

Third Presbyterian Church
Midweek Bible Study
Miracle Series – Miracle of a Donkey Speaking
Lesson 31 – I am Winning with God

Numbers 22:1-35 (NIV)

¹ Then the Israelites traveled to the plains of Moab and camped along the Jordan across from Jericho. ² Now Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites, ³ and Moab was terrified because there were so many people. Indeed, Moab was filled with dread because of the Israelites. ⁴ The Moabites said to the elders of Midian, "This horde is going to lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field." So Balak son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, ⁵ sent messengers to summon Balaam son of Beor, who was at Pethor, near the River, in his native land. Balak said: "A people has come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the land and have settled next to me. ⁶ Now come and put a curse on these people, because they are too powerful for me. Perhaps then I will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the country. For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed." ⁷ The elders of Moab and Midian left, taking with them the fee for divination. When they came to Balaam, they told him what Balak had said. ⁸ "Spend the night here," Balaam said to them, "and I will bring you back the answer the LORD gives me." So the Moabite princes stayed with him. ⁹ God came to Balaam and asked, "Who are these men with you?" ¹⁰ Balaam said to God, "Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, sent me this message: ¹¹ 'A people that has come out of Egypt covers the face of the land. Now come and put a curse on them for me. Perhaps then I will be able to fight them and drive them away.'" ¹² But God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed." ¹³ The next morning Balaam got up and said to Balak's princes, "Go back to your own country, for the LORD has refused to let me go with you." ¹⁴ So the Moabite princes returned to Balak and said, "Balaam refused to come with us." ¹⁵ Then Balak sent other princes, more numerous and more distinguished than the first. ¹⁶ They came to Balaam and said: "This is what Balak son of Zippor says: Do not let anything keep you from coming to me, ¹⁷ because I will reward you handsomely and do whatever you say. Come and put a curse on these people for me." ¹⁸ But Balaam answered them, "Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything great or small to go beyond the command of the LORD my God. ¹⁹ Now stay here tonight as the others did, and I will find out what else the LORD will tell me." ²⁰ That night God came to Balaam and said, "Since these men have come to summon you, go with them, but do only what I tell you." ²¹ Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab. ²² But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the LORD stood in the road to oppose him. Balaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. ²³ When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, she turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat her to get her back on the road. ²⁴ Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between two vineyards, with walls on both sides. ²⁵ When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat her again. ²⁶ Then the angel of the LORD moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. ²⁷ When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat her with his staff. ²⁸ Then the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and **she said** to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?" ²⁹ Balaam **answered the donkey**, "You have made a **fool of me!** If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now." ³⁰ The donkey said to **Balaam**, "**Am I not your own** donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the **habit of doing this to you?**" "No," he said. ³¹ Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown. ³² The angel of the LORD asked him, "Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me. ³³ The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If she had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now, but I would have spared her." ³⁴ Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned. I did not realize you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now if you are displeased, I will go back." ³⁵ The angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but speak only what I tell you." So, Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

1. We are supposed to keep God first in our life. Why is it important to know who/what is the number one contender for that position God holds in our life?
2. The sermon made the following point: “Authorization to go does not mean consent to disobey” explain/discuss this truth as it relates to God allowing us to go places.
3. Every person has a compromising price. Agree or disagree and why?
 - a. How do we protect/change our compromising price?
 - b. What happens when we don’t work to change our compromising price?
4. How did Balaam’s desire for riches distract him from what God wanted him to do?
5. In what ways do we make it hard for God to get our attention?
6. Why do we often desire riches more than God?
7. How can listening to God help us keep wealth in perspective?
8. What can you do this week to keep from being distracted from God?
9. Share your main takeaway from the sermon and the lesson?

the Story of Balaam, His Donkey, and His Three Encounters with God (Part 1): A Picture of the Unseen, Unknown Attempts by the Powers of Darkness to Defeat God's People, 22:1-41

(22:1-41) Introduction— Spiritual World, Warfare of — Evil Spirits, Work of— Occult, World of— Sorcery, Evil of — Psychics, Evil of— Diviners, Evil of— Darkness, Powers of, Described: there is an unseen warfare going on behind the events of world history. This warfare is conducted by the evil spirits of darkness, evil spirits who serve under a supreme power that is identified in the Holy Scripture as Satan or the devil. In deep malice and wrath against God, these evil forces try their best, when possible, to frustrate the plan of God for this world. Evil spirits seek to cut the heart of God because of God's judgment against their arrogance and rejection of Him. The way they seek to hurt God is by taking over the normal desires and the obsessive passions of men, using them to destroy people. They use the passions that enslave people, passions such as...

