***The Error of Balaam

RV14-01***

We are looking at Revelation 2:14 in this third letter which was written to a series of seven churches in Asia Minor, that which is known today as Western Turkey. These were a series of seven churches which were representative of conditions that existed in local church life in New Testament times, and also which represented eras of subsequent church history. The local church condition in Pergamum portrayed the era in church history that ran from the year 312 to 600 A.D. The pressure of persecution which Christians had experienced up to the year 312 was suddenly lessened, and the demand for accommodation to paganism was greatly increased. The Babylonian mystery cult system, which we have looked at in considerable detail, was everywhere in favor. It was the religious viewpoint of the society of that day.

Many Christians resisted compromising of doctrine, and they consequently suffered martyrdom. We have read of one such man whose name the Scriptures record for us: a man named Antipas. This name in itself means "against all." It is suggestive of the fact that here was a believer in the midst of pagan idolatry, and emperor worship, and complete disorientation, who was ready to stand as a witness for Jesus Christ to the extent of martyrdom.

However, other Christians at the time (we have evidence here) sought to escape the conflict with paganism by adapting Christianity to paganism. This church reflected a condition within organized Christianity which historically came on the scene after the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire. Up to the time of Constantine, Christians were under increasing persecution, but with Constantine that all changed. Christianity was not only a tolerated religion thereafter, but it was, in time, within a few short years, made *the* religion of the Roman Empire. Constantine himself, therefore, became the religious leader of the newly established Christian religion. He actually was the moderator at some of the first great church councils which were called to hammer out what the Bible actually taught about Jesus Christ.

We know a great deal about the nature of Christ. Many of you could give a fine dissertation on the nature of Jesus Christ. You know about the hypostatic union. You understand about the kenosis. All of these are elementary to you, but they were not so in the early church. People were beginning to get an access to Scripture, but these doctrines had not been brought together. They were doing, in effect, in those early church councils, what we periodically do in a church service when we stop and say, "Alright, now here's a summary of this doctrine. They were bringing together from Scripture, as a result of their study, what the Bible really thought about this point and this point and this point." The early church council centered, of course, on the person of Jesus Christ. We call those the Christological controversies that went from one stage of heresy to another until the truth was hammered out.

Well, interestingly enough, Emperor Constantine was right there sitting among all the leading Christian leaders of the day, and he was the moderator. When he would come in wearing his kingly Roman robes, they would all stand and applaud him. The result of this was that Christianity, unfortunately, was married to the mystery religion of paganism which existed in the day, and which had been inherited originally from Babylon, and which had been begun by Nimrod. This religious system culminated in the Roman Catholic Church as we know it today. It was a very gross hybrid of paganism in the clothing of Christian terminology. However, that which is incorporated within it (the paganism of Satan's world system) is an abomination to God.

So in Luke 16:15, we have this statement: "But God knows your hearts, for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." So Christianity soon became highly esteemed in this hybrid mixture with paganism in the early centuries after this period of 312, and particularly after 325, when Christianity was now *the* religion of the empire. Then gradually, it moved very rapidly into the Middle Ages, which we still refer to as the Dark Ages, because a darkness descended upon humanity in all areas of learning and in all areas of human relationships, because Christianity had been rubbed. Its New Testament, genuine quality was now gone.

So Constantine was not a boon to the Christian church. He was a devastating blow, and brought about the conditions historically that are described here in the Pergamum church. We have a great deal of doubt about Constantine's own spiritual status and his own spiritual condition relative to genuine salvation. One of the things that leads us to question whether he is in heaven at this point, and in fact not in the domain of Hades, is the fact that Constantine delayed his water baptism until the day he knew that he was going to check out. When he knew he was going to die, that's when he took on water baptism. And the reason he did that was because the view had already been promulgated that sins are washed away through the ritual of water baptism.

