



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Exodus 20: 1-40

“The Dunce and the Donkey”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for the time together. We ask Thy blessing upon us, as we study the Scriptures tonight together. Guide and direct our thinking, and may the truths of the word of God be elucidated in a way that will please Thee. We entrust this time to Thee for Thy blessing through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

[Message] I would like to say that the topic tonight has no personal reference to anyone in the audience, but it is “The Dunce and the Donkey.” [Laughter] So will you turn with me to Numbers, chapter 22, and we want to look at the first of our series of three or four studies on Israel’s encounter with the prophet Balaam. Numbers, chapter 22.

When one reads through Numbers 22, 23 and 24, it quickly becomes evident, as you reflect upon it, that this is really one of the greatest of the sacred dramas in the word of God. A very picturesque study of a typical man and the typical man in this instance is the hireling prophet, and since we have hireling prophets in the 20th Century, and we have had them in almost every century since the time of Balaam, the subject is a subject that is very relevant for us. The question that immediately comes to an individual, who thinks about Balaam, after reading through these chapters is this, was Balaam a true

prophet? In other words, could we say Balaam that he was a genuine Old Testament believer? Will we in heaven see Balaam, the prophet, there?

Augustine said, “No. He was a prophet of the devil,” but on the other hand, Jerome, the great Roman Catholic scholar said that he was a prophet of God. One of them said, he was *prophetam diaboli*, the other *prophetam Dei*. There are things in Numbers 22, 23, and 24 that will lend some support, some rationale to both of these viewpoints, and that is why it is such an interesting question. It would be nice if we could devote an entire hour just to the consideration of that particular point, but since that is not really the most important point of these chapters, we only will make a few references to it. One thing we do know from reading chapter 22, the chapter we look at tonight is this, that Balaam was a disobedient prophet. Notice the twelfth verse, God said unto Balaam,

“Thou shalt not go with them; Thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed.” (And then in verse 19, we read) “Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the Lord will say unto me more.” So it obvious that Balaam is an individual who does not really respond to the plain teaching of the word of God. Later in the thirty-fourth verse, we read, Balaam said unto the angel of the Lord, “I have sinned; for I knew not that Thou stoodest in the way against me; now therefore, if it displease Thee, I will get me back again.” And one can see in this comment that he still has not had sink into his mind the fact that the Lord God did not want him to go with Balak’s messengers to Balak and the Moabites in order to curse the children of Israel. Balaam is also termed as soothsayer.”

Now we know from the Scriptures that the Old Testament has some very strong words to say about magicians and soothsayers and witches and individuals who have dealings with the spirit world, and Balaam obviously is one of them. In Joshua, chapter

13 and verse 22, we have the root word that is used to describe Balaam. In 1 Samuel chapter 15 and verse 23, in Jeremiah 14:14, the word divination and in Deuteronomy chapter 18, the great chapter on the prophets and the false prophets, the way in which Balaam is described is harmonious with those things that are there, and God speaks of the false prophets as being abominations to him.

Further, Balaam gave Balak some very devilish advice, and after he was unable to curse the children of Israel because God just would not let him do it, using him as the divine mouthpiece, in chapter 25, we will at least make reference to this, Balaam is the means of corrupting the children of Israel, causing them to go after the pagan women falsely and commit fornication with them. So he was a moral derelict as well.

In addition, the New Testament makes I think it rather plain that Balaam is a false prophet. In 2 Peter chapter 2 and verse 15, Peter writes these words concerning Balaam, 2 Peter 2 and verse 15, 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 forbade the madness of the prophet. And then in Jude verse 11, Jude the brother of our Lord also has something to say about Balaam. He writes, “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.” And finally in Revelation, chapter 2 and verse 15, we have another New Testament reference to Balaam, “So hast Thou also them that hold the doctrines of... I read verse 15, I should have read verse 14, “But I have a few things against Thee, because Thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.”

Now sometimes people say, well but Balaam was a mouthpiece of the Lord and does not that indicate that perhaps in the final analysis he was a believing man, though a man who had gone astray from the word of God, and needed to grow in sanctification

and in the grace of it. Well, it is not enough for God to speak by a man to make a man a Christian. God spoke by the ass, but we would not say that the ass was a member of the believing family of God, would we? Although I must say that in this instance he would make a better church member than Balaam, at least he was able to discern when the angel of the Lord stood before him.

