



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Peter 2:10–16

“Balaam and the Apostates”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Again Father we thank Thee for the privilege of the study of the scriptures. We thank Thee for this vigorous epistle that the Apostle Peter has written and we praise Thee for the way in which he has expressed himself under the Spirit’s guidance concerning false doctrine and consequent immorality and debauchery. We thank Thee for the provision through Jesus Christ of an atonement that meets all of our needs and the presence of the Holy Spirit who is the power who enables us to walk in the light of the Scriptures. And we ask Lord that as we study again in the word that it may perform its task. We remember that Thou hast said, “Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.” And we pray as we listen to the Scriptures and as we hear their message that our faith may increase and our Christian strength grow. We pray too Lord that Thou wilt open doors of opportunity for us, Thou wilt enable us to see our lives in the light of the Scriptures and by Thy grace conform to Thy will for us. So Lord we pray that the Scriptures may have an edifying and sanctifying influence upon us tonight as we turn again to them. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] Our Scripture for tonight is 2nd Peter chapter 2 verse 10 through verse 16 and the subject is “Balaam and the Apostates.” So we pick up the reading of the word with verse 10. Strictly speaking, I think I mentioned this last time also, the preceding section ends in the middle of

the 10th verse and this section begins with the word, “presumptuous” in the middle of that 10th verse, which contains two sentences in the Authorized Version. But we’ll read again the beginning of the 10th verse through the 16th verse. Peter is speaking now remember about judgment and he says,

“But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. (That expression is not exactly despise government but something slightly different.) Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord. But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; and shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. Spots they are and blemishes, reveling with their own deceivings while they feast with you; Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: and a heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: Who have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, 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.”

I guess that all of us would feel as we read these verses that this passage in 2nd Peter is just about as vigorous language as we have in all of the word of God. And it’s not only vigorous language, vital language, but it is very strong language and expresses truths that are very strong also. In addition, Peter has used vocabulary that is most unusual here and I think it’s not wrong to say that we could study these verses literally for hours in order to deal with all of the truth that is found in the vocabulary that the apostle has used here. But we don’t want to do that, we want to try to hit the high spots and so we want to plunge into our study tonight in which in this section, Peter makes two great points.

The first point that he makes is that the false teachers are libertines who are characterized by blasphemy, debauchery and covetousness. Notice the 10th verse where he speaks, “Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.” He has just said that they walk after the flesh and the lust of uncleanness. Then in verse 13 and verse 14 he speaks about them “receiving the reward of unrighteousness as they that count it pleasure to revel in the daytimes. Spots they are and blemishes, reveling with their own deceivings while they feast with you; having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin;” debauchery. And finally on the last two verses, “Who have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.” So the picture then is of false teachers who are libertine in their immorality characterized by blasphemy, three times Peter uses the word blaspheme with respect to them. They’re characterized by debauchery and they’re characterized by covetousness. So they are individuals who slander the truth of God, they are individuals who are so libertine in their actions that their doctrine is actually, essentially we may live as we please and those who do not accept their teaching are false and unsound in doctrine, and finally, they do all that they do for the sake of personal financial gain. Not a very lovely description of the false teachers with which Peter is contending.

And then the second great lesson is the lesson of the ineradicable link between right belief and right behavior. Over and over again Peter stresses in these verses that those who are orthodox in doctrine must be orthodox in their practice. Guy King has written a little book on the Epistle of James which he has entitled, “*A Belief that Behaves.*” And that is expressive of biblical doctrine. The Christian doctrine must issue in a moral life. And if a moral life is not the issue of our doctrine it may well be that our doctrine is not sound, because Christian doctrine should lead to holy living. Peter makes that point over and over again; the New Testament makes it over and over again. It’s strange that we should have to have it emphasized, but that itself is a testimony to the depravity of the human heart and the depravity of the Christian heart that we have to have it emphasized over and over again that right doctrine must result in right practice.

In the first chapter remember, Peter has argued that the apostolic testimony is reliable. And then on that base for that is the base for what he says in the following chapters, he states that there are to come false teachers just as there were false prophets in the Old Testament times. And these false teachers are individuals who are going to bring in heresies of destruction. They're going to bring in teaching that leads to an eternal separation from God. And furthermore, because they are bringing in heresies of destruction, teaching that leads those who accept that teaching to hell, we can expect them to be judged. And if you have any doubt about God's ability to judge, Peter would say, I remind you of how he did not spare the angels that sinned, he did not spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and he did not spare the whole world in the time of Noah. He is well able to judge, and so Peter warns them that God is a God who does exercise judgment and he will exercise judgment upon these false teachers.

