**‘Doctrine of Balaam’**

*A Teaching Widely Taught and Accepted Throughout Christendom Today*

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[Jude 1:11](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Jude+1.11&t=NKJV) records “the error of Balaam,” [II Peter 2:15](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=II+Peter+2.15&t=NKJV) records “the way of Balaam,” and [Revelation 2:14](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+2.14&t=NKJV) (in the message to the Church in Pergamos) records “the doctrine of Balaam.” All three of these verses are used in passages referring to Christians entering into a state of affairs within Christendom which *not only defiles their high calling but also dishonors the Lord who paid the price for their salvation with His Own blood.*

*The error* and *way* of Balaam appear in companion passages of Scripture and would seem to refer basically to the same thing. *The error* of Balaam is associated with “reward” in Jude, and *the way* of Balaam is associated with the “wages of unrighteousness” in II Peter.

Thus, *the error* and *way* of Balaam have to do with “monetary gain.” And, according to the Old Testament account of Balaam, monetary gain derived through this means was acquired through his willingness to compromise the principles of God and proclaim things contrary to the revealed Word of God (though Balaam was prevented from doing this and could only utter that which was in accord with the revealed Word of God).

*The error* and *way* of Balaam can be found in [Numbers 22-24](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+22-24&t=NKJV).

Balak, king of the Moabites, hired Balaam to come into his land and pronounce a curse upon the children of Israel. Balak had seen that which Israel had done to the Amorites; and knowing that this nation would soon be passing through his country, he was afraid because of the exhibited power which Israel exercised through the nation’s God.

Balak knew that the only way Israel could be defeated was through *bringing about a change in Israel’s relationship with their God*. Thus, Balak hired Balaam to come into Moab and pronounce a curse upon the Israelites, incurring God’s wrath upon them in order to ultimately bring about their defeat at the hands of the enemy.

However, once in Moab, on three separate occasions, being unable to curse the one whom God had not cursed ([Numbers 23:8](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+23.8&t=NKJV)), only *blessings* proceeded from the lips of Balaam. Balak, angered by the turn of events, sent Balaam out of Moab to his own country.

*The doctrine* of Balaam though was different than *his error* and *way.* *His doctrine* had to do with that part of his teaching which was contrary to doctrine in the revealed Word of God, and it is seen in Scripture following the account of his error and way.

**Past Teaching**

Scripture pertaining to the doctrine of Balaam and its tragic results is given in [Numbers 25:1-3](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+25.1-3&t=NKJV):

*“And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab.*

*And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods.*

*And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.”*

The Israelites, after coming into Moab, began to commit fornication with the “daughters of Moab,” eat meat sacrificed to idols, and bow down and worship the false gods of the Moabites.

In order to put a stop to these sins and stay the hand of God’s judgment upon the entire camp of Israel, Moses was instructed to slay every Israelite who had “joined himself unto **\*\***Baal-peor.” Because of their sins, twenty-four thousand Israelites perished under God’s judgment.

What caused the Israelites to depart from the one true and living God Who had delivered them from Egypt and begin serving false gods and following the idolatrous ways of the Moabites? The answer is given in [Numbers 31:16](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+31.16&t=NKJV):

*“Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord.”*

As previously seen, Balaam could not curse Israel. Only beautiful prophecies filled with blessings flowed from his lips when he was called into Moab by Balak. But Balaam did succeed in leading the Israelites astray through *his counsel.*

The Israelites, through *the counsel of Balaam*, were led to commit fornication, eat things sacrificed to idols, and bow down before other gods. And because of these sins, the judgment of God fell upon His people.

*The counsel of Balaam — i.e.*, “the doctrine of Balaam” — in the light of his prophecies ([Numbers 23](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+23&t=NKJV); [24](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+24&t=NKJV)), could only have had to do with sins committed by the Israelites in view of promises and blessings associated with their covenant relationship with God. In this respect, briefly stated, this doctrine could only have had to do with the fact that the Israelites were the covenant people of God, and God’s covenants (Abrahamic and Mosaic at that time) could not be broken; consequently, the Israelites, in relation to realizing covenant promises and blessings, could sin with immunity.

However, such was not the case at all. It was true that the covenants established between God and Israel could not be broken; it was also true that Israel’s position as firstborn could not be changed; but it was not true that the Israelites, in relation to realizing the promises and blessings associated with God’s covenants, could sin with immunity (*cf.* [Genesis 22:17-18](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Genesis+22.17-18&t=NKJV); [Exodus 19:5](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+19.5&t=NKJV), [6](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+19.6&t=NKJV)).

