

Lesson 13B: I Cannot Go Beyond the Word of the Lord

Reading Preparation:

- Numbers 22-24; 31:1-16

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Lesson Notes:

[1. Introduction](#)

Some critics have suggested the Bible is no longer relevant for the challenges we face in our day. It is not only difficult to read, but also to understand. This, they note, is especially true for the Old Testament. While it is true the language of the King James Bible reflects the language of the times when it was translated [1611 A.D.]. It is also true the culture of the Israelites and their history is far removed from our modern day lifestyle.

The Bible is relevant for the challenges we face today. If one makes the effort to surmount the language and culture differences, they will find the issues addressed in the Bible are extremely relevant for our day. The issues of obedience and disobedience; honesty and fraud; humility and pride; enduring and giving up, are just some of the choices we face in our lives today. In this specific lesson, we are taught the importance of enduring. Like the runner of the race, who initially leads all his opponents, only to learn as the race continues, his lead is at first shortened, then he/she is passed by one who had sufficient endurance and speed to finish the race ahead of all others. While disappointed with his loss, he learns an important lesson. It is not enough to start strong, we must also finish strong.

Balaam, a prophet of God, begins firm in his obedience to the Lord. Listen to his words: "If [the king] would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go against the word of the Lord my God" (Numbers 22:18); "All the Lord speaketh, that I must do" (Numbers 23:26); and, "I cannot go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do either good or bad of mine own mind; but what the Lord saith, that will I speak" (Numbers 24:13). Following our analogy, out of the racers blocks, Balaam sounds strong and resolute in his commitment to obey the word of the Lord. He is a strong candidate to win the race.

[2. Balaam Refuses Balak's Offer of Rewards](#)

Before the children of Israel can cross the river Jordan into the promised land, they must destroy the current inhabitants of the land that borders the river Jordan. Of those who had been sent as spies into the land to determine the strength of the people by Moses, only the report of Caleb and Joshua were favorable to their being able to defeat the people. The remainder reported that due to the strength of the inhabitants, they would not be able to defeat them. Because they doubted the strength of the Lord in Israel in being able to possess the land, many were denied entrance.

Numbers 14:22-23

**22 Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice;
23 Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it:**

As the children of Israel, under the direction of the Lord, proceed toward their promised land, they are prepared to opposed all who refuse them passage in battle.

Numbers 21:1-3

1 AND when king Arad the Canaanite, which dwelt in the south, heard tell that Israel came by the way of the

spies; then he fought against Israel, and took some of them prisoners.

2 And Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities.

3 And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah.

In each place they went, the children of Israel made the similar plea to the people.

Numbers 21:19-25

19 And from Mattanah to Nahaliel: and from Nahaliel to Bamoth:

20 And from Bamoth in the valley, that is in the country of Moab, to the top of Pisgah, which looketh toward Jeshimon.

21 And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, saying,

22 Let me pass through thy land: we will not turn into the fields, or into the vineyards; we will not drink of the waters of the well: but we will go along by the king's high way, until we be past thy borders.

23 And Sihon would not suffer Israel to pass through his border: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel into the wilderness: and he came to Jahaz, and fought against Israel.

24 And Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from Arnon unto Jabbok, even unto the children of Ammon: for the border of the children of Ammon was strong.

25 And Israel took all these cities: and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all the villages thereof.

As the kings of the land heard the success the children of Israel had in battle, they were concerned about their own future. As the children of Israel "pitched [their tents] in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan by Jericho" (Numbers 22:1), the king of Moab was fearful. He sent a message to Balaam.

Who is Balaam?

The scriptures state that he was "the son of Beor of Pethror which is by the river of the land of the children of his people..." (Numbers 22:5).

Ellis T. Rasmussen states,

"Pethor is thought to have been near Haran; descendants of Abraham's brother, Nahor, and his son, Laban, lived there in the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; remnant of their culture may have remained (PGP, Abraham 2:1-6; Genesis 11:31-32; 22:20-24; 28-31). " (A Latter-Day Commentary on the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1993, 160).