Now having said that, in the 10th verse he launches into a description, a very vivid, I say and a vigorous and moving description of the errors both in doctrine and life of the heretics with which he is dealing. In the 10th verse, when we read, “But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness” he again alludes to the fact that these false teachers are men who are not heterosexual. They are men who walk after the flesh, they are homosexual. They are individuals who are engaged in the worst kind of sexual activity and as I mentioned last time the name Sodom has been associated with it because Sodom was a place where this sin was evidently very common. We are living as I mentioned last time in a society in which sodomy and homosexuality and lesbianism and all of the other of the vilest and filthiest of the sexual practices are abounding. And the striking thing about our society today is that we are accepting this and calling it progress when we exercise liberal attitudes toward it. Now I don't want to engage in the question of whether a government should or should not act with reference to these practices, but a Christian's viewpoints as set forth in Scripture, should be very plain. And we can never accept the position that it is progress to accept this type of activity as normal. So walking after the flesh, this is an evidence of the commonness of

that in the days of Peter and he expresses himself very strongly with respect to it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

What I want to do now is to just pick out a few of these expressions that he uses, I say we could talk for hours literally on some of the statements that Peter makes. But I want to select some of them that seem to me to have special meaning. In the 10th verse, he states concerning these teachers that they are presumptuous or daring as the Greek text puts it, and self-willed. They are headstrong men they are contemptuous of other people and the hell of this individual is that his world contracts until all he has left is his own self which he has corrupted. Now remember, Peter is not talking simply about ordinary people like you and me, he's talking about men who pose as religious leaders, he's talking about heretics, he's talking about teachers, he's talking about leaders in a sect of false teachers who are plaguing Christian believers. So he is speaking about the religious people, he's not talking about irreligious people, he's talking about religious people and he calls them presumptuous and self-willed and describes them in these terms that express their rebellion against God.

I think it's fair to say that there's no rebellion against God that is more heinous than the rebellion of a religious man. And a religious man who is anxious to persecute genuine believers is the most implacable fool that a Christian could possibly have. And if you will go into and study the history of the Christian church and particularly the history of the rise of apostasy in the various churches and then study the circumstances that surround the divisions that have taken place in Christianity, no one of course thinks that a division itself is good, but the history of divisions in the Christian church is of the most awful forms of self-willed persecution of the orthodox in situations like that. So that the types of men of whom Peter speaks are types of men who are that are with us today. Incidentally, there are sometimes when it is the godly thing to separate. And let us never think that we should always say that division is bad. Division from that which is contrary to God and expressive of rebellion against God, division from that is often the precise teaching of Holy Scripture. And one of the greatest things that has happened to the Christian church for example is

the split that occurred in the sixteenth century when the reformation took place. So he speaks of them as presumptuous and self-willed. I've had enough experience with religious leaders to give illustration after illustration of the most implacable hatred of simple believers by religious men opposed to the orthodox teaching of the word of God.

Now the striking thing about these men Peter says is that they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. It's possible that that word is a reference to angels, commentators are not really sure about the meaning, and nor am I. Now because the commentators are not sure you know I may be sure. [Laughter] But in this case, I must confess with the commentators, I'm not exactly sure about the meaning of this, it could be a reference to the angelic beings, because these individuals were individuals who spoke out against angels evidently or at least there were in the tradition at the time of Peter. On the other hand, dignities may be a reference to the leaders in the local churches that is the elders and deacons of the local churches. And these false teachers are so presumptuous and self-willed that they're not afraid to speak evil of the dignities the leaders in the local churches. Whereas he says, angels who are greater in power and might than these false teachers do not bring a slanderous against them before the Lord. As Jude goes on to say, they stand around and say let the Lord do the judging. Why these men are so rebellious and so self-willed that they will step in where others fear to tread and they will bring a railing accusation against church leaders when even angels wouldn't do that, but would rather turn over the judgment to the Lord, which only accentuates the self-willed and arrogant character of the false teachers.