There is a strange story about horse racing and the devil that some years ago I read when I first made a study in preparation for exposition of the history of Balaam. This story illustrated how people trafficked with Satan if they feel it is to their material advantage. There was a woman in Venezuela. Now this was about 25 years ago and the story of this appeared in *Time* magazine. She was in Venezuela and she was a very poor widow, and so she risked her last dollar to bet on the horse races and when she went to the horse races, she made her choice, she picked six horses. Now no experts, so *Time* magazine said, said that any of these horses had a chance to win. And when she entered her wager, put down her money, she said I have to win that she prayed this, “Dear God, help me. And if you can’t, may it be the devil, who will.” Well, all the horses that she chose were winners, and one wonders of course who was responsible for this. Was it the Lord or was it the devil?

Well certainly that kind of prayer is not the prayer that a Christian person understands the Scriptures would make. There is another lesson about Balaam I think that is interesting and it raises this question, where did Balaam derive his knowledge of the Lord God? One might ask, if he was a prophet who is giving Messianic messages as it turns that he is, and he is not on the other hand a believing prophet, where did he get all of this information? Well of course, what he says is that he is given information by the Lord God, but it also seems, as one reads the story that he understands that there is a person by the name of Yahweh. He understands a great deal about the Nation Israel. In other words, he is not a person who understands nothing about spiritual things. Where did he get it?

Well perhaps, there are indications in Scriptures that would indicate that this is true that the knowledge of the Lord God have never disappeared from that part of the world. After all, remember, when Jacob went to get his wife, he went a long ways into the east, and then of course, Abraham had been spoken to by the Lord God and ruler of the Chaldeans. We see some indications of this broad and widespread knowledge of the Lord in the New Testament and the wise men, who come at the time of birth of our Lord.

So, it seems to me, that the chances are that Balaam had much contact with the knowledge of Jehovah, that was general knowledge in that area, just as people today, who are not Christians at all have a great deal of general knowledge about Christianity. So that might explain how Balaam is a prophet, how he knows the name of the Lord, how he understands a great deal about the truth, but nevertheless is not himself a true believing man.

Now lets for just one moment remind ourselves of the historical situation. The children of Israel came out of Egypt, remember, and they spent some time at Mount Sinai, and then they spent some time at Kadesh-Barnea and now this is the last of the places where they will spend a considerable amount of time, in the plains of Moab. Just before the mountains of Moab, not far from Jericho, and they will be there evidently for some time before they move into the land. So if you can think of Sinai and then Kadesh-Barnea and finally the plains of Moab, you have the three places where the children of Israel stopped for a considerable period of time during their wilderness wanderings.

Now they are getting ready to go into the land and we read in chapter 22 in verse 1 through verse 4, the fears that Moab felt over the coming of the children of Israel, and notice now that Israel has become a rather large company of people, and the children of Israel set forward and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan by Jericho and Balak, the son of Zippor, saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. It was natural for him to be fearful of the children of Israel because the Amorites had just before this overcome the Moabites and the children of Israel have now overcome the Amorites, and

so that would have struck fear into the Moabites. And so when we read in verse 3, we can understand that Moab was so afraid of the people because they were many and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel, and Moab said unto the elders of Midian, “Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field.”

Now I must confess that idiom did not really speak to me. If you grow up in the city, when you read something like this, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field, I am wondering just what exactly is the meaning of that. But in the commentaries, it is said that the oxen have a scythe-like sweep with their tongue. And so all of you people who grow up on the farm, you understand how the ox’s tongue seems to act like a scythe and sweep up a vast amount of grass. A lot of you are looking very puzzled and may be I am not explaining it as a true farmer would, but anyway that’s the point of it. And when he says as the ox licketh up the grass of the field, he is suggesting that Israel is large now and they are taking over the country into which they are coming. And he goes on to say, and Balak, the son of Zippor, was king of the Moabites at that time. He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam, the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of children of his people.

Now there is a little question about this in the Hebrew text, and it probably could be rendered something like the land of Amoa or the land of the Amavites, the reference is to a part of Mesopotamia. And so he goes on to say, “Behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me.” So Balak, the king of Moab, is very much concerned over the coming of the children of Israel and very fearful that the things that have happened to others recently, things that have happened to Heshbon and Sihon and Og are going to happen to them, and so he conceives of the idea of sending a mission to a false prophet and getting a false prophet to come and curse these people.

So in verse 5 through verse 7, we read of it, He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of his people, to call

him, saying, “Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me. Come now therefore, I pray Thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I know that he whom Thou blessest is blessed, and he whom Thou curses is cursed.” And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination. And notice that particularly with the rewards of divination in their hand, this was the seminar charge.

