



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Numbers 25: 1-18; 31: 3,16

“Balaam’s Last End”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee and praise Thee for Thy word and we again ask Thy blessing upon us as we turn to it. We pray that Thou will give us responsiveness to it.. May as we reflect upon the things of the Lord, our lives be changed in such a way as to bring glory and honor to Thy name. We ask Thy blessing upon this hour and upon the hour that follows in Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight we are looking at the last of our studies of Balaam and this is really the sixth because we had an introductory study and then we looked at Balaam's four Messianic prophecies. And then tonight we are going to look at Balaam's last end to use his own expression, but since this 25th chapter is probably not quite as well known as some other chapters for all of us, let me begin by reading through the eighteen verses of this chapter.

Remember Israel is just on the border of entering into the Promised Land and they have waited in the plains of Moab and while they have been waiting there, Balak, the King of Moab, very disturbed over the children of Israel who have defeated the Midianites who were in some ways very friendly with the Moabites, you see some reflections of it here, and now Balak has been very concerned and he sent for a Mesopotamian prophet

by the name of Balaam hoping that he would utter some curses that would result in the catastrophe of the overthrow of Israel in some way.

He has been very disappointed because Balaam, instead of prophesying curses for Israel, has prophesied blessing. Though there is no indication that he wished to do that. He just simply was forced by Yahweh, the Lord, to prophesy blessings rather than curses. So he has finished his Messianic prophecies and now in chapter 25, we read,

“And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom 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 (that means to the false god Baal who was associated with Peor) 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.”

Now there are two ways to understand this and it's possible first of all to understand this as the Lord saying take all of the chiefs of the children of Israel and kill them and then hang them up before Yahweh against the sun that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel. That, some contend, is the proper way to take it. On the other hand, there is some very good tradition for taking it in this way that what Moses is saying is for the chiefs of the people to be responsible for the hanging up of those who have committed the sin mentioned in this context, and so the heads of the people are responsible for the execution of those who are involved in the committing of the harlotry and of the judgment against them. I am inclined to that and think that this hang them up is a reference to those who have been involved in the committing of the harlotry. And we go on and read in verse 5,

“And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one of his men that were joined unto Baalpeor.” (That seems to fit into the context quite well.) “And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.”

As will become evident, there was the beginning of a plague in further judgment and so the children of Israel were very disturbed and upset over the plague that had come and now for the first time so far as we know, an Isrealitish man brings a Midianitish woman into the congregation itself where they were staying and commits intercourse with her. So instead of doing this with the Moabitish women in the land of Moab or outside of the camp of Israel, here is something within the camp itself.

“And when Phinehas (now remember Phinehas is the grandson of Aaron, Eleazar was his father, the first high priest after Aaron and Phinehas is the successor in that line). “And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand; And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel. And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand.”

Turn over to 1 Corinthians chapter 10. If you turn over there, you will find that Paul says twenty-three thousand rather than twenty-four thousand and so evidently Paul is thinking about the plague and there were an additional thousand that were involved in the actual executions that were involved here. That seems the simplest harmonization of what Paul says in the light of Numbers chapter 25. I am quite sure Paul understood this chapter as well as modern scholars.

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy. Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: And he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel.” (It’s a very interesting expression, “he made an atonement.”) “Now the name of the Israelite that was slain, even that was slain with the Midianitish woman, was Zimri, the son of Salu, a prince of a chief house among the Simeonites.” (So this is an important young man.) “And the name of the Midianitish woman that was slain was Cozbi, the daughter of Zur; he was head over a people, and of a chief house in Midian.”

So these were two important young people in their places and later on in chapter 31, I believe it is Zur is mentioned as being slain in battle with the Midianites. And verse 16,

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Vex the Midianites, and smite them: For they vex you with their wiles, wherewith they have beguiled you in the matter of Peor, and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a prince of Midian, their sister, which was slain in the day of the plague for Peor's sake.”

Now I would like for you to also turn to a couple of other passages and first of all, we will turn over to chapter 31 of the Book of Numbers because some other interesting and useful information is given here. In chapter 31 and verse 8, we read now that Israel is warring against the Midianites, and so we read in verse 8,

“And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; namely, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur (that’s the father of Cozbi) and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian: Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword.” (So the Israelites were responsible for the death of Balaam. Now notice 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.” (So that’s additional information that is not given in the earlier part.)