Then Peter goes on to say in verses 12 through 14, that they are full of arrogance and lust. Now this is a direct assault upon the false teachers, and someone has said, “He glows with moral indignation.” You can certainly catch the force and disposition of Peter here, he states in the 12th verse “that these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed.” What a vivid description of men who claim to be teaching the word of God. The Greek text says literally that they are irrational beasts. That is that is they're like the animals who do not have any reason whatsoever, they're creatures of instinct that is they follow out just what their fleshly lusts lead them to and they

are born for a taking and for destruction. What a description of men. And in the midst of it he says that they claim that they know. “They speak evil of the things that they understand not.” They claim that they know, but they don’t really understand what they’re talking about Peter says. So their libertine liberty is not really liberty at all, and it is false doctrine, and they shall perish just like the beast that they are in the slaughter house, for they are made to be taken and destroyed. So he has the picture there of a giant slaughterhouse, just like there used to be in Fort Worth. And these individuals are taken, I don’t know it may still be over there in Fort Worth, but at anyway they are made to be taken just like animals and to be led off to the slaughterhouse. You can see again from this that Peter is claiming that Christianity is inescapably ethical but these men are just like beasts, and they live according to their instincts.

Then he says in the 13th verse, “and they shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to revel in the daytime.” In the ancient times, daylight debauchery was the worst form of debauchery. Debauchery is bad enough, but daylight debauchery was the worst of all. And evidently too, some of this was taking place at the Lord’s Table, for we read, “Spots they are and blemishes, reveling with their own deceivings while they feast with you.” And some of the ancient manuscripts the word deceivings is in the Greek texts, love feasts, a reference to the Lord’s table.

Now we know from Paul’s writing in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 that it was not uncommon for immorality and drunkenness to exist at the Lord’s table. That’s why Paul had to write 1 Corinthians chapter 11. And he spoke about some of them being drunken there which is evidence only incidentally of the fact that they did use real wine at the Lord’s table. One does not get drunk over grape juice, and Welch’s grape juice at that. They were using real wine at the Lord’s Table. But some of them were misusing their food and drink, and there was drunken debauchery at the Lord’s Table. And Peter may be referring to that here when he says that they revel in the daytime in the Lord’s Table. Incidentally some of the commentators have suggested that the reason that the Lord’s table came to be, that the reason that the eating and drinking at the Lord’s table came to be stopped among the early Christians was because of some of the debauchery that took place the early

Christians evidently met and ate a meal together. But these men revel in the daytime, so it is the worst kind of debauchery of which they are guilty.

I don't know whether there is much that we can say about our society that parallels this; we all have had experiences of individuals who claim to be teachers of the word of God who have been involved in some form of immorality. I remember some years ago in Dallas when we were still riding on streetcars, getting on a streetcar to go out to Eagle Ford to preach. And I used to get on the car and go out to the end of the line and then walk a mile or a mile and a half to this little schoolhouse at which I first preached. And on this streetcar one day a drunken Roman Catholic priest got on and hardly was able to find the seat in which to sit down. I still remember being slightly shocked by that. I grew up in Charleston South Carolina and went to the College of Charleston and when I was at the College of Charleston I was a member of one of the fraternities and some of my friends in that fraternity went into the ministry.

I remember one young man who I asked why he was going into the ministry he said, “Well, it's just as good a profession as any other profession.” That's the reason he went into the ministry. Later on I asked about him, how he was getting along after I had become a Christian, and someone said to me, “Oh he's doing fine, he and” and he mentioned another member of our class who also was an Episcopalian minister now, both of them were. He said, “Oh he's getting along fine and he and this other person have pastorates not too far from each other in northern South Carolina and every now and then they get together and pull down the shades in the daytime and have a big party.” I guess that's what Peter is speaking about here, something like that, reveling in the daytime. I heard, or read the story of a clergyman who had been transferred from one place to another and he was being praised by members of his congregation. And one woman told him, “You're wonderful, I never knew what sin was until you came here.” [Laughter]

The next description that is given of them is even more difficult and even more damning than the previous one, “Having eyes full of adultery.” That's a most vivid expression in the Greek text. Literally it is, “Having eyes full of an adulterous.” It is feminine, “Having eyes full of an

adulterous.” What it means is that these teachers view every woman that they look upon as a potential adulterous. They cannot look upon a female without reflecting upon her likely sexual performance, and or the possibility of persuading her to gratify their mutual lusts together. So these false teachers have eyes full of an adulterous.

