

Micah 6:5

## I. WHY INCLUDE BALAAM?

- A paradoxical prophet: Balaam's story illustrates that God can reveal His words even through a corrupt man....or his donkey!
- He is one of the few non-Israelite prophets in Scripture, explicitly receiving direct communication from the LORD (YHWH).
- His inclusion shows that God inspires words not men.
- The New Testament repeatedly references him as a warning example of greed, compromise, and false teaching (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11; Revelation 2:14).
- Balaam's oracles include genuine, Spirit-inspired prophecy — including one of the clearest early Messianic prophecies in the Torah (Numbers 24:17).
- Thus, he represents a "prophet in function" but not "in faith."

## II. HISTORICAL AND NARRATIVE BACKGROUND

- Setting: Late wilderness period, in the plains of Moab east of the Jordan, just before Israel's entry into Canaan.
- Identity: Balaam son of Beor, from Pethor on the Euphrates (Numbers 22:5) — a Mesopotamian diviner known for cursing and blessing through spiritual invocation.
- Commission: Balak, king of Moab, hires him to curse Israel to prevent their invasion (Numbers 22:5–6).
- God speaks directly to Balaam (22:9–12), forbidding him to go.
- When Balaam persists, God allows him to go under restraint, leading to the famous episode of the speaking donkey (22:22–35).
- This reveals that Balaam truly heard God's voice but resisted its moral demand.

## III. BALAAM'S PROPHECIES (NUMBERS 23–24)

- **First Oracle – Numbers 23:7–10**
  - Israel's separateness and divine blessing cannot be cursed.
  - Balaam declares that Israel is "a people that shall dwell alone."
- **Second Oracle – Numbers 23:18–24**
  - God does not change or lie; His blessing cannot be revoked.
  - Theme: The immutability and faithfulness of God's word.
- **Third Oracle – Numbers 24:3–9**
  - Balaam describes Israel's beauty and strength, comparing the nation to gardens, trees, and a lion.
  - Theme: Israel's exalted national destiny under God's favor.
- **Fourth Oracle – Numbers 24:15–19**
  - A prophecy of a future ruler who will crush Israel's enemies
  - Theme: The coming King and final triumph of Israel.

## • Final Sayings – Numbers 24:20–24

- Brief prophecies against surrounding nations: Amalek, the Kenites, Asshur, and Eber. Each is shown as destined to rise and fall in history.
- Theme: Historical judgments revealing God's control over all nations.

**Observation:** Balaam's oracles are *genuine revelation* — God "put a word in Balaam's mouth" (23:5, 16).

## IV. THE PROPHET WHO SEEMED FAITHFUL — AND WASN'T

- In Numbers 22–24, Balaam appears almost obedient:
  - He refuses Balak's first summons when God says no (22:12–13).
  - He insists he can only speak "the word that God putteth in my mouth" (22:38; 23:12, 26).
  - His four oracles glorify Israel's election, God's immutability, and the coming Messiah.
- If the story ended there, Balaam might seem like a reluctant yet faithful prophet-for-hire.
- But later Scripture unmasks him:
  - Numbers 31:16 — He secretly counseled Moab to seduce Israel into idolatry and immorality. Unable to curse Israel outright, he sought to corrupt them from within.
  - Deuteronomy 23:4–5 — Reminds Israel that God turned Balaam's intended curse into blessing.
  - Joshua 13:22 — Records his death "by the sword" among Israel's enemies.
  - 2 Peter 2:15–16; Jude 11; Revelation 2:14 — Use Balaam as the archetype of a false prophet:
    - "The way of Balaam... who loved the wages of unrighteousness."
    - "The doctrine of Balaam" — teaching compromise with idolatry for reward.
- Thus, Balaam stands as a warning:
  - A man may hear God's voice and even speak His word yet remain corrupt in heart.
  - His oracles exalted truth; his life betrayed it.

### Summary:

Balaam stands as one of Scripture's most sobering prophetic figures — a man who heard the voice of God yet chose personal gain over obedience. His oracles affirm God's sovereignty, his counsel leads to moral ruin, and his legacy endures as a perpetual warning: *a prophet's lips may speak truth even when his heart is far from God.*