Now one further passage I would like for you to turn to is Psalm 106 because again we have some additional information. You probably in your studies have come to be acquainted with the fact that there is such a thing as Jewish tradition as well as what we find in the Bible itself and occasionally that Jewish tradition appears in the word of God even though the contents of it may not be mentioned in the context of the Bible itself. For example, the apostle in 2 Timothy gives the names of the magicians with whom Moses dealt when he was carrying on his encounters with them before Pharaoh and we are told their names there, but you will not find their names in the Old Testament, but you will find their names in Jewish tradition. So the Apostle relied upon Jewish tradition there.

Now that doesn’t mean of course that all Jewish tradition is true. It only means that that particular Jewish Tradition is true and so we have the affirmation of the Apostle that in that case the tradition carried down is a true tradition. So you’ve probably noticed when you have psalms like Psalm 106, there would be additional information here and there that you won’t find in the historical record in the earlier part of the Old Testament, but notice verse 28. The Psalmist is going over the past and making reflections concerning it and he says in verse 28, “They joined themselves also unto Baalpeor.”

Now that’s a statement that is found right here in verse 3 of chapter 25 of Numbers “And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor.” So clearly the Psalmist was acquainted with

that, but notice what he goes on to say "and ate the sacrifices of the dead." Now that's not specifically stated in the preceding account, but putting the two together to eat the sacrifices of the dead is to eat the sacrifices that were offered to the idols who are simply dead pieces of wood or whatever they may be made of. So eat the sacrifices of the dead is not a reference to the worship of the dead or something like that, but it's a reference to the sacrifices of dead idols. And the most recent commentary on the Book of Psalms, a three-volume work, the author of this particular section translates it something like ate the sacrifices of dead things. So a reference to the fact that the idols are involved.

Now go on. "Thus they provoked him to anger with their inventions: and the plague brake in upon them. Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment: and so the plague was stayed." And notice this 31st verse. "And that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore." You'll recognize immediately the parallel of that statement with the statement made concerning Abraham, and he believed in the Lord and it was accounted to him for righteousness. And the thing I would like for you to note also is that in verse 30, it says, "Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment." Well actually that is an expression that means to act as a mediator. You will find the Hebrew word *pallal*, which is used here in the intensive stem with the *-al* means simply that he stood and made interposition. That is he made mediation. So he acted as a mediator. That's not surprising because the high priest of course was the mediator, the one who represented God with man and represented man with God.

So now let's turn back to chapter 25 and the subject for tonight is Balaam's last end and you can see that I have taken it from the statement that he made at the end of his first prophecy when in chapter 23 and verse 10, he said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" So we find out here what Balaam's last end was.

His first prophecy contained this wish "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" Well it would be nice to be able to say that this has a very

happy ending like stories are supposed to have, a happy ending, but the story of Balaam does not have a happy ending and his wish expressed in chapter 23 in verse 10 was not realized. He was slain by the children of Israel. He also was guilty of deceptive counsel given to Balak and others by which the children of Israel fell into idolatry again.

There are several significant lessons that appear again in chapter 25 and they are not new. They are old lessons but they are very important lessons for all of us to remember. One of them is simply that false teachers are often false in their life as well. To put it in the language of the New Testament, false teachers are often libertines, and when you read the New Testament particularly the second epistles, Second Thessalonians, Second Peter, Second/Third John, the Second Epistles, Second Timothy, you will find that there is frequently a great stress upon the false teaching that will appear in the last days, and one of the things that is mentioned with reference to them is that they are often not simply false in their doctrines but they are false in their life.

For example in 2 Peter chapter 2 and verse 1 through verse 3, we read these words, “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily (or in secret) shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.”

Then in verse 10 through verse 16 of this same chapter, we have strong emphasis upon it and we even read about Balaam, but we will refer to that later on, so we won't say anything about it now. In chapter 3 in verse 3, Peter writes concerning the last days and he says “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts.” So there will be denials of the second coming of Christ as he goes on to say but they will also in their personal lives be unholy, fleshly, walking after their own lusts.

Now we have seen so much of that, it's surprising that Christians are so naïve. One remembers if you are familiar at all with influential theologians in the United States, Paul Tillich. Tillich probably had as much influence on the liberal church over the past 25 or 35 years as any man. In fact, his influence actually became greater than Karl Barth's and when Tillich died, the revelations that were made of his personal life were such that it was plain that he had lived all along a very sordid life. And what confirmed it was that even his own wife wrote a book about it and acknowledged it also as well. He never really was her husband in the sense that a man should be, but at the same time he was extremely influential in the American professing Christian church. To cite Tillich was to cite an authority.

