

WHAT TO DO WHEN GOD SAYS "NO"

22 ²Now Balaam the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. ³Moab was terrified of the people, because they were so numerous. Indeed, Moab was filled with dread because of the children of Israel. ⁴The Moabites said to the elders of Midian, "This horde will lick up everything around us, like an ox licks up the grass of the field." Now Balaam the son of Zippor was king of Moab at that time. ⁵So he sent messengers to summon Balaam the son of Beor, who was at Pethor, which is near the [Euphrates] River, in his native land. He said, "A people have come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the land and are encamped next to me. ⁶Now, therefore, please come and curse these people for me, because they are too powerful for me. [If you curse them], I might then succeed in defeating them and driving them out of the land; for I know that whomever you bless is blessed, and whomever you curse is cursed." ⁷So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed, taking with them the fee for divination. They came to Balaam and gave him Balaam's message. ⁸[Balaam] said to them, "Spend the night here, and I will bring back to you the answer Jehovah gives me." So the Moabite princes stayed with Balaam. ⁹God came to Balaam and asked, "Who are these men with you?" ¹⁰Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent [messengers] to me, saying, ¹¹"The people who have come out of Egypt cover the face of the land. Now come and curse them for me; perhaps I will then be able to fight against them and drive them out.'" ¹²God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse these people, for they are blessed." ¹³Balaam got up the next morning and said to Balak's princes, "Go back to your country, because Jehovah refuses to give me permission to go with you." ¹⁴So the Moabite princes got up and returned to Balak, and reported to him, "Balaam refuses to come with us."

¹⁵Then Balak again sent princes, more numerous and more distinguished than [the former ones]. ¹⁶They came to Balaam and said to him, "This is what Balak the son of Zippor says: Please let nothing prevent you from coming to me; ¹⁷for I will greatly honor you and I will do whatever you say. Therefore, please come and curse these people for me." ¹⁸Balaam answered Balak's servants, "Even if Balak were to give me his palace filled with silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of Jehovah my God, either adding to it or subtracting from it. ¹⁹Now, therefore, please stay here tonight, so that I may find out what else Jehovah will say to me." ²⁰God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men have come to summon you, get up and go with them. But you shall only do what I tell you." ²¹So Balaam got up in the morning and saddled his donkey and went with the Moabite princes.

²²But God's anger was aroused because he went, and the angel of Jehovah took his stand in the road as an adversary against him. Now [Balaam] was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. ²³When the donkey saw the angel of Jehovah standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, she turned off the road into a field. Balaam struck the donkey in order to turn her back onto the road. ²⁴Then the angel of Jehovah stood in a narrow path between two vineyards, with a wall on either side. ²⁵When the donkey saw the angel of Jehovah, she thrust herself against the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he struck her again. ²⁶Then the angel of Jehovah went on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. ²⁷When the donkey saw the angel of Jehovah, she lay

down under Balaam. Balaam's anger was aroused and he struck the donkey with his staff. ²⁸Then Jehovah opened the donkey's mouth and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to cause you to strike me these three times?" ²⁹Balaam answered the donkey, "Because you have defied me. If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now!" ³⁰The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey, that you have always ridden, to this day? Was I ever in the habit of doing this to you?" He said, "No." ³¹Then Jehovah opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of Jehovah standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand. He bowed his head and fell facedown. ³²The angel of Jehovah said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Listen; I have come as an adversary, because what you are doing is contrary to [my will]. ³³The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If she had not turned away, I certainly would have killed you by now, but I would have spared her." ³⁴Balaam said to the angel of Jehovah, "I have sinned. I did not realize that you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now, therefore, if it is displeasing to you, I will go back." ³⁵The angel of Jehovah said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but you shall only speak the word that I speak to you." So Balaam went with the princes of Balak. (Num. 22:2-35)

Introduction

"I talked to God this morning," writes Marilyn, a morning talk show hostess and T.V. reporter.

"As I combed my hair before the studio mirror I said, 'I know You don't approve of this, but I'm going to do it anyway!'"

"This" was an interview Marilyn was about to conduct which would compromise her values and ethics. Now, as she prepared to go on the air and do this interview, she says to God, "I know You don't approve of this, but I'm going to do it anyway!" (*POWER*, 2/9/92, pp.4-5)

In the passage of Scripture before us we meet a man who said the same thing to God: I know You don't approve of this, but I'm going to do it anyway!

Two people, a contemporary T.V. personality and an ancient mysterious prophet, who knew that God said "No" to what they wanted to do, but they went ahead and did it anyway.

What do you do when God says, "No?"