- greed
- drugs
- alcohol
- gluttony
- lust
- cravings
- vulgarity
- profanity
- pornography
- immorality
- abuse
- killing
- bestiality

If the curtain were rolled back between earth and heaven, man would easily see what lies behind all the sin and evil, all the conflicts and struggles of this world. He would clearly see a horde of evil spirits seeking to cut the heart of God by deceiving people, by turning them away from God (see outline—' Luke 8:26-39 and notes—' Luke 8:26-39 for more discussion). One of the ways used by these evil spirits is the world of the occult, the world of the false prophet, the diviner, the sorcerer, the psychic, the palm-reader, the fortune-teller, the astrologer, and a host of others. The leaders of the occult advertise and cry out for the attention of people, claiming that they know the future, can meet needs, and can bring blessings into the lives of people. Some even go so far as to claim that they can control and alter the future, that they can bring blessings upon those whom they bless and cursings upon those whom they curse. Under the power of darkness and spiritual wickedness in high places, they mislead people and cause them to turn away from the only living and true God, the Lord God Himself (Jehovah, Yahweh). The world of the occult is a world controlled by evil spirits who are set upon destroying the lives of people and cutting the heart of God.

not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephes. 6:12).

Remember, Israel is camped in the plains of Moab by the Jordan River across from the great city of Jericho. The present Scripture is an event that takes place totally unknown to the Israelites. It is a picture of the unseen, unknown attempts by the powers of darkness and spiritual wickedness in high places—an attempt to destroy the people of God in order to break the heart of God. Keep in mind that Israel is totally unaware of what is happening. But not God. God knows, and God protects His people. He will not allow any person to touch His people, to call a curse of judgment and destruction down upon them. Judgment and destruction are in His hands and no one else's. To curse His people with judgment and destruction will never happen, never be allowed. This is the story of this Scripture: *Event 8—the Story of Balaam, His Donkey, and His Three Encounters with God (Part 1): A Picture of the Unseen, Unknown Attempts by the Powers of Darkness to Defeat God's People, 22:1-41*

1. The background to the encounters with God: a false belief in divination (v.1-6).
2. The 1st encounter of Balaam with God: a man who earned money dishonestly (2 Peter 2:15) (v.7-14).
3. The 2nd encounter of Balaam with God: a man who would do anything for money (Jude 11) (v.15-21).

4. The 3rd encounter of Balaam with God (the story of the donkey): the anger of God over greed and the signs of His anger (v.22-35).

5. The effect of the encounters and warnings upon Balaam (v.36-41).

1. (22:1-6) Divination— Sorcery— Occult— Balaam— Balak: the background to Balaam's encounters with God was dramatic. A false belief in the world of divination, sorcery, and the occult is seen. Note the Scripture and outline.

1. The Israelites were poised to enter the promised land (Numbers 22:1). At long last, the Israelites had reached the plains of Moab and camped along the Jordan River right across from the great city of Jericho. From this vantage point, the promised land was in plain view and God's people would soon lay claim to the wonderful inheritance God had promised them. Picture the excitement of the people as they sat around their campfires by night: the children playing, running, and dancing around; the adults sharing their joys and plans for the land they are soon to inherit and the homes they are to build. Excitement, joy, anticipation, great expectation—all the hopes and dreams of a people who had been freed from slavery and were about to return home—were wrapped up in the moment of these days. But behind this scene of great excitement and joy, another dramatic plot was being played out. The unseen, unknown powers of darkness were scheming to destroy God's people.