Old Testament Institute Student Manual adds,

"It is significant that Balaam is never referred to as a prophet in the scriptures, but rather as a soothsayer or diviner, somewhat on the order of Simeon of the New Testament (Joshua 13:22; Acts 8:9-24).

"One of the remarkable things about Balaam's blessing of Israel is the Messianic promise of Christ (see Numbers 24:14, 17, 19)." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 209).

Numbers 22:2-4

2 And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.

3 And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they were many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel.

4 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. And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time.

Concerned the Israelites will destroy his people, he sends his messengers to Pethor requesting Balaam come to Moab and curse the Israelites that they will not be successful against his people. The scriptures note they did not come empty handed, but came “with the rewards of divination in their hand” (Numbers 22:7).

Balaam indicated to the messengers “Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the Lord shall speak unto me” (Numbers 22:8). God replies to Balaam’s petition.

Numbers 22:12-13

**12 And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed.
13 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.**

The response of the king’s messengers is to increase their offer of remuneration. They must have thought, surely every man has his price.

Numbers 22:18

18 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.

Unfortunately, Balaam does not send Balak’s messengers away. He invites them to remain “that I may know what the LORD will say unto me more” (Numbers 22:19).

3. The Lord Shows Danger of Balaam’s Stubborn Will.

Balaam reports to the king’s servants, the following message from the Lord.

Numbers 22:20-22

**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, that shalt thou do.
21 And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab.
22 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.**

It appears the message God gave to Balaam was not the message he delivered to the king’s messengers. Balaam is trying to serve two masters.

In the following sequence of events the Lord sends an angel and uses a donkey to deliver a message to Balaam. The donkey sees the angel blocking the path, while Balaam does not. He is angry with the donkey who is unable to proceed. Initially the donkey turns toward a field; He then turns and crushes Balaam’s foot against the wall; and then finally falls down underneath him. In each instance, Balaam strikes the animal. (see Numbers 22:23-27.) The Lord then opens the mouth of the donkey.

Numbers 22:28-30

**28 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?
29 And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee.
30 And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay.**

Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

“The rebuke received by Balaam from an animal wrought upon by the spirit of God is a singular event in history. Speculation on how the deed was accomplished is useless. It is certain that the beast spoke in a way understandable

to Balaam. Other scriptures indicate that when animals are filled with the divine spirit and celestialized they will be able to express themselves in ways presently denied them (see Revelations 4:6, 9; D&C 77:2-4). Balaam is not recorded as showing surprise at this phenomenon, which circumstance has led some to suggest that Balaam's mind was troubled because of his attempt to serve both God and mammon. Had he been more thoughtful, the unusual behavior of his otherwise obedient mount would have caused him to look about to discover the trouble. Then perchance he would have discovered the angel's presence." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 209-210).

Daniel H. Ludlow adds,

"God speaks through any means that serve his divine purpose. Thus a voice and words come from a bush (as in the case of Moses) or from a donkey (as in the case of Balaam). Also, the same God who created the animal world in the first place could surely enable a donkey to see something (in this case an angel) that might not be perceived by man." (A Companion To Your Study Of The Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981, 181).

What are some modern parallels of individuals and groups stubbornly trying to do what they want rather than submitting to God's will or to the righteous counsel of parents or leaders?

"Examples include:

"1. A child, unhappy with an answer from one parent, goes to the other parent, hoping for a different answer.

"2. A member of the Church, unsatisfied with the counsel of a priesthood leader, goes to another priesthood leader.

"3. A member of the Church rationalizes that a commitment doesn't apply to him or her as it does to other members." (Old Testament Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1996, [2001], 74-75).

Following the incident in which the donkey speaks to Balaam, the angel appears and delivers a message to Balaam.

Numbers 22:31-33

31 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.

32 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:

33 And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive.

Balaam is chastised by an angel of the Lord for hitting his donkey. The purpose of the angel in appearing to Balaam is because his actions are unacceptable to the Lord. He also tells Balaam the donkey has acted wisely, and had Balaam persisted in his actions toward the donkey, he would have killed Balaam and spared the life of the donkey.