So they went with the rewards of divination and they came to Balaam and spake on to him the words of Belak. And so Belak now as king of Moab, but he is acting not only for Moab, but he is acting for Midian as well. These names are very interesting, and as they saw from the case of the Bible, the names often have certain significances that we should not pass by. Balak for example is a term that means in Hebrew “to make waste,” and Balaam is a term that means “destroyer of the people.” *Bala*, the Hebrew word, which is the root of the word Balaam means to swallow, and so Balaam is a swallower of things, he is a destroyer of the people. So it’s from the verb *bala*, which means “to swallow.” And then Beor, a term that is used here in verse 5, the son of Beor, Beor is from the verb *ba’ar*, which means “to burn up” or “to consume.” So these names themselves tell us something about them.

Now Balaam is evidently a well known man. He evidently as a man, who has made a name for himself, and perhaps even his name is something like that. We know that kings and magicians liked to be their own propaganda agents and tell others how great they are. And we have an incidence of the New Testament. Remember the next chapter 8, where Simon Magus is referred to and Luke describing him says there was a certain man called Simon, which before time in the same city used sorcery as he was like Balaam and bewitched the people of Sumeria, giving out that himself was some great one, to whom they all gave heed from the least of a greatest saying, this man is the great power of God. That does not make any imagination at all to look at the religious world

of today, and see that there are literally scores and scores and scores. The people just liked Balaam, who make these great claims for themselves.

Now if you get your theology from the *National Enquirer*, you do not have to be told that, as you stand in line waiting to pay for groceries and you look over and you see the latest spiritual information on the *National Enquirer*, you will find the whole host of the false prophets, they are all in the front pages with their latest prophecies. Anybody, who would fall for that, is really a big fool, but there are lots of big fools and lots of people put down their money by those things and to tell you the truth, how often water reach in, and say, what in the world is in that article there? But Martha grabs my hand, and so I don’t buy it.

Anyway, Balaam evidently was a man, as widely known, he has made quite a reputation from himself because we make a good reputation for yourself as a prophet, well, the rewards of divination can be very good. If you have ever seen a well known TV preacher, who didn’t ride around on a big automobile? Why some of them have several automobiles. One of them not long ago had two Mercedes and a Rolls Royce. And he gets on the TV day after day and asks for money, for the support of the Lord’s work. Now you have to be a gullible person to respond to that kind of thing, and to think that there is an individual who is really in it for the glory of God. I imagine Balaam was putting out the word on his PR releases, “When I curse them, they stay cursed. Just call me devourer of the people.” And Balak got some of his leaflets in his hand and said, you know, we ought to send over there to Mesopotamia and get that fellow, Balaam, because the chances are, when he curses them they really are cursed.

Now mind you, this is something we find in the Old Testament. These things do happen. So it is not surprising as it might seem to us. For example, when Jacob gives a certain blessing, those blessings come to pass. When Isaac took the blessing away from Isayah, gave it to Jacob in the providential gardens of God, that blessing was a blessing that was a valid blessing. And in fact, Isaac said he could not change. So the idea of a

person blessing or cursing and God standing behind it, was a truth that is found in the word of God, and was found in the experiences of these individuals. So it is not as strange as it might seem to us in the 20th Century. So they went over to see Balaam with the rewards of definition in their hand. What they are trying to do, is to buy off the Lord God with a little money by paying Balaam rewards of divination, so that he will engage in some soothsaying that will deliver them from the children of Israel.

Now notice, the response of Balaam in verse 8 through verse 14. Here is the man of God’s response. It is rather clever, so you have to be on your guard. That is the reason why some people have thought, he really was a Christian man, listen to him, and he said unto them, lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the Lord shall speak unto me.” As Yahweh shall speak on to me. And the princes of Moab abode with Balaam, and God came onto Balaam. Elohim came unto Balaam and said what men are these with Thee? And Balaam said unto God, Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, hath sent unto me, saying, behold, there is a people come out of Egypt, which covereth the face of the earth. Come now, curse me them; peradventure I shall be able to overcome them, and drive them out. And God said on to Balaam, (do we have to emphasize this?) “Thou shalt not go with them. Thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed.” Now that is very plain. Do not curse the people. Do not go with them. They are blessed.