So Constantine very logically said, "I'll have a good time up to then, and I'm going to watch it closely. When they tell me this is it, I'll get my water baptism, and I'll go into heaven and face God just as clean as possible." Well, you know, enough from the book of Romans that anybody who seeks to gain eternal life by mixing any human efforts such as water baptism; a ritual; or, good works automatically has nullified the only basis upon which God will save a soul, which is grace. If you nullify grace, there is no way you can be saved. There is absolutely no way that you can be saved. I think that this pretty well indicates to us (this attitude on the part of Constantine of trusting in his water ritual) that he unfortunately never made it. Interestingly enough, those church councils that he called hammered out a great deal of truth in spite of the emperor.

Well, during this era then, from 312 to 600 A.D., the church suffered a great relapse from sound doctrine, so that many evils began to be tolerated within the Christian community, which was also the case in the church at Pergamum. Evils were tolerated within this local church, reflecting what was to come historically. These were evils that were directly attributable to the fact that they began to tolerate false doctrine. As long as they were sound in doctrine, Satan could not get his foot in the door, but once they began being indifferent and tolerant toward false doctrine (that which could not be confirmed by Scripture), then the devil had a handle on them.

So the Lord Jesus Christ here addresses this local church at Pergamum as the one who holds the two-edged sword. That is symbolic, of course, of the Word of God, and it is also indicative of divine judgment upon evil. He approaches this particular church because this is their problem. They have deviated (they drifted off) from doctrine. Therefore He is approaching them on that basis with the sword representing the Word of God, and with the judgment that He's going to bring upon them.

The persecution era had not destroyed Christianity. That era was represented by the previous letter to the church of Smyrna. Persecution did not do Christians in. As was very quickly observed, the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church. As fast as they were destroying Christians in the arenas, others were coming to the faith, and the Christian community was rapidly multiplying. So Satan realized that that was a bummer deal if he was going to cut down the Christian church. Therefore, he decided to do it in a different way, and that was to operate from within the Christian community.

He did this by bringing about a situation with Constantine where the Christian church was accepted by the Roman government. Instead of persecuting them, he took the persecution off. The Pergamum Christians were courting friendship with the pagan world, so they were tolerating evil practices among themselves within the local churches that they previously, in the era of persecution, would not have tolerated. Satan did not approach the Pergamum church, therefore, as a roaring lion, as he had approached the Smyrna era. He approached them rather as an angel of light, and therefore he very quickly secured a hearing even among these believers.

If you ever think that your preacher makes you feel like there are no genuine, knowledgeable Christians elsewhere, he perhaps has good cause to do so. I know that sooner or later, Christians in a Bible-teaching church sometimes feel that they're given the idea that there aren't many really sound solid Christians outside of that group. That might seem bigoted. But the truth of the matter is that, in our day particularly, there are not many solid Christian groups who are steeped in doctrine, and who know what it's all about. Instead, what you find in Christianity is fakery, and people calling upon each other to express love. This is a love which is based upon an old sin nature emotion rather than upon the content of the Word of God. There is lack of genuineness. There are pressures upon people from how they give their money to how they handle their personal lives. There is complete disrespect for the privacy of the priesthood of the believer, and everything down the line. If you stop and think about it, you will find that basically it's false; it's fake; it's a front; and it lacks that depth of genuineness which is characteristic of God the Holy Spirit when He is producing these things in our lives.

So what was happening here in Pergamum was unfortunately that they had lost the understanding that they had been privileged with spiritual insights, and that they had the truth. They thought it was just as good down the street here, and it wasn't really so bad across the street in the pagan temple. When you realize what was taking place in the pagan temples, you will realize what a horrendous attitude was beginning to develop among them. You can talk about worship in one of the pagan temples, but you must remember that Pergamum was noted for the fact that it had erected the great temple to Caesar Augustus (who was the Caesar who was ruling when Jesus was born), and that they were noted in the ancient world for this great temple. They felt greatly honored that Caesar had permitted that place of worship to himself to be built in Pergamum. That notable place of worship was a place of sexual immorality. That's what was involved in worship in the pagan temples. The details are extremely gross.

**Tolerance toward Evil**

Here you have a Christian community who is suddenly finding itself tolerated, and accepted, and no longer under the pressures of official persecution, and they have a relationship now to the pagan system which has dominated, and which the emperor and all the officials themselves are a part of. In theory, the church at Pergamum was still orthodox, and it still had a sound doctrinal statement, but it was tolerant toward evil within its ranks. That is the issue here.