Numbers 22:34-35

34 And 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.

35 And the angel of the LORD said unto Balaam, Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak. So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

The Old Testament Institute Manual states,

"The incident was sufficient to carry out the Lord's purposes, however, Balaam was shown that it was not the journey in itself that was displeasing to God, but the feelings and intentions he harbored. The entire incident seems to have been brought about to sharpen his conscience and sober his mind that he might speak only the word of God." (Old Testament Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1996, [2001], 74-75).

4. Balaam Refuses to Curse Israel.

Upon Balaam's arrival, Balak express regret that Balaam had delayed his visit. His purpose in bringing Balaam to Moab is to curse the children of Israel. Balaam respond to the king.

Numbers 22:38

38 And Balaam said unto Balak, Lo, I am come unto thee:
have I now any power at all to say any thing? the word
that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak.

Balaam, having been chastised by an angel, tells the king he can do nothing of himself, but only will speak the words of the Lord. The king takes Balaam to a high place where he can view the countryside. In front of the princes of Moab, the king expects Balaam to curse Israel.

Numbers 23:7-9

7 And he [Balaam] took up his parable, and said, Balak
the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the
mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and
come, defy Israel.
8 How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how
shall I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied?
9 For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the
hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and
shall not be reckoned among the nations.

Balak is not pleased with Balaam's response. These are not the words he wanted to hear. He determines to take Balaam to another location, and, as it were, see if Balaam will say the words he wants to hear. Balaam does not refuse the king offer.

Numbers 23:19-22

19 God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son
of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he
not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it
good?
20 Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he
hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it.
21 He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he
seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with
him, and the shout of a king is among them.
22 God brought them out of Egypt;....

Again Balaam has disappointed the king and his entourage. Instead of cursing Israel, he has blessed them and confirmed they have been led out from Egypt by God! The king, persistent in his desire that Balaam curse Israel, now takes him to a third location. Again Balaam stands firm in the message the Lord has given the king.

Numbers 24:2, 5-9

2 And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel
abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the
spirit of God came upon him.
5 How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles,
O Israel!
6 As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the
river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the LORD
hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters.
7 He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his
seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be
higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted.
8 God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were
the strength of an unicorn: he shall eat up the nations
his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them
through with his arrows.
9 He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion:
who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee,
and cursed is he that curseth thee.

Frustrated by Balaam's failure to comply with his request, Balak can no longer contain his anger toward Balaam.

Numbers 24:10-11

10 And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he
smote his hands together: and Balak said unto Balaam, I
called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast
altogether blessed them these three times.
11 Therefore now flee thou to thy place: I thought to
promote thee unto great honour; but, lo, the LORD hath

kept thee back from honour.

Balaam responds to the king.

Numbers 24:12-14

**12 And Balaam said unto Balak, Spake I not also to thy
messengers which thou sentest unto me, saying,
13 If Balak would give me his house full of silver and
gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the LORD, to
do either good or bad of mine own mind; but what the LORD
saith, that will I speak?
14 And now, behold, I go unto my people: come therefore,
and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to
thy people in the latter days.**

Balaam indicates to the king he has been honest with him. He came to speak the words of the Lord to the king which he has done. Balaam's error is that although he refused to curse the children of Israel, as the king desired, he continued to follow him around, despite the clarity of the word of the Lord to the king. Sometimes, we too are guilty of not standing up for what we believe in the face of voices we know are not in keeping with our beliefs and standards.

What are the dangers of listening to unrighteous suggestions (from friends or the media, for example) when we know they are wrong?

We are in fact not being fully honest with others when we give the impression that we may be influenced to set aside our values and "go along with the crowd" by our remaining, rather than clearly stating our position and then leaving the party, movie, discussion, etc. To remain, makes us guilty by association.

Gary E. Stevenson shares the following about a personal friend,

"Some years ago, John was accepted at a prestigious Japanese university. He would be part of the international student program with many other top students from around the world....