*A realization of promises and blessings within Israel’s covenant relationship with God was conditioned on obedience* ([Leviticus 26:1ff](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Leviticus+26.1ff&t=NKJV); [Deuteronomy 28:1ff](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Deuteronomy+28.1ff&t=NKJV)). And as a result, with thousands of Israelites succumbing to the counsel of Balaam, God’s wrath was manifested because of the sins of His people; and these individuals — saved individuals — were overthrown in the wilderness, short of the goal of their calling.

**Present Teaching**

*The doctrine of Balaam* is one of the most widely taught doctrines in the Church today. Christians know — as their counterparts in the Church in Pergamos ([Revelation 2:12-17](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+2.12-17&t=NKJV)) — that they have been saved by grace through faith, and nothing can change or alter this fact.

Christians presently possess eternal life, which can never be taken from them; and, because of *the unchangeable nature of the spiritual life which they possess*, they often reason that they can conduct their lives in any manner which they choose, apart from this manner of living making any difference in their one day realizing that to which they have been called.

However, as in the case of the Israelites, so in the case of Christians. *It makes exactly the same difference as seen in the type concerning how Christians conduct their lives.*

Christians, as the Israelites under Moses, have been saved *for a specific, revealed purpose*. Every Christian is enrolled in a race ([I Corinthians 9:24-27](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=I+Corinthians+9.24-27&t=NKJV)), engaged in a conflict ([Ephesians 6:10-18](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+6.10-18&t=NKJV); [II Timothy 2:4-5](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=II+Timothy+2.4-5&t=NKJV)). *And the goal set before every Christian is to win the race, be victorious in the conflict.*

God has made provision for Christians in order that they, at the end of the race, might say with Paul,

*“I have fought a good fight* [‘I have strained every muscle in the good contest’]. *I have finished my course* [‘race’], *I have kept the faith:*

*Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness…”* ([II Timothy 4:7-8](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=II+Timothy+4.7-8&t=NKJV)).

The enemy, Satan, on the other hand, is doing all within his power to bring about defeat in the lives of Christians. Satan’s main objective in the present warfare is t*o prevent Christians from qualifying for crowns and thus positions of rulership with Christ in His coming kingdom.*

God is presently bringing into existence a new order of sons to replace the order now ruling from the heavens; and the incumbent rulers — Satan and his angels — *are doing all within their power to retain their present governmental control over the earth.*

The main facet of the doctrine of Balaam which is being promulgated in Churches today is the teaching that *future blessings and rewards have been set aside for every Christian solely on the basis of Christ’s finished work at Calvary and the Christian’s positional standing “in Christ.”* In this respect, all Christians — regardless of their conduct during the present time — will receive crowns and positions of power and authority with Christ in the kingdom.

However, that which is clearly taught throughout the Word of God is to the contrary.

*The Israelites did not sin with immunity, and neither can Christians. Sin in the camp of Israel resulted in the Israelites being overthrown in the wilderness, short of the goal of their calling. And it will be no different for Christians* ([Hebrews 3:18-4:2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Hebrews+3.18-4.2&t=NKJV)).

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\*\*Baal Peor

Baal Peor, or the Baal of Peor, was a local deity worshiped by the Moabites. When the Israelites, following Moses to the Promised Land, were in the vicinity of Peor, some of them fell into idolatry and worshiped Baal Peor. As a result of their sin, the men of Israel were judged by God.

The story of Baal Peor starts when Balaak, the king of the Moabites, hired Balaam, a prophet-for-hire, to curse Israel. Balaak had seen the progress and might of Israel and was trying to do something that would stop them. Balaam took the money but was unable to curse Israel because the Lord would not allow him to do so. Balaam then met with the king of Moab and went through the motions of receiving a word from God; each time (seven times total) he ended up blessing Israel instead of cursing them ([Numbers 23](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+23&t=NKJV); [24](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+24&t=NKJV)). At the time of the third oracle, Balaam and Balaak were observing the Israelite camp from a place called Peor ([Numbers 23:28](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+23.28&t=NKJV)). By the end of the seventh try, Balaak finally got the message that Balaam would not curse Israel for him.