In verse 14 then, the Lord Jesus begins to describe the things that displease Him about the Pergamum church. These things are going to bring about divine discipline. Up to now, he has been commending them for a variety of things, and he has told them how he appreciated the fact that they were doctrinally sound in their statements; they were true to Him on the whole; and, they were even willing to be martyrs. Then He comes to verse 14. In verse 14, he begins with the word "But" which is the Greek word "alla." The word "alla" indicates a change of thought. We could translate it "nevertheless." Jesus goes now from commendation to condemnation. The word is connoting, "While all this has been true that I have said about you, on the other hand..." While the church in Pergamum was officially orthodox, and by and large, the people were loyal to Jesus Christ, yet it was beginning to tolerate evils from the pagan society which surrounded it. That was the problem.

That is the problem today for any group of believers in any local church who are sound in doctrine. They have the problem of how to relate themselves to a society which is increasingly in this country becoming completely pagan and disoriented. It is always perilous for Christians to be situated in an evil environment. These people in Pergamum were just exactly that. For that reason, they had to have a great reservoir of divine viewpoint in their souls so they could see evil as a serious issue, and that they could see these things that the pagan society was imposing upon them, and say, "Now that is wrong, and that is bad. I don't appreciate it." They should sound forth about it.

You always have the problem when you are surrounded by evil of getting used to it so that you end up going along with it. A man who's got a spiritual caliber about him, and he dates some girl, and he discovers that she doesn't have much spiritual discernment. She doesn't have much taste for the Word of God. Instead of taking that as a signal to back off and to go easy, he keeps pursuing her. In time, what happens is that he begins to lose his sense of the problem. He becomes acclimated to her spiritual caliber, and the next thing you know, he doesn't think it's really all that bad. Unless you keep your spiritual divine viewpoint straight, you will fall into that trap with people all around you in every relationship of life.

Pergamum was surrounded by vile paganism. And now, because the pressure of persecution was off, they were beginning to be tempted to try to get along with people; stop making issues; stop resisting so much; and, try to get along with the society around them. When we're surrounded by an evil environment, we're tempted to take the easy way out, and tolerate the evil we come up against, instead of thinking up ways of neutralizing it.

This is why we have Christian schools. By and large, the public school system has a problem academically, but more to the point is the problem that it has morally and spiritually. In some parts of our country, the public school systems have finally said, "Enough is enough." Particularly out on the West Coast, the beginning and public schools have instituted programs of moral training. Somebody has finally awakened to the fact that you cannot have education without moral implications. You do teach certain values and rights and wrongs. But the public school system, by and large, is restricted from doing that in separation of church and state. So we can walk around as Christians, and wring our hands helplessly, and let our children be contaminated and go down the tube to a worldliness and to human viewpoint destruction, or we can say, "Wait a minute. We're going to come up with an alternative that neutralizes the problem of secular, humanistic, evolutionary public education."

That's what the people of Pergamum should have done. But instead, because they were surrounded with an evil climate that they did not react against, they got accustomed to it, and they began to go along with it. The same thing is true in political action today. People say, "What are we going to do about it? Well, you're going to elect somebody that's going to come to office with some biblical honor and some understanding of the divine institution of government. But no matter whom you elect in Satan's world, you discover that it's the same old story all over again.

Well, it would be very tempting in an evil climate like that for us to throw up our hands and say, "Well, I'm not going to do anything, I'm just going to let it go down. I'm looking forward to the rapture." That would be wrong. As long as there's blood in our veins and breath in our bodies, we should fight the kind of dishonorable conduct that our politicians have fought into. Everybody knows what's chewing away your money. Everybody knows what's putting the pressure upon your dollar. Isn't it humiliating that we, the richest and greatest country in the world, should have to stand and listen to the reports from Switzerland that their annual rate of inflation is 1%? Just who are those Swiss cheeses, anyhow, that they should have 1% inflation while we have double-digit inflation?