"Soon after John's arrival, word of a party to be held on the rooftop at a private residence spread among the foreign student population. That evening, John and two friends made their way to the advertised address...

"As the night wore on, the atmosphere then changed. The noise, music volume, and alcohol amplified, as did John's uneasiness. Then suddenly someone began organizing the students into a large circle with the intent of sharing marijuana cigarettes. John grimaced and quickly informed his two friends that it was time to leave. Almost in ridicule, one of them replied, 'John, this is easy—we'll just stand in the circle, and when it is our turn, we'll just pass it along rather than smoke it. That way we won't have to embarrass ourselves in front of everyone by leaving.' This sounded easy to John, but it did not sound right. He knew he had to announce his intention and act. In a moment, he mustered his courage and told them that they could do as they wished, but he was leaving. One friend decided to stay and joined the circle; the other reluctantly followed John down the stairs to board the elevator. Much to their surprise, when the elevator doors opened, Japanese police poured out and hurried to ascend the stairs to the rooftop. John and his friend boarded the elevator and departed.

"When the police appeared at the top of the stairs, the students quickly threw the illegal drugs off the roof so they wouldn't be caught. After securing the stairway, however, the officers lined up everyone on the roof and asked each student to extend both hands. The officers then walked down the line, carefully smelling each student's thumbs and index fingers. All who had held the marijuana, whether they had smoked it or not, were presumed guilty, and there were huge consequences. Almost without exception, the students who had remained on the rooftop were expelled from their respective universities, and those convicted of a crime were likely deported from Japan. Dreams of an education, years of preparation, and the possibility of future employment in Japan were dashed in a moment.

"Now let me tell you what happened to these three friends. The friend who stayed on the roof was expelled from the university in Japan to which he had worked so hard to be accepted and was required to return home. The friend who left the party that night with John finished school in Japan and went on to earn degrees from two top-tier universities in the United States. His career took him back to Asia, where he had enjoyed immense professional success. He remains grateful to this day for John's courageous example. As for John, the consequences in his life have been immeasurable. His time in Japan that year led him to a happy marriage and the subsequent birth of two sons. He has been a very successful businessman and recently became a professor at a Japanese university. Imagine how different his life would have been had he not had the courage to leave the party on the important evening in Japan." (Be Valiant in Courage, Strength, and Activity," in Ensign, November, 2012, 53).

Prior to Balaam's departure from the king, he offered him a prophecy regarding the coming of the Savior.

Numbers 24:14, 17-19

**14 And now, behold, I go unto my people: come therefore,
and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to
thy people in the latter days.**

17 I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.
18 And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly.
19 Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city.

Adam Clarke states, regarding verses 17 and 19,

"17. I shall see him, but not now. Or, 'I shall see him, he is not now.' I shall behold him, but not nigh-I shall have a full view of him, but the time is yet distant. That is, the person of whom I am not prophesying does not at present exist among these Israelites, nor shall he appear in this generation. There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel-a person eminent for wisdom, and formidable for strength and power, shall arise as king among this people. He shall smite the corners of Moab-he shall bring the Moabites perfectly under subjection (see 2 Samuel 8:2). and destroy all the children of Sheth.

19. "Out of Jacob shall come. This is supposed to refer to Christ, because of what is said in Genesis 49:10." (Adam Clark's Commentary on the Bible. Abridged by Ralph Earle. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1967, [Nineteenth printing, March, 1991], 196).

It appears verse seventeen refers to King David who will unite all of Israel. Verse 10, refers to the Jesus Christ.

At this point in our discussion of Balaam, we would be pleased that after a misstep, he heeded the call to repentance, and served the Lord well. Unfortunately, this is not how Balaam finished the race.

Numbers 31:16

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.

Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

"The record [Numbers] next describes the whoredoms Israel committed with the daughters of Moab; that is, Israel joined the women of Moab in worshipping Baal-peor, a fertility god, including offering sacrifices to the god and indulging in sexual immorality. What is not mentioned here, but is explained later (Numbers 31:16) is that Balaam advised the Moabites in this action. Evidently, when he saw that he could not earn Balak's commission by cursing Israel directly, he told Balak that God would only bless Israel when they were righteous. If the Moabites could seduce Israel into idol worship, they would lose God's power." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 209-210).