One of the remarkable things about this encounter is that we will have four Messianic prophecies, in which Israel is blessed, given by this man, God using his mouth as we should see, but you can see. He says, first I am going to go to the Lord and see what the Lord says, verse 8. As the Lord shall speak onto me, I will bring you word again, and then the Lord speaks to him “Though shall not go.” Now this is the preceptive will of God for Balaam, “I do not want you to go.”

Now remember the preceptive will of God is not necessarily the will of God that is carried out. The decretive will of God is the will of God that is carried out. When God

decrees that something takes place, it will take place. That is called his decretive will. The will of his decree. We do not know that will, acceptance of our as a prophetic message may be given of what will take place.

We are in the decretive will of God after the event. We learn it was the decretive will of God that the Cowboys had a pretty poor season last year when the sixteenth game is finished and they’re not in the playoffs. We say, God decreed among his other more significant decrees, this rather insignificant one that the cowboys would not have a very successful season for them, but now the preceptive will of God is what is taught in the Bible, what is said to please God.

Now sometimes the decretive will is contradictory to the preceptive will. The greatest illustration of that is the cross of Christ. It was the decretive will of God that the Son of God suffer for the sins of sinners, but it is his preceptive will that men not crucify the Son of God, but we know that the decretive will of God, determines what will come to pass. Now here I suggest you that this is equivalent to the preceptive will of God. He is saying, Do not go with them. It is not that which pleases me that you go with them and curse Israel because they are blessed.

Now Balaam then, you might think he has gotten the message, because we read in verse 13 and 4, Balaam rose up in the morning and said unto the princes of Balak, get you into your land for the Lord refuses to give me leave to go with you. And the princes of Moab rose up, and they went unto Balak, and they said, Balaam refuseth to come with us. Now I suggest you, though that I cannot really prove this, this is only a suggestion. I suggest to you that this is really a rather weak response. The Lord refuses to give me leave to come with you. In other words, as far as I am concerned, I would like to do it. Have you ever said things like that? You now as far as I am concerned, I would like to do what you are talking about, but I do not really think I better do it.

Well they evidently interpreted it as a weakness on the part of Balaam. So I suggest that it probably was a weakness, weak-like. I would like to go, but I cannot go

right now. He doesn’t say it is impossible for me to go, it is useless for me to try to curse the children of Israel because they are blessed. God has already given Abraham covenantal promises, confirmed to the patriarchs and it is foolish, utterly foolish for us to fight against God, because they are going to be blessed. So but now, I have not given permission to come with you.

So when news got back to Balak, he said, I think we better try again. So we read in verse 15, and Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honourable than they. He sent some more important fellows. And they came to Balaam, and said to him, “Thus saith Balak the son of Zippor, Let nothing, I pray Thee, hinder Thee from coming unto me, for I will promote Thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever Thou sayest unto me. Come therefore, I pray Thee, curse me this people. So Balak like the world, which thinks its possessions will fascinate us, judges at Balaam has his price, and he is right, Balaam does at his price.

So now, Balaam is going to give a second response, we read in verses 18 through 20, And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, “If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more. Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the Lord will say unto me more.” Now the Lord has already spoken, but he is going to ask for further information about that plain message given to him. And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, “If the men come to call Thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto Thee, that shalt Thou do.”

Now I am going to suggest something to you again that I am not absolutely certain, but a little more certain than other things I was not so absolutely certain about a movement ago. When Balaam said in verse 18, if Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord, my God do less or more. I suggest that if we do not read that like an easterner would read it, we would not understand it. Do you remember when Abraham bought some land to bury Sarah in, and

he had a little confrontation with the sons of Heth, and the way they bargained with something like this, a man with whom he bargained I have forgotten his name for the moment, said now I would not think of selling you anything, and Abraham said, I want to pay you? I would not think of taking any gifts from you, and then the man says well listen the land is worth 400 pieces of silver, but I will not think of taking anything like that, it is a gift and so in verses, Abraham weighed out the pieces of silver and bought the land. That is just the way they go about things.

So when Balaam said here, if Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord to do less or more, he means, if Balak gives me a house full of silver and gold, I will ask again and see if I can count. And so you can say that he has already let Balak know he has got a price. So he says I am going to go the Lord tonight then I may know what the Lord will say on to more. Here the Lord has already spoken. There is no point in going back to the Lord again. So we go on with this prophet who has a price and now we read that the Lord said, Balaam rise up and go.