Ah, but they have the wisdom to operate on biblical principles of financing. Everybody in this country knows that the trouble is our Congress and our government which is spending and printing money that doesn't have any meaning. They're spending what we do not have to spend. So you are paying for it, and our children will pay for it. That's an evil environment. It's very frustrating. You want to throw up your hands and just cut yourself out. But again, the result of that kind of not doing anything will give evil even a greater opportunity.

So no matter how difficult it is, we should come up with creative alternatives. In Pergamum, they obviously were not doing it. We should take the stand for divine truth, and seek to influence our society. The Bible tells us that we are the salt. Once we're gone (once the church is gone), then society is really doomed. It has no preserving power whatsoever.

However, having said all that, I am aware of the fact that when you take a stand for divine truth position, it means that you mark yourself, and you draw down the antagonism of power groups and of antagonistic groups, and you have to face all kinds of intimidation. I could hold you captivated for the rest of the session with the kind of power group pressures that we find against our little ministry here; the kind of intimidations that are directed against us; and, the kinds of letters we get sometimes. These poor people who write us don't realize that they're just identifying themselves. We've got so much divine viewpoint orientation that we can spot exactly what their problem is when they sound off to us against some indignation they have – an indignation that happens to be because we took a stand for what is right and for a biblical principle that they happen to be ignorant of, or that they don't want to go along with.

So you're going to mark yourself, and you're going to tolerate a lot of disadvantage because of it. It's true today, and you can be sure it was true back in Pergamum, because the heathen, who had been riding high on the hog and who had been in power, had a great deal of antagonism when suddenly they saw, from their emperor down, Christianity being placed into dignity. The Christians were finding themselves with what they called "their testimony." How much compromise is done in our day by believers because they want to have a testimony? They don't want to do certain things because it'll hurt their testimony. They don't want to stand up and sound off to people who are all botched up and who are imposing contaminated viewpoint upon the people of God. They say, "We don't want to offend them because we want a testimony." But the poor Lord Jesus Christ, unfortunately, didn't know that. Instead, the Lord comes along and says, "When I talk, I'm going to put a mother against her daughter, and a mother-in-law against a daughter, and a father against the son." Isn't that a wonderful teacher? That's the kind of a preacher you'd enjoy, isn't it? You'd enjoy a preacher like Jesus Christ who gets everybody all up in arms against themselves.

But He was very definitive that the truth divides, and that standing for the Word of God and the implications of the Word of God is not going to make you popular. It is not going to rally people to you. It will rally some. It will rally the divine viewpoint crowd. It will rally those upon whom the hand of God rests in blessing. But all the human viewpoint crowd is going to gnash its teeth in indignation. So the result is that you're going to be tempted to back off. You have to make your estimate as to temporal values and eternal values. Maybe some character has written you a snide letter calling you down for something that you have done that is a right thing, and that is the thing that should have been done. They should have welcomed and commended you for it. But long after that letter has gone to dust, your honor before God and your reward before Him will only be mounting in intensity. So you take the gaff, and you take the stand for divine viewpoint truth.

They obviously missed it in Pergamum. For here, the Lord Jesus says, "But this is what I have against you. You have." This is the word "echo" in Greek. "Echo" means here more than "have." It means "to hold." This is a position indicated. It expresses the attitude of Jesus Christ toward the Pergamum church. This is the constant attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is present tense. Therefore, it indicates His constant attitude. It is not something that's fluctuating up and down. They have settled into a situation such that His attitude is pretty well set here. It's active. It's the choice of the Lord Jesus Christ from His divine viewpoint. It's indicative mood, so it's a statement of fact.

What He holds is "a few things." This is the word "holigos." This indicates a quantity – a number. So there is more than one thing. There is a variety of things now that have developed in this church. He says, "You have a few things that I hold against." Here's our preposition "kata" which is going to mark out for us what the target of the displeasure of Jesus Christ is. This word connotes a quality of hostility, because this is no small matter. These few things that He has against them are not a few little things. They are a few very serious things. Each may have been little in itself, but the consequences now have become very serious. The Lord Jesus Christ uses this preposition in saying, "I have something against you that I am angry about. I am indignant. I have a certain hostility toward you because of it."