2. The king of Moab had heard about Israel, that they were camped nearby in the plains of Moab (Numbers 22:2-3). He of course had also heard about the military exploits of Israel against the Amorites and the kingdom of Bashan. This news struck fear in king Balak and his people. Note what Scripture says: they were terrified, greatly distressed, and filled with dread because of the Israelites. The word "fear," "afraid," or "terrified" (gur) means a dreadful, horrifying fear. It has the idea of being frightened or terrified out of one's mind. But even this does not fully describe the depth of fear they were experiencing. Note the word "distressed" or "dread" (qus): this means a sickening, nauseating, debilitating, incapacitating, hopeless, and helpless fear. The king and his officials saw no way to stop the march of the Israelites. If he launched a military operation against the Israelites, he would be defeated and his nation utterly destroyed. A surprise military action was therefore out of the question. Some other way had to be devised to defeat God's people. No doubt after days of consultation and consideration of contingency plans, the king and his official came up with a devious plot. To modern ears within industrial societies, their devious plot may sound strange, but divination, sorcery, and the world of the occult were a part of everyday society among pagan people in the ancient world. To be honest, the world of the occult—diviners, psychics, witch doctors, astrologers, and many others—is just as active today as ever.

3. The king and his advisors formed an alliance with the leaders of Midian (Numbers 22:4). Note how Balak described the strength of Israel to the Midianites: Israel was so strong and powerful that she was just like an ox that devours grass. It should be noted that this particular plot against God's people by these two nations would fail. However, a later plot by Moab and Midian would succeed, and Balaam—this false prophet—would again be right in the middle of the plot. In fact, he would actually devise the plan and scheme that would overthrow the children of God (Numbers 25:1-18). Now note the devious and strange sounding plot.

4. The king (in alliance with the Midianites) sought to curse and defeat Israel by pagan divination or sorcery (Numbers 22:4-6). The king sent messengers to secure the help of Balaam, a famous diviner or sorcerer with an international reputation. The summons sent to the false prophet spelled out exactly what the king wanted:

- ⇒ He related how a horde of people had arrived from Egypt and settled next to him (Numbers 22:5).
- ⇒ He wanted Balaam to come and put a curse on them so he could defeat them in battle (Numbers 22:6).
- ⇒ He stated that he believed strongly in the divination or sorcery powers of Balaam; that is, the people Balaam blessed were blessed, and those he cursed were cursed (Numbers 22:6).

The king was desperate: the Israelites were too powerful for him to fight without the help of the "gods." There was no hope for victory unless the gods helped him by cursing the Israelites and blessing his own military forces. Consequently, he summoned one of the famous diviners or psychics of that day and time. Along with so many others down through history and even up until this day, he believed that the gods had gifted some persons who could pronounce cursings or blessings upon people. He believed if Balaam could just pronounce a curse

upon the Israelites, either some supernatural event would wipe them out or else he would be able to defeat them in battle.

Thought 1. Psychics, fortune-tellers, palm-readers, sorcerers, diviners, psychics, self-proclaimed prophets of new-age movements or of the zodiac—the whole world of the occult—have all been sought by people down through the centuries of human history. People want to know their destiny, what the future holds. They want the blessings of the gods that be, or else they want some enemy cursed. They want only good things to happen to them, not bad things. They want good experiences, not bad experiences. They want plenty, not the bare necessities. They want more, not less. They want acceptance, not rejection. They want to be highly esteemed, not put down. They want position and power, not servitude and enslavement.

For these reasons and for so many more, people seek the leaders of the occult. They seek the help of any person who claims to have the power of astrology, the power to read the stars, the zodiac, or any other medium. If a person claims to have the answer to the future or to people's problems, they flock to him. But Scripture is clear: the world of the occult is a world of sin and evil. Man is to have nothing—absolutely nothing—to do with the world of the occult.

And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers" (Acts 16:16-19).

2. (22:7-14) Encounter, with God— Confrontation, with God— Warning, of God— Balaam, Warned by God— Money, Earned Dishonestly— Divination, Evil of— Sorcery, Evil of: the first encounter of Balaam with God was a warning. This false prophet, this diviner, needed a severe warning. He was a man who earned money the wrong way, by dishonesty.

"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 [by divination, sorcery]" (2 Peter 2:15).