Balaam's counsel to King Balak is verified by references from Micah and the Apostles Peter and John.

Micah 6:5

5 O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; ...

Revelations 2:14

14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac [Balak] to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

2 Peter 2:15

**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;
16 But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet.**

How detrimental to the children of Israel was the counsel Balaam gave to King Balak in order to receive his payment from the king?

Ellis T. Rasmussen states,

"The twin sins of idolatry and adultery were later causes of Israel's apostasy, overthrow, and exile." (A Latter-Day Commentary on the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1993, 161).

The effects upon Israel were incalculable as they let down their standards and by so doing lost the protective blessing of the Lord as a people. Their actions led to the downfall of a people. This will also become true for later civilizations including Rome and Greece. It may yet prove the downfall of the United States of America.

5. The Israelites Destroy the Midianites and Slay Balaam.

Why did the Israelites go to war against the Midianites?

The Lord was angry with the Midianites for enticing the Israelites to sin, as recorded in Numbers, Chapter 25.

Numbers 25:1-3

**1 AND Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab.
2 And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods.
3 And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.**

Who counseled the Midianites to tempt the children of Israel to participate in idol worship and immorality?

As referenced previously [Numbers 31:16], it was Balaam.

Why did Balaam give this counsel?

Old Testament Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual states,

"Although Balaam obeyed the Lord's commands to bless rather than curse Israel, in his heart he wanted earthly honors and rewards. To receive these rewards [from King Balak], he suggested tempting Israel to sin, [thereby] causing them to lose God's protection." (Old Testament Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1996, [2001], 75).

What lessons can we learn from the experience of Balaam and King Balak?

Old Testament Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual states,

"Members of the Church who seek earthly rewards and honors, who seek exceptions to God's counsel and commandments, or who try to introduce worldly ideas, practices, or standards into the Church are following Balaam's unrighteous example. This is... known [even today] as the "doctrine of Balaam" (Revelations 2:14)." (Old Testament Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1996, [2001], 75).

Bruce R. McConkie states,

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

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

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

6. Conclusions

We introduced our discussion regarding Balaam by referring to a runner in a race. He began the race strong and quickly emerged as the leader. As the race proceeds, he is then passed by one who has greater speed and endurance. In our discussion regarding runners in a race, we often focus our attention on their speed, as if this was the sole criteria to ultimate success. Maybe we do so as it is much easier to determine speed by the use of a simple stop watch, while it is more difficult to determine the racer's endurance.

In the race of life, the victor's crown is bestowed upon the individual, who in righteousness, endures to the end. For each of us, like Balaam, we too begin the race with the desire of reaching the finish line. We have high hopes for success, but as the race proceeds, and the distractions in the form of challenges and adversities of life arise, we begin to falter. Balaam began with the resolute determination to serve the Lord, not the wealth of the king. Along the way to the home of the king, whom he had determined not to serve, it was first his donkey, and then an angel who appeared, because his actions or motives are questionable. Initially, upon his arrival, it appeared he had repented in his

responses to the king, but he was not able to leave his employ, until finally he succumbed to the king's offer of wealth and power, and betrayed his God.

We, too, will be confronted by the distractions of sin as we run our race of life. It will not, however, be our speed, but our resolute determination to be obedient to the commandments of God and to endure in faithfulness that will lead us to the victor's crown. It was the Apostle Paul who admonished each of us, "...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Hebrew 12:1). As we do so, at the end of the race, like Paul, we too will be able to say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2nd Timothy 4:7). I have finished my race. Then we will hear the words of the Lord.

Matthew 25:21

21 ...Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

In the race of life, there is not just one winner, but many. Those who receive the crown of eternal life are those who were obedient to the commandments of the Lord, served others, and endured in faithfulness to the end. May we remember the example of Balaam to help us to endure in righteousness to the end of our lives.