I can remember being in certain churches where people would come up to me and say oh if we just had someone in our church preaching the gospel. In my church, our pastor constantly quotes Paul Tillich. So you can imagine what kind of teaching we get. There was a French theologian who died just a few years ago, a very influential scholar, a Roman Catholic priest who has written a number of very significant books, Jean Daniélou. Jean Daniélou was one of the most outstanding French Catholic priests. Do you know where he died? In a bordello. [Laughter] Most embarrassing to die in a house of prostitution, but he did, and finally it appeared in *Time* magazine too and the embarrassment over it was acute. But this was a man who had lived like this, it just so happened by the determination of the Lord God we believe that that was where he should die. And of course I am sure that the people who knew him knew he really was that kind of man.

So false teachers are often libertines and it's not surprising that this man Balaam who gives us these magnificent Messianic prophecies should in the final analysis be revealed as a very deceitful man.

Another lesson that appears is the ineradicable link between right belief and right behavior. That's clear from this that if you have right belief, there is a chance you will

have right behavior but if you have wrong belief, it's impossible for you to have right behavior. Now listen to the Apostle Paul in contrast in 1 Corinthians chapter 4. In verse 16 and verse 17, the Apostle is writing to men and women to whom he had preached the Gospel and he says "Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church."

In other words, the apostle's actions, his ways, the way in which he lived his life is in harmony with what he taught. What he taught is illustrated by the way he lived, and incidentally that often gives us a clue about what Paul would have believed about poets when he doesn't necessarily say anything about it because he says that his actions are in harmony with what he taught. So it's perfectly proper for us to look at the apostle's life and see how he did carry on his ministry and in the absence of anything to the contrary to assume that that's what he taught. If you had asked him how should a certain thing be done, he said be followers of me. You know my ways in Christ. They are in harmony with what I teach. So I feel from this and many others do too that when one looks at the life of Paul, we are looking at someone we are to follow.

And in cases where he hasn't spoken a specific word, we may have fairly good conviction and fairly good support for saying, concerning other things that he would have taught this because that's the way he carried out his ministry. "My ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church." What a marvelous thing! Preachers incline to say listen to what I say but don't do what I do and all of us know that there is a sense in which we have to do that because we don't live up to things that we see in Scripture. And I certainly would want you to think that I live up to the things that are in Scripture. Follow Scripture. Don't follow me. Follow Scripture.

But there should be a harmony of some sort between what the Scriptures say and what we all as Christians affirm to be the truth. One final lesson which is obvious from

reading this chapter is the certainty of the following divine judgment when we turn away from the things of the Lord. “Be sure your sin will find you out” as Paul puts it in Galatians chapter 6 in verse 7. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked, whatever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” Notice it’s not whatsoever he thinks, he sows or whatsoever he wanted to sow, but whatsoever he sows that shall he reap.

Now quickly let’s look at the national apostasy with Baalpeor in verse 1 through verse 18. Have you noticed in the Bible that often the brightest revelation of truth is often followed by an incident or things that happen that reveal the darkest of sin. Take for example Sinai where the children of Israel were given the magnificent law of Moses and Moses when he comes down from the mount is exposed to the idolatry of Aaron and the children of Israel because he has been gone for forty days. They have already fallen into idolatry and so the Golden Calf is constructed and they are ready to bow down before it and to acknowledge the Golden Calf as their God.

Well here in the plains of Moab, the children of Israel have been waiting to enter into the land and we don’t know that they really had any idea of these prophecies of Balaam, but it’s almost as if Moses has done this on purpose, he has given us these magnificent prophecies and then right next to the prophecy is the revelation of this dark sin of idolatry which so offends a covenant-giving God. The first nine verses describe the harlotry of Israel and the zeal of Phinehas. Baal was the Canaanite fertility god remember. The Israelites seem particularly susceptible to allurements by Baal because Baal was a fertility God. And associated with the belief that Baal was a god was the practice of the temple kind of prostitution in which since Baal was the fertility god, it was very important to be in right relationship with the god in order that one might have fruitful crops, that one might prosper, and then associated with it was the temple prostitute and because of the temple prostitute and the practice of intercourse and because through the practice of intercourse, people are fertile in the production of the human race, the association was obvious, and so if one wanted to worship Baal, then he could engage in intercourse with

the temple prostitute. And so Israel was particularly allured by Baal and through the Old Testament of course you have numerous incidents in which Israel fell into the idolatry of the worship of Baal.