He earned a living by playing off the fears, sufferings, and hopes of people—claiming to have the answer to whatever they wanted or needed. He could bless and a person would be blessed, or he could curse and a person would be cursed. He could help people, give them exactly what they needed. But for his help he was to receive a fee, obviously a large fee because of his international reputation. God condemns diviners, sorcerers, mystics, or anyone else who preys upon people seeking direction or help.

1. The officials from both Moab and Midian traveled to see Balaam. Special attention is called to the fact that they took with them a large *fee for divination* (Numbers 22:7). This fact suggests that Balaam had a heart consumed with greed, the desire for money and possessions—the things of this world (1 John 2:15-16).

2. The response of Balaam was immediate: he invited the officials to spend the night while he sought God's will (Numbers 22:8). Note that he was going to seek God during the night, while the others were asleep.

3. Note the first confrontation with God. Balaam got the surprise of his life: shockingly, astoundingly, the Lord Himself (Jehovah, Yahweh) confronted this false prophet, this seer, this diviner, this psychic, this sorcerer.

a. God asked who the men were visiting Balaam (Numbers 22:9).

b. No doubt in shock, Balaam identified them as officials from Balak, the king of Edom. He related their request for a curse to be put upon Israel so that the king might fight and drive them out of his land (Numbers 22:10-11).

c. Upon hearing the word "curse," God immediately issued a strong warning to Balaam:

⇒ He was not to go with the messengers to the king.

- ⇒ He was not under any circumstance to "curse" Israel.
- ⇒ The reason was clearly stated: they were God's people, especially blessed by God Himself (Numbers 22:12).

God loves His dear people, for they bear His name and stand as a strong testimony to His name. They live righteous and godly lives before God, proclaiming the absolute necessity for man to live righteously and godly. God loves His dear people because they are the heirs of the Abrahamic covenant, the great covenant God made with His people through Abraham:

- ⇒ the promise of the promised seed
- ⇒ the promise of the promised land (see outline—' Genesis 12:1-3 and notes—' Genesis 12:1-3 for more discussion.)

4. The response of Balaam to the confrontation with God was decisive, clear-cut: he refused to go with the officials, and the officials returned to relate the refusal to the king (Numbers 22:13-14).

Thought 1. God's people are very special to Him, a very special treasure (Exodus 19:5). What makes them so special is God's call: the fact that He has called and set them apart to be His followers. Simply stated, genuine believers live holy and righteous lives before God. They seek with all their hearts to live lives...

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| • of morality and purity | • of strengthening and equipping |
| • of honesty and fairness | • of generosity and good will |
| • of truthfulness and integrity | • of supporting and building up |
| • of giving and sharing | • of preaching and teaching |
| • of service and ministry | • of witnessing and sharing Christ |
| • of encouragement and consolation | • of healing and helping |

For these reasons and for many others, God loves His dear people. He has called and appointed them to be His witnesses upon this earth, just as He had the Israelites. No person can call upon God to curse His people. Once God has called a person and set that person apart to become a member of His people, that person cannot be cursed. He is destined to live eternally—some day out in the future—with God Himself, face-to-face. The believer is God's heritage, God's treasure, God's chosen, God's elect, God's heir, God's adopted son or daughter—very, very special to God!

"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you" (John 15:16).

"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Romans 8:33-34).

3. (22:15-21) Encounter, with God— Greed— Money, Lust for— Judgment, Judicial— Judicial Judgment— Balaam: the second encounter of Balaam with God was stunning and revealing: it revealed a double-minded, hypocritical, and greedy heart. This encounter with God exposed a man who would do anything for money.

"Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core" (Jude 11).

1. The king was not going to give up, for he was desperate. He tried a more urgent request with Balaam: he sent other officials, a larger number and more distinguished. Note that he also sent a far more appealing offer:

- ⇒ The king would pay him well, in essence, pay Balaam whatever he desired.
- ⇒ The king would do anything, bestow whatever honor Balaam desired.
- ⇒ The king was desperate: he begged Balaam to come and put a curse on Israel (Numbers 22:17).

