

The

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Good News

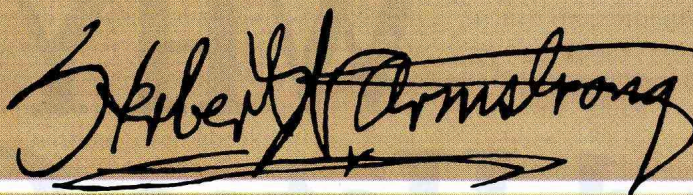
Are You
a LIVING
Sacrifice?

WHY God
Hates Gossip!

Where Are
You Headed?

Earth's
Oldest Living Things—
What They Teach Us

Now Is the Time
to Sprint!
Page 5



DID YOU ever stop to ask, "How far may I safely go in doing what I want but know I ought not?"

In this column, where I can talk *personally* with our readers, I like to discuss things that give us something to *think about*.

Remember the Old Testament character Balaam, who, as you read in Revelation 2:14, in the words of Christ, caused ancient Israel to sin?

Let me give you some interesting new facts about this Balaam.

Balaam, it now appears, was in his time successor in office to Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-10), founder of the world's pagan civilization. Balaam was the greatest prophet of the time — in the pagan religion — the Pontifex Maximus of the pagan world — the chief oracle of paganism.

Does it, then, seem strange that he prayed to God and appeared to be a servant of God?

When King Balak of Moab sent emissaries to hire Balaam to put a curse on the people of Israel, Balaam asked the emissaries to remain overnight, so he could go aside and pray, and ask God if he might go with them. If he was the chief *pagan* prophet, actually sitting in SATAN'S SEAT, as head of Satan's religion on earth, WHY would he pray to God about it?

I feel quite sure that most people who have read this account have supposed Balaam to be a prophet of God — not of Satan. Did he not do *right* in consulting God? Surely Satan would not do that! Take just a quick look at the incident.

The children of Israel, under Moses, had pitched camp in the plains of Moab, on the east side of the Jordan River, near Jericho. The king of Moab, Balak, saw what these Israelites — there were at least two or

three million of them — had done to the Amorites. He was struck with fear. The Moabites were far outnumbered.

So King Balak sent messengers to Balaam, who lived at Pethor in Mesopotamia — far distant, near the Euphrates River. They took with them the fees for divination, to hire Balaam to curse the Israelites.

"They are too mighty for me," was Balak's message to Balaam, "for I wot [know] that he whom thou blest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed" (Num. 22:1-6).

When the elders of Moab and Midian, Balak's messengers, delivered the message to Balaam, notice what he said: "Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the Lord shall speak unto me: and the princes of Moab abode with Balaam" (verse 8).

God said to Balaam, "Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed."

"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" (verses 12-13).

Again King Balak sent messengers to Balaam — this time more noble princes of higher rank, and more money. Again Balaam asked them to remain overnight, "that I may know what the Lord will say unto me more" (verse 19). This time God allowed him to go with them, but forbade him to curse Israel. Yet the angel of God stopped Balaam's donkey on the way. WHY?

Now doesn't all this sound as if Balaam were GOD'S prophet, not Satan's? Yet, see what we read in the New Testament!

Peter speaks of false prophets "following the way of Balaam . . . who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (II Pet. 2:15).

Jude writes: "Woe unto them! for

they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward" (Jude 11).

Jesus Christ says to the Church of the Pergamos era: "But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel" (Rev. 2:14).

So Jesus Christ, Peter and Jude all tell us Balaam was a *false* prophet. When we research into his actual identity, we find that Pethor, where he resided, was the headquarters of the highest priest of the pagan Babylonian Mystery religion.

In reading through Numbers 22, 23 and 24, one might suppose Balaam was just some ordinary fellow of no consequence. Yet here was the king of a nation. He passed up his own highest priests, magicians and astrologers of the pagan religion. He sent his highest princes, with rich rewards and highest fees. He sent them a great distance to Pethor, near the Euphrates in Mesopotamia. He would not have sent them to any but the most powerful practitioner of divination.

Other scriptures show that these higher magicians of divination were often demon possessed. This Balaam could have been DEVIL possessed, so that it was actually Satan himself in possession of the human Balaam, working in and through him. WOULD SATAN CONSULT GOD ABOUT DOING THIS? The answer comes sharp and clear!

Satan himself *would* consult God, precisely as Balaam did, under such circumstances! Biblical "scholars" and commentators have assumed Balaam had been a true prophet of God originally. This is not true.

The answer is found in the first two chapters of the book of Job. Satan himself is here pictured in con-

(Continued on page 20)

PERSONAL

(Continued from page 1)

versation with God concerning the righteousness of Job.