"I have a few things against you;" that is, the Christians in the churches of Pergamum as a whole, because." This is the Greek word "hoti." This word marks for us the cause of the anger of the Lord against them: "Because you have," and again we have that same word "echo." Here, this time, it actually means "to possess." It is present tense. They possess a continual condition. It is active. They have chosen this condition. It isn't something that was imposed upon them. You have deliberately chosen this position. It's indicative of a statement of fact.

"You have something there." That's the Greek word "ekei." This word refers back to verse 13 where you have the words "among you." I know where you dwell, even where Satan's throne is, and you hold fast My name, and have not denied my faith, even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr who was slain among you." And this word "ekei" is referring back there to "among you." What's He talking about? Well, He's talking about right there in those various local congregations. There was probably more than one house church gathering in the city of Pergamum. There were many Christians in the city. So they're meeting in these various home churches. Among them, within that local assembly, there has developed something.

That is a group of people that he describes as holding something. The word hold is the Greek word "krateo." "Krateo" means not simply to hold, but it means "to hold something firmly." It means to have something that is a very solid belief. It's the same word, interestingly enough, which is used in verse 13 in describing their firm loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 13, this word is used to describe the fact that, by and large, they held fast to the name of Jesus Christ. They were very firmly loyal to Him. Now, however, in verse 14, He uses the same word to point out that some within the congregation were holding just as firmly to something else. That was to a certain false doctrine.

The thing that was tragic was that the Christians who were sound were tolerating it. No one was rising up and saying, "Hey, wait a minute. What do you think is going on here in this local church? We're going to call a halt to this. We've got people who are doing this; who are thinking this; and, who have this attitude, and we're not going to say anything about it? We're not going to offend them? We're going to worry about whether they go and join another church?" This "krateo" is present tense. This was their constant belief. This is active. They deliberately chose this viewpoint that they held. It's participle in mood, indicating a statement here. What is it that they held?

They held a certain doctrine. This is the Greek word "didache." "Didache" is a word that means "a teaching." It refers to something which has been taught in those churches. Doctrine forms the mental frame of reference from which all of our actions flow. Doctrine that is out of line with divine viewpoint is false doctrine. Divine viewpoint doctrine is determined by the interpretation of Scripture. That's where doctrine comes from. It comes from the Word of God. It comes from Scripture which has been interpreted upon the basis of the HICEE technique that we have talked about before.

**The Error of Balaam**

This is a doctrine which was propagated by a certain historical character, a man named Balaam. His name in Greek is "balaam." Three areas of human viewpoint are illustrated by Balaam in the New Testament. We'll just briefly look at those in this session. First of all, Balaam in the Scripture is used to describe what is called "an error" – "the error of Balaam." You have this in Jude 11, where we read, "Woe unto them, for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward." Human viewpoint opinion is what is involved here on the part of the error of Balaam in terms of the fact that he could see, as he looked upon the Jewish people, that they had some weaknesses, and that there was evil among them. And from his human viewpoint opinion, Balaam decided that God would desert this people – that God would desert His people. That was a very serious mistake on Balaam's part. That was his error. He could look upon the people of God, and he could see that they were not perfect, and that there was sin among them. He concluded that God, as a holy person, would desert them.

However, he ignored the fact that God's grace toward Israel was not based upon the character of Israel. It was based upon His own character – that God's grace flowed from His own integrity. Grace never flows because of our sins. Grace never flows because our sin needs that grace. Grace always comes to us not from something in ourselves, but from the integrity of God, because God has so dealt with the issues, that His holiness is not compromised when grace is exercised toward an undeserving sinner. Balaam had the error of thinking here that God's grace was going to be withheld from Israel because Israel did not merit that grace. That was a very serious mistake. God's grace is the result of His Holiness being taken care of and being satisfied – not because of the recipient.

So Balaam made the error of thinking that the Jewish nation was a pushover to bring under a curse. As you remember, this is what the king of Moab, Balak, came to him to ask him to do – to put a curse upon the people of God. Balaam was willing to do that because he thought, because he saw evil in Israel, that God would be willing to bring judgment upon them.