I remember some years ago when I was in theological seminar, there was a man by the name of Ketchum, a well known Baptist Minister in the East. In fact Bob Ketchum was really responsible for the formation of what we know today as the Conservative Baptist Association in the United States. They have a seminar in Denver, Colorado for example is the president of it at the present time.

Well Mr. Ketchum had a large hand to do in the formation of the Conservative Baptist who came out of the Northern Baptist Convention and when he was in seminar chapel speaking some years ago, about 25 years ago, he told us of an experience that he had as a pastor. He said, there was a young man that had come to him about marrying a young lady, and a year before he had told this young man that he should not marry that young lady. She was not a believer and he was a believer, and so he gave him his advice that he should not marry this lady. Well he said a year later, the young man came again to him, made an appointment with him and he said he wanted to talk to him about

getting married, and again he brought up the subject of getting married to this young lady. And Mr. Ketchum said he had happened to look in the newspaper a couple of days before and looked at the marriage licenses and found out the fellow had already bought a marriage license to marry, when the fellow came to talk to him about whether he should marry. So often by subterfuge we have already made our decisions, and Balaam has made his decisions, but he is going to go to the Lord and he is going to ask the Lord what the Lord is going to say to him.

So now the Lord says, Balaam rise up and go with them. Now that seems rather strange, does not it, after he has said Balaam you should not go, but as become obvious Balaam is going to disobey the Lord. And so in this case we might have what we could call God’s permissive will. He has already indicated that he is not pleased by that, but all right go ahead and go, but there is one thing Balaam that you will not be able to do. You will not be able to curse the children of Israel. There is a text in the Old Testament, it is a very interesting text, I think and it is the one that expresses an important Christian truth. In Psalm 106, and verse 15, and I know that a number of you are familiar with this verse, but it says something like this. Speaking about the children of Israel, verse 13, “They soon forgot his works, they waited not for his counsel, but lost it exceedingly in the wilderness and tempted God in the desert, and he gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul.”

One thing we learn in the Lord’s work and in the life God gives us as Christians to lead, is that we can so persist in disobedience to the Lord God that ultimately, God does allow us to do what we have set out hearts upon doing, even when we know that this is contrary to his will. And that text expresses an important truth. He let them do what they were bent upon doing, but he set leanness into their soul. And you can be sure that when you disobey the word of God, you may cover it with all kinds of rationalizations and subterfuges but leanness in the soul of the believer will come, and we will suffer the discipline of the Lord God.

Now Balaam is going to take his journey and of course in verse 21 through verse 35 is the section that is probably the most interesting because of Balaam’s experiences and we read, first about the angel and the donkey, and Balaam rose up in the morning and saddled his ass, and went with the princess of Moab, and God’s anger was kindled because he went. And the angel, by the way this is anthropopathic language that is language according to the feelings of men and so when we read the Lord was angry, his anger was kindled because he went, that is the human language, the way we would express it. And the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him and he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him, and the ass saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way and his sword drawn in his hand, and the ass turned aside out of way and let into the field and Balaam smote the ass to turn her into the way, but the angel of the Lord stood in the path of the vineyards. A wall being on this side and a wall on that side, and when the ass saw the angel of the Lord, she thrust herself into the wall and crushed Balaam’s foot against the wall, and he smote her again.

In verse 26, “The angel of the Lord went further and stood in the narrow place where there was no way to turn either to the right and to the left, and when the ass saw the angel of the Lord, she fell down on to Balaam and Balaam’s anger was kindled and he smote the ass with the staff.” Is not it striking that donkey sees what the dunce of prophet does not. Now you got to be a pretty blind prophet when you cannot see things that the ass sees.

You can see the drama of this particular account. The ass is riding the donkey. [Laughter] So we go on read verse 27 through verse 30, well I read verse 27 and verse 28, the Lord opened the mouth of the ass and she said on to Balaam what have I done on to Thee that Thou has smitten me these three times? And Balaam sat onto the ass because Thou has marked me! I would there were a sword for now would I kill Thee, and the ass said on to Balaam, am I not that ass on which Thou has ridden ever since I was thine unto this day, was I ever want to do so on to Thee, and he said, no.

Well there are lots of theories about how the ass was able to speak. Some the suggested the affair took place while Balaam was in a trance. And others have suggested that the braying of the ass became suddenly intelligible to Balaam. Actually, it is more incredible to most that the ass’ braying should make sense, but when you turn over to the New Testament, you will see that Peter takes this as just a simple miracle of the Lord God, because he describes it specifically as Moses had described. It reminds me the story of a believer and a skeptic, and the skeptic in speaking to the believer said, “I would like to see you make an ass talk,” and the believer replied quickly, “I would like to see you make an ass,” and the point of it was of course that the God who can make an ass, can surely make an ass talk.

