

### **A Double Agent's Curse**

Edward Snowden, 29, worked for the CIA until last week when he revealed to the press that he was the source of the information leak about how the U.S. government has been gathering data on millions of U.S. citizens through phone and Internet communications. Some are calling him a hero and others are calling him a traitor. Whatever you think, why did he do it? By his own admission, he did it because he felt strongly that his government was violating the Constitution. Until he fled to Hong Kong, Edward Snowden was a double agent.

Many successful double agents have passive-aggressive tendencies. Passive Aggression is when someone has very negative feelings towards you but, with their words and facial demeanor, you'd think they were your very best friend. Eventually, however, by their actions they take their revenge. It's like a waiter in a restaurant who feels he's being abused by a customer, but only smiles and nods at the table. Back in the kitchen, however, he spits in the soup.

Balaam was a very calculating, very powerful, very destructive double agent. Last week we saw his passive, pleasant side as he told Balak that he "couldn't possibly curse Israel because that would go against the will of God." [Smile, smile; wink, wink] This week, we will see his aggressive, nasty side. But first, we need to acknowledge...

#### **I. Balaam's Oracle Messages.**

Balaam delivered five oracles, five speeches regarding Israel. Balak, the king of Moab, kept hoping that at least one of them would come out as a curse. None did. This can't be credited to Balaam's good heart but rather to God's prevailing power over all things to accomplish His perfect will. Here is the main point of each oracle:

Oracle #1 – Israel is a Chosen People

Oracle #2 – Israel is a Conquering People

Oracle #3 – Israel will one day be a Contented People

Oracle #4 – Israel is a Royal People (The Messiah will come through her.)

Oracle #5 – Israel will be a Vindicated People (All her enemies will be defeated.)

Now, we could spend a great deal of time going through each one of these oracles and showing exactly what they say, but we have bigger fish to fry today. The principle we must not miss is that Balaam wanted to curse Israel and God wouldn't let him. We should take great comfort in this because God is providing the same protection for us today.

What's the most common curse that people express today? Isn't it, "You can go to hell?" That's a curse! But, I can guarantee you that as a Christian, if someone pronounces that curse on you, it absolutely will not happen! In fact, it's rather interesting that most of the people who use that curse, don't even believe in hell. So, if someone uses that curse on you, maybe you should reply, "OH! Do you believe in hell? Maybe we could talk about that sometime."

God's protection of Israel from being cursed is also valid for you. Secondly, we see that...

## **II. Balaam Found a Way to Damage Israel Anyway.**

Pastor Warren Wiersbe writes:

Balaam wasn't able to curse Israel, but he knew how to defile them and seduce them into sin so great that Jehovah would judge them. Balaam suggested to Balak that the Moabites and the Midianites convene a religious feast to honor Baal, and that they invite the Jews to attend. The feast, of course, would involve idolatry and abominable immorality and would be a flagrant violation of Israel's covenant with the Lord... What Balaam couldn't do by appealing to the demons, he accomplished by appealing to the flesh and inviting the Jews to "enjoy themselves" at Baal Peor. <sup>i</sup>

Numbers 25:1-3 describes it briefly:

**While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. So Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor. And the LORD's anger burned against them.**

The army of Moab couldn't defeat the Israelites. The pagan prophet, Balaam, could not defeat Israel with curses. Israel could not be overcome from the outside, but Balaam found a way to bring disaster on Israel. He did it through an inside job. He tempted them into cursing themselves. And it worked! A plague began that night and 24,000 Israelites died before it was over (Num. 25:9).

What temptation was powerful enough to put Israel on the wrong side of God? Sexual temptation. Ba'al means "master." Peor means "opening." This is a blatant sexual reference. Does America worship this god? America used to have laws in every state that tried to limit the power of this god. Sex outside of marriage used to be illegal. You could go to jail for it. And activities that even tempted you to move in that direction were outlawed, too. So, there were laws against contraception being available to single people, or laws limiting the distribution of pornography or laws limiting abortion. Those laws are all gone today. In fact, this past week, President Obama made it legal for the "Morning-After Pill" to be available, not only to women, but also to girls of any age. So, the legal limits are gone now. Baal Peor has complete freedom to ply his wares in our culture.