One might wonder, is it possible? Yes it’s possible, it’s very possible. In fact it is happened. In our own students at Dallas Theological Seminary we’ve had this. We’ve had some men who have graduated from seminary who’ve fallen into this kind of sin. And it’s in Believers Chapel too. Not long ago one young man went to his wife and said, “I’m leaving you.” “But it’s wrong.” She and others said. He said, “I don’t care whether it’s wrong or not, I’m doing it.” And he married his secretary. These sins are sins that are relevant to our society; not only relevant to our society, but relevant to our Christian society. And my dear Christian friends in this auditorium, not only relevant to our Christian society, but relevant to Believers Chapel. Since I have come back and started to minister at Believers Chapel a little more and become much more involved in the work of the Chapel, I think out of the first five people who came to me for counsel, and not all came from Believers Chapel, four were cases involving marital difficulties. Now my brethren and my sisters, it ought not so to be in an assembly which claims Jesus Christ as its head and the word of God as its guide.

So when Peter describes these false teachers, he’s using language that is very relevant. “Having eyes full of an adulteress, and that cannot cease from sin, beguiling unstable souls.” What false teachers can do for the simple Christians constantly amazes me. Now I know that some of you are going to get mad at me for what I say but this statement, “beguiling unstable souls” is very apropos to the Charismatic movement. In my opinion, they are beguiling unstable souls. Have you ever noticed if you’ve ever studied the Charismatic movement, you will find that that movement is a parasitical movement; it rarely ever does anything by itself as a Christian movement. The history of the Pentecostals on the mission field has always been they have never been able to go into an area where the gospel has not come and do anything. They have always gone in where others have gone

in and have preached the gospel and a church has come into existence, and then as parasites, they have come in and have led the believers into their Charismatic form of Christianity. They are parasitical, they're parasites. They live on the good work of others. And unfortunately there are many simple Christian souls who are so unsound and unstable in Christian doctrine that they are easily misled by them. “Beguiling unstable souls,” there are many other ways of course in which this has taken place. Again, so many illustrations come to mind.

He says, “And they have a heart exercised with covetous practices.” And then Peter passed judgment upon them, he calls them children of a curse, “Cursed children they rest under the judgment of God.” Now then finally in verses 15 and 16, Peter speaks of the error and greed of these heretics. He states in verse 15, “Who have forsaken the right way and have gone astray.” There is a way that seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof is the way of death. And these false teachers have forsaken the right way which is the Lord Jesus Christ, and they have gone astray following the way of Balaam.

I have before me a review of a book called *The Difficult Sayings of Jesus*. I have forgotten whether I said something about this. If I said something about this previously, I apologize to you. And if you're listening on tape and you said, “I just heard that the other day when I heard the tape,” I apologize to you also. But this is a review of a book called *The Difficult Sayings of Jesus* by William Neil. Now Mr. William Neil is an outstanding Christian leader, and this is a collection of thirty-four three or four page essays on selected difficult sayings of the Lord Jesus. Mr. Neil is a recognized religious leader. And not only that, this book is published by the Eerdmans Publishing Company of Grand Rapids, Michigan, which has been noted for decades for its publication of sound Christian literature. But they have published this book in the United States by William Neil.

In it he offers some theological opinions. He states, “We know that the universe took longer than six days to come into existence.” In other words, he denies the creation account as set forth in the Book of Genesis. But then he goes on to say that Jesus' words about Hell and unquenchable fire quote “certainly do not imply the eternal torments of the damned” unquote which

we find quote “in the fire and brimstone preaching of Victorian evangelists.” So you see, Mr. Neil is a universalist again, he teaches that everybody is going to be saved, that there’s not going to be any eternal damnation and hellfire. And then in order to degrade the teaching, he said that’s the kind of teaching that Victorian evangelists used to give us. He says Jesus quote “does not share the crude pharisaic belief in some kind of physical resurrection of the body at the last judgment” unquote. In other words, this religious leader denies the resurrection of the body. And finally he says we should acknowledge the Spirit of Christ in those quote “who may not call themselves Christian at all” unquote. In other words, we have Christianity not only among the Christians who believe in Jesus Christ and who acknowledge the authority of the word of God, the authority of Jesus Christ in their life and the sufficiency of the atonement which he accomplished for our salvation and the distinctiveness of the Christian religion, but actually the Spirit of Christ rest in others who don’t have any contact with Christianity at all. Now it’s hard to find a greater collection of denials of the faith then that and yet this is a recognized religious leader whose book is published by a publishing house which has at least until recently specialized in publishing Christian, good sound Christian literature.