In [Numbers 25](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+25&t=NKJV), we find that the women of Midian began to seduce the men of Israel to sexual sin and to sacrifice to their gods. Since the gods of the pagans were often fertility gods, the “worship” often involved sexual acts. The incident is recorded in [Numbers 25:1-3](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+25.1-3&t=NKJV): “While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Midianite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate the sacrificial meal and bowed down before these gods. So Israel yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor. And the Lord’s anger burned against them.” As a judgment against the Israelites’ sin, God sent a plague among the people ([Numbers 25:9](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+25.9&t=NKJV)).

According to [Numbers 31:16](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+31.16&t=NKJV), the women did this on the advice of Balaam. It appears that, since he could not curse Israel, he found another way to fulfill the wishes of Balaak, who was paying him. Balaam knew that, if the Israelite men could be seduced into idol worship, that God Himself would curse them.

The word peor simply means “opening” and is the name of the place (a mountain or a spot on a mountain) from which Balaak and Balaam observed the camp of Israel. The meaning of the word may or may not be significant to the naming of the place. (Perhaps there was a cave opening there or some kind of mountain pass, or perhaps the place was called Peor for some other reason.)

The word baal is simply the word for “lord,” “master,” or “ruler.” Baal became a technical or semi-technical name for the gods of the Canaanites. There was not just one god named Baal, but there were many Baals (many Canaanite “lords”). That is why [Numbers 25:3](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+25.3&t=NKJV) in the NIV does not use “Baal Peor” as if it were a proper name for a god but uses the term more as a description: “the Baal of Peor,” which could also be translated “the Lord of Peor” or “Lord of the Opening.” Peor might refer to the mountain top from which Balaam and Balaak observed Israel, or it could have something to do with the literal meaning of the word peor (opening), which, in the context of Canaanite worship (and the context of [Numbers 25](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+25&t=NKJV)), could have a sexual or scatological connotation. Perhaps the top of the mountain was called Peor because that is where the sexual rites took place.

In any case, Baal Peor is really the Baal of Peor or simply the Lord of Peor, which distinguishes this Baal from all the others. This particular god is referred to again in [Numbers 25:5](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+25.5&t=NKJV). Then [Numbers 25:18](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+25.18&t=NKJV) speaks of “the Peor incident,” which sounds like Peor is being used as a place name rather than something based on the meaning of the word.

[Deuteronomy 4:3](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Deuteronomy+4.3&t=NKJV) uses Baal Peor as a place name to refer to the incident recorded in [Numbers 25](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+25&t=NKJV) and in the same verse as a designation for the pagan god. “You saw with your own eyes what the LORD did at Baal Peor. The LORD your God destroyed from among you everyone who followed the Baal of Peor.” [Joshua 22:17](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Joshua+22.17&t=NKJV) speaks of the “sin of Peor,” and [Hosea 9:10](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Hosea+9.10&t=NKJV) uses Baal Peor to refer to the place where this incident happened: “When they came to Baal Peor, they consecrated themselves to that shameful idol and became as vile as the thing they loved.” [Psalm 106:28](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Psalm+106.28&t=NKJV) also refers to the Baal of Peor: “They yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor and ate sacrifices offered to lifeless gods.”

So it seems that Peor and Baal Peor are both used as place names to refer to the place where Israel sinned in sexual immorality and in worship of a particular Baal. The Baal in question is referred to as Baal Peor. Perhaps he was already referred to by this name, as he was seen to be in charge of this particular location, or perhaps this is the name that the Israelites gave him after the fact.

In any case, this incident at Baal Peor stands out as the first of many times that Israel fell into immorality and idolatry, and it also serves as a warning to Christians. The Corinthians would have been particularly susceptible to this kind of temptation, as the city of Corinth was filled with idolatry and sexual immorality. The question of eating at idol temples was debated within the congregation. Although he does not mention Baal Peor by name, Paul refers to that incident in [1 Corinthians 10:8](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Corinthians+10.8&t=NKJV): “We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.” In [1 Corinthians 10:11-14](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Corinthians+10.11-14&t=NKJV), Paul goes on to say, “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.”

Many things have changed since Israel’s sin at Baal Peor, but the basic temptations have not. Sexual temptation is ever present in modern societies, and the idols of money, pleasure, fame, and “the good life” also vie to take the place of the One True God in the hearts of many people. Even today, Christians must guard against the sin of Baal Peor.