We have a second reference to this man – another divine viewpoint principle. That's under the word "way" – "the way of Balaam." You have this in 2 Peter 2:15: "Who have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness." Please remember that Balaam was a religious leader who was using his office for material gain. He was using his religious office for personal material gain in a monumental way. This was the way of Balaam. He was a man that had the office of prophet. We have a very strange situation here with this man, because as you read through the records in the book of Numbers about Balaam, you realize that he had a background of occultism. He had come out of the spirit world. Actually, this is why Balak looked him up. Balak said, "I know that you've got great powers of divination." And Balak's money (the payment that he sent with his agents) was described in Scripture as the payment of divination.

So someplace along the line, this man had the reputation of being able to move the demonic spirit world in one's behalf. That's why he was approached. Whether he was born into that, or whether he was once involved in that, at the same time, it is very difficult to deny that this man is a true representative of God, and that he is truly a prophet of the living God. So what you have here is a man who is using a spiritual gift to make himself wealthy. He's commercializing his service to God. Balaam held the office of a prophet of God, but he was ready to sell out the people of God – the very people of the very God whom he served. He's ready to sell them out.

It's easy for spiritual leaders to think that no one's going to take care of them if they don't do it for themselves. I've heard some preachers say that very thing: "You know, nobody is going to take care of me and my family and the things we need unless I do it myself." Wrong, wrong, wrong! God's going to take care of you, dumbbell. You don't have to take care of yourself. God's going to take care of you. All you have to do is go about His business; take the stand that that pulpit needs to take; and, feed the flock on the Word of God. And don't feed them on the corn cobs, but on the real corn itself – the real food.

Balaam thought he had to take care of himself, and he was not beyond commercializing his spiritual capacity to get a little extra money on the side. That is the way of balance.

Now, here in Revelation, we have the third example where this man shows up in Scripture, and that's in reference to what is called the doctrine of Balaam. That we have here in our passage in Revelation 2:14. The people of God are being encouraged by this man to abandon their strict separation from Satan's world system, and from the pagan nations round about them. He himself practiced compromise with unbelievers, people such as Balak, who were in places of authority and in places of influence, and who had the capacity to reward him with material things.

So Balaam's doctrine was that it doesn't hurt to help the world out a little bit. He held the view that certain benefits are to be gained from compromise with the world, and that that's justified. I have heard people in Christian work justify getting money from sources that you could only describe as satanic sources. Do you know what the justification is? "I've been told that that money is God's money, and Satan has had control of it long enough. Now we're going to have the Lord control it." Of course, they're going to control it through themselves. I've actually heard people who are in the ministry propose that they should do certain things that are, in effect, compromises with the world, because they will gain some financial support for their cause: "Because, after all, it's God's money, and the devil has had it long enough, and we're going to take it away from him."

What happened in Pergamum was that this same doctrine of compromising with the world for certain benefits had been accepted by certain a contingent in that congregation. That's what he's referring to. There were certain people who had rejected the idea that Christians were aliens in Satan's world. You see, this is offensive to us. We don't like to think of ourselves as outcasts, as believers. We don't like to think of ourselves as those who offend our society. We want to think of ourselves as those who are accepted and can get along, and can have a great testimony to our society.

But in truth, when you take your stand and let society know where it is going, you're going to have the same problem that the Christians in the Roman Empire did. The Christians in the Roman Empire might have pointed their finger at the officials in the government and said, "You are wrong. We have a way of judging you by the authority of the Word of God. And Almighty God condemns you; condemns what you're doing; and, condemns your leadership, and you will be doomed forever." They would not forgive the Christians for that. As long as the Christians went about their own business without declaring that they had a superior authority over the emperor of the leaders of government, they got along alright. But once they established they had an authority from God, a viewpoint which condemned what officials were doing, that was the end of the line. For many, it was the kiss of death.

**Spiritual Adultery**

In Pergamum there were these Christians who obviously had taken Balaam's doctrine, which was to play ball with the world; tolerate their evils; and, do a little compromising in order to gain certain goods. In James 4:4 that kind of compromising with the world system is called spiritual adultery, and that is a very strong term. Here in Pergamum, the idea was tolerated that Christians are not a pilgrim body just passing through Satan's world. Some of them had actually settled down in it. In Revelation 2:13, we had that very word "dwell" used, which in the Greek means "to settle down."