What we learn from this passage of Scripture is that when you pursue your own way, despite the LORD's objection, you do so to your own detriment, and even to your own destruction if you persist. Do not resist the LORD, because it is self-defeating and it can even be self-destructive.

I. Do Not Resist the LORD, By Seeking to Exploit Your Relationship with Him

This man, Balaam, is one of the most mysterious characters to be found in the Old Testament. He comes from the mysterious east, the land of the Babylonian magi, but he is acquainted with the LORD. Whenever he refers to the God of heaven he always uses God's covenant name, "*Jehovah*" ("*the LORD.*")

Balaam is a man who has some connection with the true and living God. He knows God by His covenant name. He speaks with God and God speaks with him; Balaam receives divine revelations from God Himself.

Balaam is a man who had some power from God. Balak testifies, "*I know that whomever you bless is blessed, and whomever you curse is cursed*" (Num. 22:6b.)

Balaam is a man who had some respect and reverence for God. When Balak's messengers arrive with their request, Balaam seeks the LORD's counsel (Num. 22:8.) Balaam initially turns the messengers away because, as he explains, "*Jehovah refuses to give me permission to go with you*" (Num. 22:13.) Then, when Balak sends his princes to Balaam, Balaam advises him, "*I cannot go beyond the word of Jehovah my God*" (Num. 22:18.) Either out of reverence for God or from an awareness of God's sovereign control, Balaam is conscious that he is somehow bound by God's will: "*Balaam replied to Balak, 'Now I have come to you; but am I able to say anything I wish? The word that God puts into my mouth, that is what I must speak'*" (Num. 22:38.)

Then, too, Balaam desires to share in the inheritance of the LORD's people as is evident from his utterance: "*Who can count the dust that is Jacob, or number even a fourth of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and may my end be like his!*" (Num. 23:10.)

Balaam was also a man who presumed upon his relationship with the LORD; he sought to take advantage of that spiritual relationship for his own ends and purposes. Balaam apparently heard of the mighty works the LORD performed on behalf of Israel and he sought an acquaintance with the Lord—for the purpose of furthering his career as a soothsayer? A common belief among the pagan peoples was that "the spiritual man" was able to tap into supernatural power and employ it for his own purposes (Keil & Delitzsch, *A Commentary on the Pentateuch*, Vol. 3, p. 162.) In his acquaintance with the LORD, Balaam discovered that he had tapped into the ultimate source of supernatural power, and he would eventually discover that it is a power that cannot be manipulated or exploited.

Do not resist the LORD, by seeking to exploit your relationship with Him.

Don't seek to do so by taking advantage of His tender mercies and the Father/child relationship He has established with those who believe in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, bear in mind the warning of the Apostle Peter:

And if you call upon the Father who judges impartially according to each one's work, live your remaining time [on earth] in fear, ¹⁸knowing that you were redeemed from your futile way of life handed down from your forefathers—not by perishable things, such as silver or gold, ¹⁹but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish or defect, [the blood] of Christ. (1 Pet. 1:17-19)

Don't do so by presuming upon His long-suffering and patient forbearance, take heed to the warning of the Apostle Paul:

... do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? ⁵But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself on the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. (Rom. 2:4-5)

II. Do Not Resist the LORD, When He Has Made Clear His Will

When Balak's messengers arrive and explain their mission to Balaam, he informs them that he must find out what the LORD has to say (Num. 22:8.) When he consults with the LORD, Balaam gets a very clear answer from God: *"God said to Balaam, 'You shall not go with them; you shall not curse these people, for they are blessed'"* (Num. 22:12.)

But when it appears that Balaam is going to forfeit a lucrative soothsaying contract because the LORD told him not to accompany these princes back to Moab, Balaam seeks further revelation on this subject (Num. 22:19.) He says to the messengers, *"Please stay here tonight, so that I may find out what else Jehovah will say to me"* (Num. 22:19.)

There now follows a very intriguing interaction between the LORD and Balaam. The LORD "allows" Balaam to accompany the princes back to Moab (Num. 22:20.) Knowing the desire and intent of Balaam's heart, the LORD is beginning to release Balaam from their relationship and allow him to pursue his own way. Compare this present instance with the description of sinful mankind given by the Apostle Paul: *"since they refused to acknowledge God in their thinking, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper"* (Rom. 1:28.)

Although the LORD "allowed" Balaam to go, we are told, *"God's anger was aroused because he went, and the angel of Jehovah took his stand in the road as an adversary against him"* (Num. 22:22.) Three times He blocks Balaam's way. Here is both an initial act of judgment and a final act of mercy. In effect, God is saying to Balaam, "I told you not to go, yet you insist on going. Now I'm letting you have your way, but I want you to see what is going to be the result: I will be your Adversary." Note the warning issued by the Apostle James: *"You adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity toward God?"*

Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (Jam. 4:4.)