Calvin speaks of these false teachers, he says they are perversely ingenious in futile inventions, and that word invention was a word that meant discovery in Calvin’s day. So these men are perversely ingenious in the futile discoveries of truth which they claim that they have. Now Calvin may have spoken very sharply, but he didn’t speak nearly as sharply as Peter and frankly, that kind of sharpness is what is needed today.

Finally, and I come now to what we want to speak about for the rest of the hour tonight, “They have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with a man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet.” Now I want you to turn back with me to the Book of Numbers, chapter 22. And we want to read the story of Balaam and the donkey. The point of the comparison that Peter is making between Balaam and the heretics of his day is primarily between the avarice and greed of the false teachers in Peter’s day and the avarice and greed of

Balaam the false prophet in Numbers chapter 22. But not only is Balaam a man who is a false prophet, he also as the story unfolds, becomes the man who leads Israel into immorality and thus there is a further comparison between the false teachers or heretics and Balaam in the immorality of Balaam and the immorality of the false teachers, and finally perhaps in the godlessness of the two, as Calvin suggests as well. The story of Balaam is found in Numbers chapter 22, chapter 23 and chapter 24, chapter 25 and chapter 31 primarily. There are references here and there to Balaam outside of these chapters, but these three chapters, 22, 23, 24 give Balaam’s prophecies chapter 25 gives what happens after the prophecies are given and chapter 31 tells us about the end to which Balaam came. I’m going to begin reading at the 1st verse:

“And the children of Israel set forward, and encamped in the plains of Moab on the side Jordan by Jericho. And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. And Moab was very much afraid of the people, because they were many: (Moab is the nation nearby.) 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. (If you’ve ever seen an ox he has a sieve like tongue and it is a very beautiful metaphor of what Israel was doing evidently in the eyes of Moab.) 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 the children 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: perhaps 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 cursest is cursed.”

That’s very striking, because Balaam’s name means destroyer of the people, and Balaam evidently was a kind of person who thought himself to be quite a prophet. It was very common for

ancient false prophets and soothsayers and the men of that type to give themselves strange names and quite a public relations build up. Remember in the New Testament there was Simon Magis and he put himself out that he was some great great being. He went around just like Muhammad Ali who does it for money and said that he was the greatest and claimed to be the greatest of the soothsayers in Samaria. When, remember, Philip came and the Holy Spirit was given, he wanted to pay a little money in order that he might have the gift so that he might continue to be called the greatest. Well evidently Balaam was the kind of person, his name means destroyer of the people, who put it out that when he cursed people they really were cursed. So I can just imagine him as his own public relations man or if he had one getting one and saying now when Balaam prophesies against someone, they really are prophesied against. When he curses them, they stay cursed. So just call him Balaam, destroyer of the people, so his reputation evidently had spread far and wide and Balak sent for him and asks that Balaam come and curse the children of Israel. And we read in the 7th verse, “And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand;” There’s the money that the false prophet likes, he likes for you to put it in his palm. Now remember, Peter is using this man as an illustration of false teachers. Can you think of a professedly Christian man, wishing to have money for his message and for his service? So the rewards of divination are in their hands,

“And they came unto Balaam, and spake unto him the words of Balak. And he said unto them, Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the LORD shall speak unto me: and the princes of Moab abode with Balaam. And God came unto Balaam, and said, what men are these with thee? (And all of this is in anthropomorphic language, God knew who these men were but speaking in the language of Balaam) 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 for me; perhaps I shall be able to overcome them, and drive them out. And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them;”

Now that is God’s will, that is his preceptive will, remember there are two wills of God, the decretive will of God which determines everything that is going to come to pass, not one thing shall ever come to pass contrary to the decretive will of God. That decree was accomplished in eternity and everything is proceeding in accordance with that decree. You can not change it, not a one of you can change it. Now you can come up to me afterwards and say, “I don’t believe that that you’re talking about Dr. Johnson” but it’s going to happen just the same. That’s why I won’t get mad at you. [Laughter] I’ll just say someone has beguiled this unstable soul. [Laughter] Now the Scriptures make it very plain that God works all things according to the counsel of his own will, now that’s what that means. Now that is God’s decretive will, we don’t know what that will is. No one knows what that will is. There are certain things about it that we know. He has decreed for example that those who reject Jesus Christ shall go to the Lake of Fire; He has decreed that the believers shall have everlasting life. And there are many things that we do know about it, but the total decretive will we do not know. His preceptive will is what he has revealed to us as that which pleases him. Now his preceptive will is set forth for us in Holy Scripture. So his decretive will is what is going to come to pass; His preceptive will is what he desires, in the light of his holy nature.