Note how the king appealed to the greed and covetousness of the human heart. He offered this false prophet, this diviner, this sorcerer, this psychic anything he wanted—any amount of money and any honor. He appealed to his greed, his pride, and his ambition. The king was desperate: this diviner must come and put a curse on God's people so that he could defeat them and drive them out of his country (cp. Numbers 22:6).

2. The response of Balaam revealed a spirit that was totally enslaved by greed (Numbers 22:18-19). Note how Balaam's actions were for appearance only. He only seemed to be resisting the summons and offer of the king.

- a. Balaam declared that nothing could change his mind, not to go against God's will. He would not even go against God's will for a palace filled with silver and gold (Numbers 22:18). Remember, God had already revealed His will: the false prophet was not to go (Numbers 22:12). He knew exactly what God wanted him to do: he was not to curse Israel. They were God's people, followers of the only living and true God. Therefore, there was no chance that God was going to curse His people nor allow anyone else to put a true curse upon them. No one would ever be allowed to defeat His people nor to curse His people to the judgment of death. Only the Lord God Himself (Jehovah, Yahweh) had the power to curse and judge people to death. No one else had this power. Consequently, there was no chance that God was going to judge His own people, those who sought to follow after Him. Moreover, there was no chance that He was going to allow Balaam or anyone else to curse His dear people. All this Balaam already knew. God had revealed it to him, forbidding him from going and attempting to curse God's people. But note how wavering, double-minded, and hypocritical Balaam was.
- b. He told the officials to stay and spend the night while he sought God, just in case God would give him another message and allow him to go (Numbers 22:19). This shows a strong, strong urge and intention to accept the offer. This was a terrible reflection upon God, as though God were double-minded and would change His mind, allowing him to go and put a curse upon the people of God. The heart and mind of this man were so corrupt and twisted that he played the role of a hypocrite, of a double-minded man himself. Deceiving and misleading the officials were nothing to him. He would not go against God's will even for a palace filled with silver and gold, but he would take the night to seek God just in case God would let him go. He was play-acting with the name of God, preying upon the needs, the hopes, and the dreams of people—all for money and profit. Obviously to him, God was little higher than man himself who wavered back and forth, changing his mind day by day. Simply stated, he already knew God's will. He knew that he was not to go, for God had already told him that he was not to go nor to put a curse upon the precious people of God.

3. Note the second encounter with God: God gave Balaam over to his greed, gave him up to the lusts of his own heart (Romans 1:28-32). Balaam's heart was set on going. He lusted to go, craved after the wealth and honors offered by the king. The lust and greed had enslaved his heart. His mind had already made the decision: he was going. But note what happened when he got alone that night: God came to Balaam and gave him a severe warning: "Since these men had come to summon him—since he had determined to go with them—he could go. But he had better do only what God told him" (Numbers 22:20). The decision to rebel against God by going was made by Balaam. The permission to allow Balaam to follow through was given by God. Balaam was permitted to go, but he was warned and warned severely: he must do only what God told him to do.

4. The response of Balaam to the confrontation with God was just what would be expected from a greedy heart: he got up in the morning and went with the officials. He still had the freedom to obey God, the ability to

choose not to go, not to put a curse upon God's people. But the choice was made, driven by the consuming passion of greed, the lust after money and honor.

Thought 1. Greed and covetousness are wrong; they are sin before God and man. A covetous, greedy person violates the very commandment of God Himself. Moreover, the covetous, greedy person causes suffering by not sharing and distributing to those who are in need. And sometimes, by stealing from the needy and poor, covetousness and greed consume a person, eating away at his spirit and life. A greedy, covetous person actually falls into many foolish and hurtful passions, doing many foolish and hurtful things. Greed and covetousness actually plunge men into destruction and doom.

"And he [Judas] cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself" (Matthew 27:5).