There was very famous New Testament professor by the name of A. T. Robertson, professor in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, and he was turning back some papers to a class in New Testament Greek for that’s what he taught and he introduced the turning back of the papers to the students by saying, “In old times, God spoke through a serpent and God spoke through an ass, and having graded your papers, it becomes obvious that he is going to speak through asses again in our day.” [Johnson laughs] So anyway the ass speaks and Balaam does not appear surprised, that is almost a bigger miracle than the fact that the ass spoke and Balaam was not surprised that the animal speaks at all, so far as we can tell.

Now in verse 29, he says, Thou hast marked me, and he does not seem surprised. He just says simply “You have marked me by what you have done.” And so verse 31, we read, then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face, and the angel of the Lord said on to him, where for has Thou smitten Thy ass these three times. Behold I went out to withstand Thee because Thy way is perverse before me. Thy way is leading head long, Hebrew text say something like that.

Evidently, the behavior of the animal was such that the Lord says to Balaam, you should have known by the strange behavior of the animal that something strange is happening. And so, implicit in the account is the fact that the supernatural part of the event should have been known by this individual, who is supposed to be a prophet of the Lord. In verse 34, Balaam said unto the angel of the Lord, “I have sinned for I knew not that Thou stood in the way against me. Therefore if it displeased Thee, I will get me back again.” Now there is no true repentance here. The fore clauses is not an explanation that one would expect from a person who has truly repented. He says, “I have sinned for I knew not that Thou stood in the way against me now. Therefore, if it displeased Thee I will get me back again.” It is obvious God has already spoken plainly to him, and the prophet is saying, if it is not pleasing that I go with these men.

The remainder of the chapter, verse 36 through verse 40, deals with Balaam’s meeting with Balak and the offering of some animals.

Now I would like in just a moment or two to sum up some of the lessons that appear here and then of course this is really an introduction to the Messianic promises and prophecies that we will notice that Balaam gives. Remarkable prophecies. Among the lessons that seems to me are very plain from this chapter are these. Balaam had a great deal of knowledge about God, and yet if the New Testament is to be believed and if Deuteronomy is to be believed, and if the 25th chapter is to be believed, he is a lost man. In other words, it is possible for a man to be a prophet and be lost. It is possible for a man to be a seer and not really see. Caiaphas prophesied, but Caiaphas was one of the instruments in the crucifixion of our Lord. In Deuteronomy, chapter 13, it is specifically stated that individuals may prophesy, and those events may come to pass, but if they say things contrary to the word of God, they are to be put to death.

So it is possible, in the providential will of God, for individuals to prophesy certain things to come to pass and they come to pass. Why? To test out faithfulness to the word of God. That is what Moses says in Deuteronomy. So when a person prophesies and

some thing comes to pass, you will not immediately say, he is a true prophet. You have to see what he says and test what he says by the word of God.

The Lord Jesus speaks the same way when he says that men will come and say to him, we have got prophecies in Thy name. We have cast out demons in Thy name, but nevertheless they lost. Balaam had faith in the oneness of the true God and yet he was lost. Balaam’s outward conduct, was so far as we can tell at this point, impeccable. He would not curse a word, but he did in deeds and his fixed principles that God must be abide were principles that he did not apply to himself. The will of God is never contrary to the word of God; that is another lesson. It is often impossible to turn back from the path of disobedience, and often people are guilty of further disobedience. Even after they recognize that they are disobeying and they are guilty often of presumption by seeking to do it at different time what God wanted him to do it in earlier time.

The love of money was the root of Balaam’s evil so far, as we can tell, and Balaam’s conscience, notice how he expresses it. It verse 34, Balaam said on to the angel of the Lord, “I have sinned for I knew not that Thou stood in the way against me.” His conscience was clear, so he says even in his disobedience. This is certainly illustrative of the ways in which we can be seduced by that which is fault. May God help us to remember that obedience to the word of God is the primary responsibility that we have as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us bow in a moment for prayer.

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for the lessons found in the life of this prophet, who thought the rewards of divination were so important that he was willing to sacrifice the direct word of God spoken to him. Oh God, help us to be obedient to the things that we see in Scripture. Deliver us from waywardness and sinfulness and rebellion for Jesus sake. Amen.