Now you see here when God spoke to Balaam that night and said, “Thou shalt not go with them.” That was the answer to Balaam’s request, don’t go. Now this becomes important, because later on God will say all right go. “Thou shalt not go with them thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed.” Cannot curse Israel, God has already blessed Israel, he has already given them the Abrahamic covenant, he has already said, “Blessed are those that bless thee, cursed are those that curse thee.” I have promised Abraham certain promises as a result of this covenant you cannot curse them. Incidentally, there’s no way in which you can curse Israel. You may try to curse them today, but they do have a wonderful future, there’s no way in which you can prevent that future from coming to pass.

“And Balaam rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Balak; Get you into your land: for the LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you.” Now I want you to notice that Balaam is not a person who doesn’t know something about God, he’s a man who has an extensive knowledge of God. Look over at the 23rd chapter, and verses 2 through 4:

“And Balak did as Balaam had spoken; and Balak and Balaam offered on every altar a bullock and a ram. And Balaam said unto Balak, Stand by thy burnt offering, and I will go: perhaps the LORD will come to meet me: and whatsoever he sheweth me I will tell thee. And he went to an high place. And God met Balaam: and he said unto him, I have prepared seven altars, and I have offered upon every altar a bullock and a ram.”

In other words he had contact with the Lord. In the 16th verse of the 24th chapter he says, “He hath said, who heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, who saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open:” He claims that he knows the knowledge of the Most High and he does know enough about God to make these marvelous prophecies concerning Israel in chapter 23 and 24. So do not think of Balaam as a person who does not have knowledge of God. He has an extensive knowledge of the Lord. But now we go on and we read verse 15:

“And Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honorable than they. 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 honor, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse for me this people.”

And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, “I told you God did not want me to go, I will not go.” That’s what he should have said, but notice what he does say, “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.” You see Balak saw immediately that Balaam had his price and it was just a question of how much. So he’s going to go to the Lord and ask, but the Lord’s already given him the answer. But he’s going go and ask again.

Some years ago I heard Robert Ketchum, a very famous Baptist preacher, preach in Dallas Seminary. He made reference to a young couple that’d come to him a year before and ask if he would marry them. One was unsaved and one was saved. Dr Ketchum’s practice was not to marry any Christian to a non-Christian which seems to be a biblical position, so he told them no, he could not perform the marriage. A year later he said, the young man came to him, made an appointment with him walked in his office and asked Mr. Ketchum if he would marry them. Or wanted to discuss marriage with him and leading up to, “will you marry?” He said, “I want to discuss the matter with you.” Well Mr. Ketchum said that he had read in the newspaper the day before that he had bought a license to marry a couple of days before that because the name appeared in the paper, he happened to have seen it. And so when the young man broached the subject of marriage, he said to him, “I am out of salve.” The young man looked at him strangely and said, “What do you mean?” He said, “I’m out of salve to minister to your itching conscious since God has already spoken very plainly, the word of God concerning this question.” Here was a young man who in spite of the Scriptures in spite of everything was still considering disobedience of the plain teaching of the word of God according to Mr. Ketchum.

Well Balaam now is going to ask God about it, we read in verse 20, “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, thus that shalt thou do.” If there is such a thing as the permissive will of God this is the permissive will of God. God’s will preceptively has already been expressed. But now, God says to Balaam if you persist, all right, do it this way. He’s in disobedience.

“And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now 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 the way, and went into the field: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way. But the angel of the LORD stood in a 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 unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall: and he smote her again. And the angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff. And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?”

