

THE LEGACY OF BALAAM

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Balaam was minding his own business, doing the work of God. He was known for his work throughout Pethor. But Balak, king of Moab, had another agenda for Balaam. He had a list of sermons he wanted preached to a people he feared. He was afraid of the blessed people of God, the Israelites, who were coming his way (Nm 22:3,12). He thus sought for a preacher to hire to carry out his agenda against Israel.

Balak had the sermons to be preached and the audience to whom he wanted them delivered (Nm 22:5,6). So he went looking for a preacher he could tempt with purse and position in order to carry out his mission to a foreign nation. He knew that there were preachers out there who would sacrifice their freedom and principles for the sake of a salary.

Balak knew how to approach religious hirelings. He went looking for a dynamic and successful religious leader. He said of Balaam, *"I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed"* (Nm 22:6). His method of tempting Balaam to preach his agenda was to send a delegation of elders to the preacher. With the delegation he sent the greatest temptation to acquire a hirling preacher. He sent "the diviner's fee," a handsome salary (Nm 22:6). So with an impressive delegation from a foreign land, and the temptation of great support, Balaam was tempted to accept the agenda of someone other than God.

At first Balaam held out against the temptation of salary and fame by refusing to compromise his principles. He would not allow his freedom to be bought with foreign support from those of a foreign country who had their own agenda. He even consulted God concerning the request of the delegation of elders. And he initially followed God's command not to go with the delegation of elders, or to accept their support (Nm 22:8-12). This was God's ultimatum. It was not to be changed under any circumstances.

But Balak was relentlessly persistent. He thus sent a greater number of princes who were more noble and numerous than the first delegation. These were political people who would appeal to the political ambitions of Balaam

(Nm 22:15-17). With the temptation of the high salary he initially received from the first delegation, this time Balaam was tempted by the foreigners with a great position and any request he might have from the nation of the foreigners (Nm 22:17).

Balaam again held out. He refused to go with the political delegation that was sent from the foreigners (Nm 22:18).

But Balaam weakened. He again asked the political delegation to spend the night. God knew Balaam's heart, and thus accommodated his carnal desires for gain. He thus allowed Balaam to be ensnared in his own greed for gain (Nm 22:19,20). *"So Balaam rose in the morning ... and went with the princes of Moab."* The mold was then cast for the hireling preacher to sell his gift to another for the sake of support. Balaam wrote his own legacy that the Holy Spirit recorded in Jude 11: He ran **"greedily in the error of Balaam for profit"** (Jd 11). Balaam established a "way" of behavior that would always be identified with his name and would describe those who compromise their principles for the sake of a salary. Peter defined *"... the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness"* (2 Pt 2:15). The angel to the church of Pergamos condemned those who *"hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality"* (Rv 2:14).

How could a preacher who was minding his own business establish forever a legacy of greed and selfish ambition? Simple. **We must never underestimate the temptation that comes with a delegation of elders from a foreign country who come with a great "diviner's fee" in order to hire those who would preach their agenda of sermons.** It takes men of great spiritual stature and dignity not to sell themselves to such great temptations. When preachers live in great poverty, it is not difficult to understand why some would be tempted to sell themselves for a salary.