And are we better off for it? Well, here are the statistics:

1965 Children in poverty = 20.7% 2013 Children in poverty = 20.7%

Forcible rape per 100,000 people - 1960=9.6 2011=26.8

Prior to 1960 there were two STDs. Today there are 25.

Teenage girls have a 46% chance of contracting HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) at their first sexual encounter. HPV is directly connected to 99.7% of cervical cancers. HPV kills 5,000 women each year.

Condoms provide virtually no protection from STDs. <sup>ii</sup>

The statistics prove that our worship of Baal Peor has been extremely costly. This mirrors the price that Israel paid. This episode at Baal Peor in Numbers 25 is the first recorded exposure of Israel to this form of occult worship. Israel would

struggle with this apostasy for the next 800 years. So, what's the best medicine for this disease? That's what we must focus on now. Thirdly we need to see...

### **III. The Cure for Balaam-itis**

In three passages of the New Testament we find warnings to Christians about this Old Testament disease. Those warnings caution Christians about "The Way of Balaam," "The Error of Balaam" and "The Doctrine of Balaam." We would be fools not to carefully examine each of them. So, first let's see...

#### **A. The Way of Balaam**

We read this first passage last week but let's hear it again (II Peter 2:15, 16):

**They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey...**

Balaam was off the straight path because HE LOVED THE WAGES OF WICKEDNESS. What is that? What are the wages of wickedness? Well, what have we seen in Balaam's life? He loved money. He loved the place of notoriety. He loved the sensuous life. We know that by his participation in the very sexualized worship of Baal. Before Peter speaks of Balaam, he is describing false teachers in his day that remind him of Balaam:

**Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed - an accursed brood!** (II Peter 2:13b-14)

So, we have Balaam as an example of what NOT to do. Where can we find an opposite model to show us what TO DO? As I thought of that this week, my mind went to Daniel. Think of it. Daniel was taken captive to Babylon with his three friends. They were offered the "wages of wickedness:" the king's rich food, the customs of the greatest culture of the day and, as princes-in-training, they were probably offered princesses as well. But Daniel rejected it all. Dan. 1:8:

**But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine...**

Now, be honest - if it were you, would you have turned down the king's food? I'm sure it was tasty! I'm sure it was rich! I'm sure it was rare! And why exactly did Daniel turn it down? I mean, it could have cost him his life! He was willing to die over a piece of non-kosher meat? Yes, he was.

What are you ready to die for? Have you thought about it? If you don't think about it now, you probably won't be able to take a stand when you need to. So, decide now, what would you be willing to die for, say, vocationally?

- Would you be willing to be fired rather than lie? The head of the NSA testified before Congress a few months ago, under oath, that the NSA had never gathered data on U.S. Citizens through Verizon. Now, the administration admits that is exactly what happened. So, this gentleman was willing to perjure himself before Congress as part of his job. Would you do that?

Or what would you be willing to kill your integrity for as a parent?

- Would you be willing to do your daughter's homework for her because you know that if she doesn't get an A on this assignment her GPA will slip

and that will have consequences for the college search? Would you do that?

Balaam is coming to your life and he isn't going to come wearing a red cape and carrying a pitchfork. He's coming with an offer of enough money to pay off your credit card. He's coming with the promise of full health insurance or something else you desperately need. This is the 'Way of Balaam.' Are you going his way or Daniel's way? Secondly, Jude warns us of...