By the way I guess the climactic illustration of this is Elijah on Mount Carmel with the prophets of Baal there, but remember that when the children of Israel engaged in the worship of Baal, worship of another god, mind you. Now in our day if you just worship God, it doesn't make a bit of difference what God you worship. Why surely you have access to the Lord God. Ann Landers said that just the other day in the column. That makes it true. We all approach God through a particular God and so why not approach through Baal as well as Jehovah? There are lots of gods and so that general idea is very predominant.

But when God gave the law to Israel, he said to worship an idol was to repudiate the covenant and so in effect to worship an idol, to worship another god was to rebel against God. It was the fundamental foundation of the Law of Moses, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" and furthermore they were not to bow down to any images. And know what that means is you shouldn't worship a Mohammedan god and you shouldn't worship another kind of god, you shouldn't worship anyone but the Lord God who is the father of the Lord Jesus Christ. So to do this was to repudiate the covenant that God had given to them in His marvelous grace.

And so it's natural then the Baal worshippers were singled out by the Lord God, the whole company would be ultimately affected by this and all of the plans that God had for them would be threatened by what was happening. And so the word goes out from the Lord to Moses take all the heads of the people and hang them up before the Lord against the sun. It was the custom in ancient times by the way to execute people and then hang them in a very conspicuous place in order to bring conviction to people that to violate the particular law was something that would lead to that very thing, and so this is set out here and Moses went through this.

And right in the midst of all of this, suddenly there comes in one of the children of Israel, a man by the name of Zimri, and he brings with him a Midianitish woman right in the site of the congregation, he goes right into the congregation, he takes her over to his tent, and enters with her into his tent obviously to engage in sexual intercourse and that was too much for Phinehas. And so Phinehas took a javelin and in the zeal of conviction that this was a rebellion against the very foundation of the children of Israel, he went into the tent and he took his javelin and he speared the man and the woman and evidently while they were in the very act of intercourse. That seems to be what is stated here. "Thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed."

Now what would you expect the Lord to say something like about this? Now remember it was open contempt of the covenant accompanied by immorality. It's not simply that he said I don't accept the covenant, but he is engaging in the expression of his false ideas in the immorality. Well what would you say? Is this a God of love? Is this a God of love who would do something like this? Maybe the Lord should say well that was a really little too much. He should have been rebuked and it should have been stopped, but Phinehas really lost his temper. You know like, well, I am not going to say anything about Hiroshima. So it's obvious that the ideas that the Lord God has about what is right and wrong and what is in harmony with His will are quite different from the temper of men today. We live in a very immoral and sentimental age.

Now listen to what God says. "The Lord spake unto Moses (this is verse 11 now) Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned away my wrath from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy." Acting as a mediator, realizing that since the plague has begun the whole of the people might be destroyed, it's Phinehas who steps into the breach and saves the children of Israel from plague. And he does it out of jealousy for the covenant of God or for the Lord God. "Wherefore say (say this

about Phinehas) Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace, and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood."

Now that doesn't mean that Phinehas' children are priest today. The Law of Moses has been done away with, but this term everlasting is a term that means everlasting in the sense that as long as the conditions that exist now exist Phinehas and his descendants shall have the priesthood. And that of course is what has happened. When the Lord Jesus Christ came, he was not of the line of Aaron remember but in his resurrection he became the priest after the Order of Melkizedek uniting the tribe of Judah, the royal tribe with Melkizedek, the priestly tribe, so he as a king, priest as a priest after the Order of Melkizedek.

He goes on to say because he was zealous for his God and made an atonement for the children of Israel. That's a most interesting statement. He made an atonement for the children of Israel and over in Psalm 106 remember it says that there he, verse 30, then stood up Phinehas, and he executed judgment in a mediatorial fashion and so the plague was stayed and "that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore."

In what sense did Phinehas make an atonement? Well you know in atonement when the Lord Jesus exercises atonement, there are many aspects of this. I know many of you have been studying this, so we won't do anything about trying to set out all of the angles of this, but just remember this that in the act of atonement, it is absolutely essential that the penalty of the broken law be paid for and that of course is what the Lord Jesus Christ did. He was made sin for us who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God in him, or he has redeemed us from the curse of the Law having been made a curse for us. So one of the aspects of atonement is the payment of the price. And we tend of course to stress the result of that that we have righteousness, that we have deliverance, that we are justified in all of the other blessings that flow from it, but in atonement it is essential that there be the payment of the debt. That's another

thing that we have lost in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and consequently the tendency of our soft and sentimental day is to pass over the necessity of the payment of penalty. Phinehas made an atonement in the act of judgment passed upon the offenders of the law of God, and of course in that act of paying the price by in this instance not delivering them but slaying them, he was in a sense doing precisely what God will do in order that men be delivered and the Lord Jesus is the one who took it upon himself to pay that price.