"And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

4. (22:22-35) Greed, Results— Anger, of God— God, Anger of— Balaam, Story of the Donkey—

Encounter, with God— Money, Love of: the third encounter of Balaam with God aroused the anger of God. This is the story of Balaam and the donkey, a story that reveals the anger of God over greed. Simply stated, God used the donkey as a sign of His anger against the greed of this false prophet. God used the donkey as a warning of judgment if the false prophet did not do exactly what God instructed. This is a dramatic lesson that shows God's anger and displeasure with the world of the occult. God stands opposed to any false prophet, diviner, sorcerer, psychic, palm-reader, fortune-teller, or astrologer. God is angry with any person who uses the fears and hopes of people to gain profit or money. The leaders of the occult world are stumblingblocks to people: they lead people into a false belief, away from the only living and true God (Jehovah, Yahweh). But even more terrible than this, they doom people to an eternity of separation from God in the judgment to come. This is the reason God is angry with the world of the occult, the reason He is going to severely judge the world of the occult. This was certainly part of the reason God spoke through the donkey to Balaam. In this dramatic event of the donkey speaking, God was warning Balaam, giving him a severe warning: he must do exactly what God says. This dramatic experience emphasized the point to Balaam, gave him an experience that he could not ignore. Note exactly what Scripture says: God's anger was aroused because Balaam went (Numbers 22:22). Balaam had known exactly what God's will was; nevertheless, he ignored God and went anyway. But this one thing God determined: this false prophet was not going to curse the dear people of God.

1. In anger, the angel of the Lord stood in the road to block Balaam's way (Numbers 22:22-23). This blind, false prophet was so blinded by his covetousness and greed that he could not see the angel of the Lord. But the donkey saw the angel standing with a drawn sword in the middle of the road. Frightened, the donkey turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat the donkey to get her back on the road.

2. But again, the angel of the Lord blocked the path, a narrow path with walls on both sides (Numbers 22:24-25). The result was the same: the donkey saw the angel with his sword drawn and tried to squeeze by, crushing Balaam's foot against one of the walls. Balaam again beat the animal.

3. The angel of the Lord then moved ahead to a place so narrow that the donkey simply could not get by (Numbers 22:26-27). This time the donkey saw the angel of the Lord and simply lay down under Balaam. In anger, Balaam struck the donkey, beating her with his staff.

4. Then it was that the drama began: in dramatic fashion God opened the donkey's mouth. The animal miraculously, shockingly spoke to Balaam (cp. 2 Peter 2:16). The reader must keep this fact in mind: the donkey did not speak by its own power; it spoke by the power of God. This was a miracle, a miracle brought about by the hand of God Himself. Note what the donkey did:

- a. The donkey did what any living creature would do if it could speak: it complained of Balaam's cruelty (Numbers 22:28).

- b. Balaam flew into a fit of rage, stating that he wished he had a sword to kill the animal. The animal had made a fool out of him (Numbers 22:29).
 - c. But note how the donkey miraculously reasoned with Balaam (Numbers 22:30). She argued that she was Balaam's property and that she had always served Balaam well. Moreover, she had never behaved like this before (Numbers 22:30).
 - d. Balaam, obviously stunned and amazed at the dumb animal speaking to him, could only agree.
5. At this point, the Lord opened Balaam's eyes (Numbers 22:31-35).
- a. Balaam immediately saw the angel of the Lord standing with his sword drawn. The drawn sword was a symbol of God's anger, a strong warning to Balaam. Stricken with fear, he fell face down on the ground.
 - b. The angel of the Lord then confronted this obstinate, hard-hearted false prophet who was so consumed with greed (Numbers 22:32-33). The Lord immediately rebuked him for mistreating an animal. Then it happened: God condemned him because of his reckless, stubborn heart, because of his resistance to God. Balaam had chosen to follow the sinful way of greed, the stubborn, reckless way that stands in opposition to God. God warned Balaam in no uncertain terms: God would have taken his life by now because of his stubborn, disobedient resistance if the donkey had not stopped (Numbers 22:33). (See Deeper Study #1—Numbers 22:15-21 for more discussion.)
 - c. Balaam confessed his sin and offered to return (Numbers 22:34). But note: he did not repent. This was only a partial confession, for true confession involves repentance. Repentance is the turning back to God, obeying God totally, fully, and completely—doing exactly what God commands. If Balaam had been sincere, he would have truly repented, returned home, and given his life to God, becoming a follower of the only living and true God. But this Balaam did not do. With one eye on the sword in the hand of the angel and with a heart filled with greed, he half-heartedly said that he would return if he had displeased the Lord. Of this, there was no question. The Lord had already told him never to leave to go to king Balak. Balaam had disobeyed the instructions of the Lord, and he was continuing to disobey them: all because his heart was full of greed and covetousness.
 - d. Note the response of the angel of the Lord: he gave Balaam over to his greed (Romans 1:28-32). He could go, but he must speak only what God told him (Numbers 22:35).