[Laughter]

Now it's evident that this prophet is dumber than the donkey. [Laughter] The donkey sees what the dunce does not, he sees the angel of the Lord. I heard a story of a skeptic one time who was speaking to a believer, and said, “You believe all those stories in the Old Testament?” He said, “Yes I do.” Do you believe that the ass of Balaam spoke?” He said, “Yes I do.” He said, “I'd like to see you make an ass speak.” [Laughter] Now this Christian was quick in rejoinder he said, “I'd like to see you make an ass.” [Laughter]

The Oxford undergraduates used to have to stand a scriptural exam. Everyone of them has to pass a scriptural exam before they were permitted to graduate. I don't know whether they do this anymore in Oxford, but their answers to questions had been recorded for posterity. And some of them are very interesting. One question was, “Who was the king of Israel?” One student answered correctly, “Saul.” But then he added a New Testament expression “also known as Paul.” [Laughter] But then there was one student who was asked, “What two animals in the Old Testament spoke?”

And he said, “Well, the serpent spoke.” And the examiner said, “Yes that’s right, what’d he say?” And he quoted one of the statements. “What was the other animal?” He said, “It was the whale, and he said almost thou persuadest me to become a Christian.” [Laughter]

Now this ass spoke, and it’s evident that the ass saw more than the prophet did. “And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? Behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me.” Now that’s the way of Balaam. What was the way of Balaam? Why the way of Balaam was simply this: that for the sake of greed and avarice, because he knew that Balak had a handsome amount of money in mind, he was willing to go contrary to the truth about God that he had heard from the mouth of God, and willing to do his utmost to curse the people of Israel. It is a picture of a man who is willing for the sake of money to prostitute his knowledge of God.

Balaam incidentally was a lost man. Balaam was not a believer. Balaam had great opportunities, great advantages. He had firsthand contact with the Lord, and others in the Old Testament did too who were not true believers. But he was a person who was disobedient at heart and was not a believer and was lost. The New Testament is very plain on that point, in its description of Balaam. Balaam and the term Balaam, Balaam is always associated with false teachers and apostate teachers who are not true.

Once I was having a discussion about this with one of my students, and I was giving the reasons why Balaam was probably a lost man. And one of the students raised the question, “Well how could he be a lost man when he understood so much about God, and furthermore when God spoke through him and gave those marvelous prophecies?” And I was at a loss for words for a moment, I’m rarely ever at a loss for words. But I was at a loss for words, and one of my other students spoke up and helped out his old professor. He said, “Why Dr. Johnson, God also spoke through the ass, and we wouldn’t call the ass a Christian would we?” [Laughter] So the fact that God has spoken through Balaam the prophet does not mean he was a Christian. As a matter of fact, he was not a believer he was lost, and Scripture tells us that he was judged.

I won't read the rest of the story, but will you turn over to chapter 31 of the book. In chapter 25 we have a story of apostasy. Perhaps I should read that while you're finding chapter 31,

“And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel. And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baalpeor.”

This is one of those times in Israel's history when Israel was led astray by the women of Midian who worshiped Baalpeor, false gods, and Israel committed harlotry with the daughters of Moab. Now we are not told anything in that 25th chapter about the instigation for this, but over in chapter 31 we read in verse 16, “Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.” In other words, Balaam could not curse Israel because God in his sovereign power would not enable that false prophet to offer a word of curse against Israel even though money depended upon it. He opened his mouth and he uttered those beautiful prophecies, messianic prophecies concerning Israel's future, against his will. But then when he was unable to curse them, he managed still to give the Moabites advice, the way to overthrow the Israelites is to overthrow them through the women. And so as a result of his counsel, he led Israel, was the means for the leading of Israel into the commission of harlotry. And thus there arose the plague which destroyed many of the lives of the Israelites.

In the 8th verse of Numbers chapter 31 we read of the end of Balaam, “And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; namely, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur,

and Reba, five kings of Midian: Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword.” So Balaam ultimately was judged by death from the Lord.

Our time is up, we shall next study finish chapter 2 and will you notice that the last three verses of 2nd Peter chapter 2, these are very difficult verses, and we’re going to take a look at them next time. While they promised in verse 20 of 2nd Peter chapter 2,

“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 in it, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.”

So we shall discuss the question of the apostasy in the latter part of that chapter. Let’s close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for the Scriptures and for the warnings that are contained within them concerning doctrine and practice. And we pray Lord that we may heed the teaching of Scripture and through the enablement of the Holy Spirit be delivered from heterodoxy and heteropraxy. Enable us to think right ...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]