Now in Phinehas' case because of this particular situation, we say it was an atonement by the judgment of the offenders in a typical act. It reminds us of the Lord Jesus who voluntarily took it upon himself to pay for the sin of man. In fact he calls it his cup. Shall I not drink the cup which have my Father hath given me? So Phinehas is a typical man who slays these individuals and God praises him for it. God praises him for his faith and also for the typical act of paying for the sins of sinners.

The other way you pay for your sin is to die. Everybody who doesn't believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will have their sins paid for by themselves. Eternal judgment. Those of us who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have our sins paid by our substitute, but sin must be paid for. And so Phinehas carries out that act. He is not going to be the substitute, but the act of judgment is part of the divine nature and expresses the divine nature. And Phinehas is in thorough harmony with it and the Lord praises him because He says he was zealous for my sake among them that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy. So he is given an everlasting priesthood because he was zealous for his God and made an atonement for the children of Israel. Well the divine judgment on the Midianites is expressed in what follows. Moses has given the command to vex the Midianites and smite them, for they vex you with their wiles.

Now let's turn over to chapter 31 for just a moment and say just a word about the counsel of Balaam and his bitter end, then I want to turn to the New Testament just quickly the three references to Balaam in the New Testament. Now we don't really know what happened to Balaam after he gave those prophecies. It's possible that the Midianites

took him captive and it's possible that when they were fighting the children of Israel, he was fighting with them and the children of Israel slew him as they did the other five kings of the Midianites. That's one way that one can construe the history and in this way, it's possible to think of him being slain in the battlefield.

Or it's possible to think of him being taken captive and then brought in among the Israelites, and then what would you do if you had given four magnificent Messianic prophecies concerning them, and they haven't heard of it and they are getting ready to put you to death, wouldn't you say, I am a prophet? You wouldn't say false prophet. I am a prophet and I have just been given four magnificent prophecies of your future. Would you like to hear them? And I'll give them to you if you let me go free. Same here. He bargained his way or tried to.

Or the other way of looking at it is very common and that is that he went to the Israelites after his prophecies and sought to gain a reward from them and since they wouldn't give him any reward for that, he went back to the Midianites and was slain in battle. We don't know exactly what happened.

We do know this though, that Balak didn't have any reason to be happy over these prophecies and so Balaam may well have said that Balak look, I cannot prophesize anything but good for Israel, but after all if Jehovah could not be turned away from his people, perhaps the people can be turned away from Jehovah. So maybe we ought to look at it the other way. Why don't you go and tempt them with the prostitutes? Why not seek to counsel them to serve your gods? Why not go to them like this; after all our gods are our gods, your gods are your gods. We respect Jehovah. Why don't you respect Baal? We would be happy to sit down with you in your church if you come and sit in our church. And so they might well have approached it like a liberal minister today would approach it.

After all, we are just looking at things in different ways and particularly since they had all of those prostitutes over there that they could worship through, it became a very

alluring thing for the children of Israel, and they yielded to it and so as a result of Balaam's counsel, so the Scriptures say, he taught them to commit adultery and in that violate the covenant of the Lord God. That was rebellion. The fundamental rebellion is the worship of Baal, the secondary issue of it is the physical fornication that they were engaged in, and God hates that.

And my dear friend sitting in the audience, God hates your sin and he hates my sin. He hates it when we who say we are his covenant people, disobey him. He hates it if we should commit adultery. He hates it if we should commit fornication. And let me go further and say, because this is just the word of God. You know it as well as I. He hates it when believers become worldly for to be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God. And that's why James calls us adulterers and adulteresses. If we are friendly with the world, there is a distinction between a believer and the world created by the new birth that demands a different style of life. So Balaam died, a monument of judgment.

Let's turn quickly to the three references in the New Testament where Balaam is referred to, and let's see how the New Testament interpreters speak about him and the first we will look at is the 2 Peter chapter 2 verse 15. I will just read this and make just a comment and then go on to Jude and the Book of Revelation.