Thought 1. There are two clear lessons for us in this point:

- 1) God had the power to speak through the donkey of Balaam. God has the power to perform miracles in order to achieve His purposes upon this earth. One of His purposes is the same purpose that He was working out through Balaam: the purpose of protecting His dear people. God has the power to protect His precious people and protect them He will. God's power is unlimited, and He will use whatever amount of power is needed to protect and take care of His dear people.

"But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

"For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

"Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25).

- 2) The heart of Balaam was reckless, stubborn, and resistant to God. He was a hard-hearted person whose mind was set on the things of this world, its money and possessions. He was possessed by greed and covetousness. As a result, his heart was hard and stubborn against God. Scripture declares in no uncertain terms: a stubborn, hard heart is condemned by God. A hard-hearted, stubborn person

will face the judgment of God and be eternally separated from God—tragically, all because the person resists the salvation of God provided through Christ Jesus. Hardness of heart condemns a person.

"But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:5).

"But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13).

"For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee" (1 Samuel 15:23).

"Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief" (Proverbs 28:14).

"He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Proverbs 29:1).

"If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart" (Malachi 2:2).

5. (22:36-41) Encounter, with God— Warning, of God— Sacrifices, Pagan: the effect of God's encounters and warnings upon Balaam was a lesson that was going to be heeded. Remember what God had just told Balaam along the journey: He had considered striking Balaam dead (Numbers 22:33). This threat and the experience with the donkey had gotten across to Balaam. Balaam was to be an instrument, a mouth-piece for God to share some very special messages with the world. Balaam did not yet know this, but he soon would. This false prophet was ready to share with the king only what God Himself revealed.

1. Note the excitement and expectation of king Balak at the coming of Balaam (Numbers 22:36-37). He traveled all the way to the border to meet Balaam. After their greetings, the king expressed disappointment in Balaam's refusal of his first request. He could not understand the refusal in light of the rich rewards he had so willingly offered Balaam.

2. Note the effect of Balaam's encounters with the Lord, the effect of God's warnings to him (Numbers 22:38). Balaam replied to the king that he had now come despite his earlier reluctance. But Balaam added that he still could speak only the message that God gave him. No doubt, the image of the drawn sword in the hand of the angel dominated the thoughts of Balaam. Stricken with the fear of the angel and the threat of God, Balaam was determined to share only the message God wanted shared.

3. Note how the king celebrated Balaam's coming (Numbers 22:39-41). The king offered pagan sacrifices of sheep and goats to his "gods." Note that Balaam participated with Balak, eating the meat that was sacrificed. The king then took Balaam up to Bamoth Baal, that is, some hill or high place where Baal was worshipped. He did this so that they could scan the camp of Israel together.

Thought 1. God is sovereign, in total control of the universe and of all that happens within the universe. This does not mean that God overrides the free will of people; rather it means that God works all things out for good...

- in order to achieve His eternal purpose
- in order to look after His people and conform them to the image of His dear Son

God takes all the events throughout the universe, twisting and turning and working them out for the good of those who love Him, those who have been called according to His eternal purpose. This is exactly what God was doing with Balaam: twisting and turning and using the experiences of Balaam to protect His dear people. Moreover, He was going to use Balaam to proclaim some glorious messages to the world. God is God; that is, He is Sovereign, Almighty, able to do exactly what He wills. Therefore,

God overrode Balaam's greed and covetousness, determining to use him to bless God's dear people instead of cursing them.

The point to see is this: God is sovereign, in control of all things. Therefore, God works all things out for the good of His dear people, for the good of all those who love Him and are called by Him.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17).

"And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9).