So this man Balaam: "Who taught." And the word "taught" is the Greek word "didasko." This is the word for teaching. It means to give instruction of some kind. Here it actually connotes advice. Balaam gave advice to Balak. The advice was repeatedly given. Here the Greek tense is imperfect. When you have an imperfect tense, it means that the person said it again and again and again. So what we have told us there is that Balaam went to Balak and said, "Hey, man, I've got the thing figured out. I have tried on three distinct occasions to bring down a curse upon the people of God for you, because that's what Balak asked him to do. Balak sees the people of God gathering on the shores of Canaan. They were not out to do anything to the Moabites, but Balak, the King of Moab, sees this vast number of people that God has brought up out of Egypt. They have wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. Now their army is at the peak of perfection. Young men who have been born since the days of slavery have never known anything but freedom, and they're ready to fight now. And Balak is shaking in his boots. They have knocked off Og. They have knocked off Sihon. These were two of the great kings of the day. Balak could just see that his turn is next. That's why he's bringing Balaam in here. He says, "I want you to curse this people."

He did this three times. We went over this in Numbers 22. He failed. He tried and he couldn't do it. The result was that he came up with a way by which he could still get that reward, because Balak promised him great monetary reward if he could bring God's wrath on the Jewish people. Once Balaam came up with this idea, he went to Balak, and he repeatedly said, "Now, I'm telling you. This is the way to do it. Do this, and you'll achieve your goal." It's active voice. Balaam himself did the advising which was going to be to the destruction of the people of God. It's in the indicative mood, which is a statement of fact. This king received advice from this prophet of God who had some kind of contact with the occult world that was going to destroy the people of God.

Well, the prophecies are very interesting – the three oracles that balaam actually did speak. We won't read those here, but I'll mentioned to you where they are: in Numbers 23:7-10; Numbers 23:18-24; and, Numbers 24:3-9. Then Balaam, at that point, was dismissed by Balak. Balak said, "Just get out of here. I've asked you to come and bring a curse, and all you've done is praise these people and to honor them the more. So I just want you to leave them." Then Balaam says, "Yes, I'll leave." And remember that Balaam was under the permissive will of God, and God was still working out His purposes through this rebel. Balaam says, "Before I leave, I want to say one thing more."

I do want to read that one to you from Numbers 24:15-19. I'm going to read it out of the New International Version. After Balak, in indignation, tells him to leave, Balaam replied, "Then he uttered this oracle. The oracle of Balaam, son of Beor; the oracle of one whose eye sees clearly; the oracle of one who hears the words of God; who has knowledge from the most high; who sees a vision from the Almighty; who falls prostrate; and, whose eyes are open. I see him, but not now. I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob. A scepter will rise out of Israel."

Did you ever wonder where the Magi of the East got the idea that when the great promised Messiah Ruler of Israel would arise, the sky would mark his arrival with a fantastic glory star? It came from right here. Here's this prophet who is so condemned in Scripture. His error is condemned. His way is condemned. His doctrine is condemned. He brought nothing but disaster upon Balak. We're going to see later that he brought disaster upon himself. And out of his mouth, God makes this magnificent prophecy: "A star will come out of Jacob. A scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab – the skulls of all the sons of Sheth. Edom will be conquered. Seir, his enemy, will be conquered, but Israel will grow strong." A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy the survivors of this city.

Well, I imagine that indeed Balak had his fill of his agent by that time, and he was quite glad to see Balaam go on his way. But before he did, Balaam came up with a very fantastic idea that was cunning, devilish, and sneaky. It has the smell of coming right out of the mind of Satan. It has the stench of hell upon it itself. But he did come up with an idea – an idea that brought death down upon the Jewish people.

The significance of this is that the same concept was being practiced in Pergamum. The point of God the Holy Spirit in Revelation is that you're practicing the same thing that brought death down upon the Jewish people. What do you think it's going to do to you? More significantly, it is not beyond possibility that the same thing exists among us. What do you think God is going to bring down upon you if that is the case, or upon us as a group? In the next session, we'll look into Balaam's clever, clever plan.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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