Now Peter is talking about the false teachers and he is saying about them these individuals who teach false doctrine, they are false prophets and they are false teachers, false prophets in the previous era, false teachers now. Verse 14 "Having eyes full of adultery, that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls, and heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed 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." The point of comparison is primarily the greed and avarice of Balaam, but if you will read the context a little more deeply, you will find that immorality is also there and perhaps Calvin is right when he says godlessness is here too. That's the fundamental problem.

Now turn to Jude verse 11. Jude, the brother of our Lord, also mentions this man. So Balaam was an individual well known to the children of Israel. And Jude is speaking just like Peter in the second chapter of his epistle. He says “Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain.” By the way these three men, Cain and Balaam and Core, are illustrations and examples of the libertines in Jude’s day. So he uses these ancient characters. “They have gone in the way of Cain, they ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.”

And Cain, what was Cain’s problem? Well he sought to approach God by works. In that sense, he is like Balaam, well like the libertines. What about Balaam? He was a man in the service of men primarily, not in the service of God. He said he was in the service of God, but he really was in the service of men. He wanted money for the preaching of the word of God. And Core, remember Core, what did he want? He wanted the priesthood also. In other words, he brushed aside the appointed mediation of Aaron and wanted intrusion into the priesthood himself. The same as if a person today should say it's not necessary to go to God only through the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not the only great high priest. He is not the only way. How arrogant can you be? How proud can you Christians be, you evangelical Christians? Well you fundamentalists they like to say, but that’s what the Bible says. To say there are other ways is to follow in the pattern of Core who contradicted the truth of the word of God. And then a final reference to Balaam is in Revelation chapter 2 in verse 14 and with this, we will have to stop.

The Lord Jesus is himself through John addressing the church in Pergamum and in the course of it in the 14th verse, we read “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.” What was that he taught was the doctrine of Balaam? Well, Yahweh is not the only God. To worship Yahweh alone is not the truth of God.

There are other gods as well. You can worship Baal and you can observe the religion of Baal and carry out their religious practices and idolatry and immorality are linked together and the claim is made that one has access to the true God even though the true God has spoken in Scripture contrary to that. The doctrine of Balaam.

I don't know. I guess that you can think of a lot of things that they might have had. Some of these things have a great deal of truth I think in them. Perhaps they pooh-pooed abstaining from sacrificial meats on the basis of Christian liberty. They might have said well the children of Israel say that you are not supposed to eat sacrificial meats but what's wrong with eating sacrificial meats? What's wrong with that? Later on in New Testament times, it's obvious there is nothing wrong with it, Paul says, providing a point is not made over it. Then of course it can be very wrong, but there is nothing wrong in eating meat that has been sacrificed to an idol. If you don't know anything about it, it's not going to do you any harm.

But if someone says this meat is sacrificed to Baal and you eat it as if you are worshipping Baal through the eating of that meat, then it's very wrong, Paul says. It's idolatry and that kind of thing leads to immorality because it's a violation of the covenant of God, the relationship to him, and it reveals the fact that the heart is not in harmony with God. So one can see the antinomianism that arose and references made in that particular text to the Nicolaitans, and we have some historical information to the effect that they were antinomian in their particular practice of things.

So let me sum it up. Balaam had an extensive knowledge of the truth. That's not enough. Balaam rebelled against God hoping to get some gain, material gain, then he sought further to get gain by giving counsel so that the Midianites and the Moabites might defeat the children of Israel and he might get his money which he still wished to get the wages of unrighteousness. Balaam was a lost man.

In Jude, just a verse so on, such men are described as twice dead. So a lost man, yet so far as we know the outward conduct of Balaam seems impeccable. A religious

man, a giver of prophecies, highly regarded obviously in Mesopotamia, sought after by Balak, but yet when God puts that kind of life next to the word of God, one sees quite a different picture.

May God help us to remember that when we worship other things, maybe it's material things, maybe it's the world, we are actually violating our relationship with the Lord God. We say we are saints. We say we have been set apart for him. That means our lives are his and everything that we do and say is to be lived in the light of that. May God through his word search our hearts and search out the sin that so often is part of our daily life and Thought. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father we thank thee for the lessons of Balaam, the prophet but a false prophet, a religious man but a lost man, a man looking for things other than the fellowship and communion with Thee which makes life so marvelous. Finding in the things of the world, the things that please rather than in the things of the divine word and the divine truth and the divine persons of the triune God, we worship Thee and Lord we pray that Thou will deliver us from the worship of other things. May we as John says, as little children, flee idols.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.