#### ***B. The Error of Balaam***

Jude warns of men who have slipped in as double agents with the Christians: **For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.**

**Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion. (Jude 4, 11)**

What's the error that Jude is showing us? "*They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality...*" There's a fifty-cent theological word for this: **antinomianism**. Anti (against), nomian (*nomos* – the law); against the law. Well, isn't grace against or anti-law? No, no, it's not. Grace is a way of fulfilling the law. We are saved by grace, through faith. God's grace is in Christ coming and paying our debt for us, our debt of sin. Having our debt paid is a requirement of the law, so grace is "fulfilling the law." Grace is working in cooperation WITH the law, not against it.

Antinomianism says that the law doesn't exist anymore. In our cultural context it's like saying, "Hey, you don't have to obey the stop lights anymore. You're free! Stop or don't stop at the red light. You're no longer bound by the law!"

And this is what some false teachers were teaching in Jude's day and they are very much around today. I've heard this taught on Christian radio. There is a man who's written a book about the grace of God but it's not "biblical" grace. He believes that, if you're a Christian, it doesn't matter if you sin or not. So, do what you want. God has already forgiven you! So, ignore those negative preachers who tell you to stop sinning. All your sins have been paid for so live freely, love freely, enjoy life completely!!! The law has no meaning for a Christian!!!

Guess what happened in this man's life? In 1994 he pled "no contest" to soliciting a prostitute. Do you see where this false teaching leads?

This is the error of Balaam. But Jesus taught that while we aren't saved BY obedience, obedience is a sign that we're saved. Jesus said:

**Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. (John 15:9, 10)**

Teaching people that they can do whatever they feel like doing is teaching them to live under the control of demonic power. That's a dangerous place to live.

Finally, Jesus Himself warns us about Balaam in The Revelation concerning:

#### ***C. The Doctrine of Balaam***

In Jesus' message to the church in Pergamum, He says: **(Rev. 2:14-17)**

**Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.**

In the vernacular, Jesus' warning here is this, "Compromise with the world neutralizes the power of God." What keeps us from compromising with the world? Total separation? Some Christians have taken that route, like the Amish. They froze their culture in the eighteenth century. Everything that came after that, like cars and electricity and zippers – it's all taboo because they view it as worldly. But I've known some Amish people and they're the first to tell you that this strategy doesn't eliminate sin from their community.

So, what else might keep us from compromising with the world? Well, Jesus actually had a suggestion on this topic. He said:

**..."Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. (Matt. 22:37-40)**

Let me give you a very practical example of how the staff here is struggling to help us all do this. Mark Woof came across some statistics that startled us. Youth experts Kara Powell and Chap Clark did a six-year study of over 500 graduating high school seniors who were regular attenders of various evangelical church youth groups. Their findings were that 40 to 50 percent, half of these youth group students abandoned their faith in college. That's the bad news.

But here's the good news – 80% of those kids who abandoned their faith, only had a relationship with the church youth group, not the church as a whole. Specifically, high school students who attended church-wide worship services were much, much less likely to punt their faith in college. <sup>iii</sup>

So, because of this and because of our desire to have "whole families" worshipping together every week here at Valley anyway, we're making some adjustments to our Communities schedules this coming fall. I'm not going to outline that for you today, but I just want you to know why we're doing this. We're doing this because studies like this affirm what we have stated over and over again – that parents are the best disciplers of their own children. We don't want to be a church that splits the family apart as so much of the world does. We want to be a place that helps families worship together, grow together, have fun together and just plain go through life together. We think that the adjustments we're making for the fall will help that to happen and help our high school students not punt their faith when they get to college.

The New Testament gives us three warnings about Balaam – a warning about his way, about his error and about his doctrine. The way to avoid all three is to focus on Jesus: Walk with Jesus, obey Jesus and love Jesus. If we all do that this week, you're gonna have one great week! Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Be Counted* (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries, 1999), p. 111, 112

<sup>ii</sup> Statistics from: U. S. Census Bureau; “The Epidemic of Sexually Transmitted Diseases,” Dr. Ray Bohlin, Probe Ministries; “STD Statistics”, Christian Life Resources.

<sup>iii</sup> From *Sticky Church*