

## 285.1: Boundaries (OT Gospel Doctrine Lesson 16, Updated)

### "I Cannot Go Beyond the Word of the Lord"

The story of Balaam's showdown with his donkey is entertaining, and there are some gems to be explored in these somewhat disjointed passages.

#### Outline

- I. General impressions
- II. Review the reading
- III. Productive Sunday School
  - a. Lessons from Balaam I
  - b. Lessons from Balaam II
  - c. Lessons from the donkey
  - d. Lessons from Balak
- IV. Conclusion

#### Outline

- I. General impressions (What do people really think of the talking donkey? Hopefully an actual talking donkey as main character should allow us to entertain the idea that the Bible contains fables that are not meant to be taken literally.)
- II. Review the reading

Class Member Reading:

[Numbers 22](#) Balaam, a kind of prophet for hire, refuses to curse the people of Israel no matter the reward offered. He has a genuine relationship with God and strong integrity. Note the tensions (which are signs of more than one story being knit together)—God tells Balaam to go with the men (v. 20) then gets mad that he goes with the men (v. 22) Balaam's donkey sees the angel, stops, Balaam beats her, angel reveals himself. Respectful interaction between Balaam and Balak.

[23](#) Note that this is a CRAZY expensive sacrifice. Profound implications, v. 8: "How can I denounce whom God has not denounced?" (ask ourselves! Brings to mind the advice to see and love people as God sees and loves them. (Balak is a bit slow to catch on, keeps spending more wealth to try to get a different outcome)

[24](#) Balaam keeps blessing Israel, Balak gets angry but they just part ways.

[25:1-3](#) Balaam doesn't even figure in this story, and the next story with Phineas is very disturbing.

[31:1-16](#) Israel engages in brutal battle, kills men, women, children, takes maximum plunder, kills Balaam, an excuse is given that Balaam had something to do with the idolatry/immorality at Peor, which leads to killing more women.

Additional Reading:

[2 Peter 2:15-16](#); The donkey "forbade his madness" (Seems there are multiple Balaam traditions, and we only have pieces)

[Jude 1:11](#); What is the error of Balaam? He was faithful to god in the story we have

[Revelation 2:14](#) Another link between Balaam and idolatry/immorality

- III. Productive Sunday School
  - a. Lessons from Balaam I: Remains open to opportunities, but committed to keeping to what the Lord commands and reveals (good balance as we navigate our own lives). Overall he remains true to his character, his gifts, and what he knows to be right.
  - b. Lessons from Balaam II: Respond with openness and curiosity, not violence! Don't be too sure that we are right. Overall Balaam is quite open to correction; as soon as Balaam understands what is going on he apologizes and repents
  - c. Lessons from the donkey: The donkey makes some touching pleas, reminds Balaam of their relationship. When we feel short tempered we can use reminders to get to a better place (and also give ourselves time outs when needed!)
  - d. Lessons from Balak? Sunk cost fallacy... do we continue to invest in a line of questioning or behavior we know is not right?
- IV. Conclusion: These passages contain the unexpected. I don't think we should be too quick to take in stride the talking donkey! That is a sign of the genre of that part of the story, which is something like a fable. We have competing traditions about Balaam... in our main story he shows a high level of character and dedication to God even though he is hired as a prophet for hire! In the other references we learn about his ironic murder by the people he blessed, and then some traditions about him leading the people of Israel astray. These stories provide good opportunity to engage with what we understand scripture to be and sort different traditions, and mine the scriptures for gems of life application.

The message of the reading doesn't line up with the manual goal "to submit to the Lord's will without hesitation" Balaam continually remained open to what God had to say, and was at every point prepared to change his mind and have a different outcome if that is what God wanted.

## 285.2: Boundaries (OT Gospel Doctrine Lesson 16, Sunday School)

### [“I Cannot Go Beyond the Word of the Lord”](#)

Balaam's argument with his donkey has to be one of the most memorable stories from the Old Testament, but it will surprise you how many profound lessons can be drawn from this little story. After all, if you read closely, this is a story about an outsider (even mercenary!) prophet being faithful to what he knows is right.

This portion covers:

- Lessons learned from Balak, Balaam, and even the donkey!
- Acting on promptings
- Prophets in and out of the Church

(Get excited for an amazing discussion with Fiona Givens and Adam Fisher)

## 285.3: Boundaries (OT Gospel Doctrine Lesson 16, Study Notes)

### [“I Cannot Go Beyond the Word of the Lord”](#)

This portion covers:

1. Scholarship
  1. Balaam in and out of the Bible (including a literary history of Balaam stories)
  2. Prophecy in the Ancient Near East
2. Study Notes
  1. Return to the reading
  2. Decision making and “hesitation”. Healthy and unhealthy hesitation.
  3. In order to act without hesitation, how can we be sure what God is telling us to do?