God *allowed* Satan to afflict Job — but God placed a limit on *how far* Satan could go! God is SUPREME RULER of the universe.

At first, God allowed Satan to take all Job possessed, but not to harm Job's person. Job failed to crack under the test. Satan argued that a man would give up all he possessed to save his own life — but if only he could afflict Job's *person*, Job would turn against God. So God now gave Satan permission to go this much further — but to spare his life.

In like manner, the Satan-influenced (or Satan-possessed, as the case may be) Balaam well *knew* God had set limits to his powers. Satan is the god and invisible ruler of this world — yet God is SUPREME RULER over all. Every ruler has authority and power *only* within his own boundary lines or jurisdiction. There are NO boundary lines on God's rulership — but there are on Satan's. And he well knows it! There could be no sin — no evil — unless God *allowed it!* And if God did not allow it there could be no free moral agency — no free choice — and that would nullify God's PURPOSE!

Notice that even Satan's ministers talk about God, and masquerade as God's ministers (II Cor. 11:13-15). This high priest of Satan knew that Israel was God's own nation, under God's protection. This divine protection set a boundary line on his power to harm God's nation. Satan is well aware that there are limits set on his powers.

Balaam would have been overjoyed to be able to curse, harm or destroy Israel. But he *knew* — he was *fully aware* — that doing this was beyond his power — *unless*, as God allowed Satan to go further than originally allowed in afflicting Job, the Almighty would now allow him to curse and harm Israel. Balaam *wanted* to curse Israel. He *wanted* the fee!

Now, with this in mind, notice what Balaam said.

When the highest princes of Moab came, on the second visit, he said, "If Balak would give me his house full of

silver and gold, *I cannot go beyond* the word of the Lord" (Num. 22:18).

It was not a matter of Balaam being willing. He was willing to harm Israel. It was a matter of *having the power* to do so. After he went with the emissaries of Balak, he said to the king: "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 [*must* — Revised Standard Version] I speak" (verse 38).

Later, Balaam said that God had blessed Israel, "and *I cannot reverse*

You may be ABLE, *if willing*, to go further in sin or wrong ways.

You are a free moral agent. But to go as far as you dare IS THE WAY OF SATAN, *not the way of GOD!* GOD'S WAY is to go . . . just as far in the RIGHT direction as possible.

it" (Num. 23:20). Of Israel, Balaam said: "The Lord *his God* is with him . . . there is NO ENCHANTMENT against Jacob, neither is there *any divination* against Israel" (verses 21, 23).

Notice, God is the God of Israel — Israel's God — not Balaam's God. Balaam practiced divination and enchantment — and God did not allow it AGAINST ISRAEL.

Balaam *wanted* to go JUST AS FAR in the *wrong way* as he dared.

That is Satan's way!

Now just *how far* may YOU safely go in doing what you *want* instead of what you *ought* to do?

Haven't you often compromised on this? Haven't you often *wanted* to do something you knew you really ought not? And haven't you sometimes gone at least *part way*, thinking that perhaps if you didn't go *all the way*

in doing wrong, you might "get away with it"?

How many, under temptation to commit fornication or adultery, go *part way* — perhaps just a little "necking"? And how often does that lead to going just a *little* farther — and then perhaps just a little farther still?

Going that first *part way* is already committing the act *spiritually* — according to the spirit or intent of the law! When you did that you were already GUILTY in God's sight.

Of course Satan was *restrained*, and UNABLE to go further than he did against Job. Balaam was *restrained*, and UNABLE to go further than he did against the children of Israel.

You may be ABLE, *if willing*, to go further in sin or wrong ways. You are a free moral agent. But to go as far as you dare IS THE WAY OF SATAN, *NOT THE WAY OF GOD!*

GOD'S WAY is to go, sincerely, wholeheartedly and earnestly, just as far in the RIGHT direction as possible. God's way is to do MORE than is required of you.

Jesus said: "Doth he [a master] thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:9-10).

If you do not even go as far in the wrong direction as you feel safe — if you do what is commanded — what God, through His Word, shows is YOUR DUTY, but do not go *even further* in the RIGHT direction, doing MORE than your duty, Jesus Christ says you are an UNPROFITABLE SERVANT! Plainly, Christ expects us to do MORE than duty in the *right* direction! And what happens to the unprofitable servant?

In the parable of the talents, Jesus said of the one who kept what he had, but did not grow in knowledge and grace — did not overcome — did what was his duty and no more — "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:30).

The Christian life is a life of growing, improving in character — of overcoming — of becoming more and more like Christ! □