before me... I make weak things become strong unto them.

Can our strengths become our weaknesses?

Elder Dallin H. Oaks: "Those who engage in self-congratulation over a supposed strength have lost the protection of humility and are vulnerable to Satan's using that strength to produce their downfall. In contrast, if **we are humble and teachable**, hearkening to the commandments of God, the counsel of his leaders, and the promptings of his Spirit, **we can be guided in how to use our spiritual gifts**, our accomplishments, and all of our other strengths for righteousness."

And we can be guided in how to avoid Satan's efforts to use our strengths to cause our downfall. ("Our Strengths Can Become Our Downfall," BYU Fireside, June 7, 1992)

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