When the LORD opens Balaam’s eyes, he sees the angel of the LORD and hears Him say: *“Listen; I have come as an adversary, because what you are doing is contrary to [my will]”* (Num. 22:31-32.) Verse 34 records Balaam’s response: *“I have sinned. I did not realize that you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now, therefore, if it is displeasing to you, I will go back.”* Despite his pious words, what Balaam really means is this: I know You don’t approve of this, but I’m going to do it anyway. Now the LORD lets him go: releasing him from any kind of potentially saving relationship and friendship that existed between them (Num. 22:35.)

When on two occasions Balaam fails to receive a word of curse from the LORD that he may pronounce against Israel (Num. 23:1-12 and Num. 23:13-25), on the third occasion he does not even seek a word from the LORD: *“When Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not resort to enchantments as at the other times, but turned his face towards the wilderness”* (Num. 24:1.) Apparently Balaam was simply going to pronounce his own curse against Israel, whether or not it would be effective, so as not to forfeit the reward promised by Balak. But, according to verse 2, *“the Spirit of God came upon him”* and compelled him to pronounce yet another word of blessing upon Israel. God prevented Balaam from achieving his purpose and realizing his ambition, and used him in spite of himself.

Being totally frustrated in his attempts to pronounce a curse against Israel, but still determined to get the reward offered by Balak, Balaam resorts to a different tactic. Balaam counsels Balak to seduce Israel, (by inviting them to join Moab in an idolatrous orgy,) and thereby provoke the LORD’s righteous anger against Israel: *“[The Moabites] caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit a trespass against Jehovah ... and so the plague was among the congregation of Jehovah”* (Num. 31:16.) Because Balaam had given this counsel to Balak, the LORD commanded Israel to kill Balaam when they carried out His righteous judgment against Moab: *“They fought against Midian, as Jehovah commanded Moses, and killed every man. ⁸... They also killed Balaam son of Beor with the sword”* (Num.31:7-8.)

Do not resist the LORD, when He has made clear His will. On the contrary, let us heed His counsel and submit unto His will:

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. ⁹Do not be like the horse (head strong and self-willed), or the mule (stubborn), that have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. ¹⁰Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but Jehovah’s unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts him. (Psl. 32:8-10)

... the wages of sin is death. (Rom. 6:23a)

III. Do Not Resist the LORD, By Pursuing Deluded Ambitions

When the elders of Moab came to Balaam they did not come empty handed, they came with *“the fee for divination in their hand”* (Num. 22:7.)

When Balaam informed these elders that the LORD had refused to grant him permission to go with them, Balak did not take “No” for an answer. He sent another contingent of princes to Balaam, more in number and greater in position (Num. 22:15.) He was seeking to impress Balaam with what he had to offer him for his services. Balak exhorts Balaam, *“Please let nothing prevent you from coming to me* (not even the commandment of God); *17for I will greatly honor you”* (Num. 22:16-17.)

When Balaam finally arrives in Moab, Balak scolds him for his delay and asks, *“Am I not, indeed, able to honor you?”* (Num. 22:37.) Balak is exhorting Balaam not to doubt that he, as the king of Moab, is able to make good his promise and give him a great reward for his service.

When Balaam utterly fails in his efforts to pronounce a curse against Israel, Balak furiously exclaims: *“Now, therefore, leave at once and go home! I intended to bestow great honor upon you, but Jehovah has held you back from honor!”* (Num. 24:11.)

Apparently Balaam believed Balak’s satanic lie and that is why he offered his counsel that Moab should seduce Israel into idolatry and immorality. Balaam was deluded into thinking that the things Balak offered him were worth the price of disobedience to God.

Do not resist the LORD, by pursuing deluded ambitions.

There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.
(Prov. 14:12)

Jehovah God is a sun and a shield. Jehovah will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly. 12O Jehovah of hosts, blessed is the man that trusts in you. (Psl. 84:11-12)

Conclusion

Balaam is a man who knew that God said “No” to what he wanted to do, but he went ahead and did it anyway; ...and paid the price.

What we learn from Balaam’s life is that when you pursue your own way, despite the LORD’s objection, you do so to your own detriment, even to your own destruction if you persist.

What will **you** do when God says “No?”

Will you respond like Balaam; ...or will you respond like Christ? (note Matthew 26:39,) *“My Father, if it be possible, may this cup be taken from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”*