

## FINDING THE NARROW PATH

### A Devotional Meditation on Balak

Numbers 22:2-25:9; Micah 5:7-6:8;  
Genesis 12:2-3; Psalm 103:1-22; Matthew 7:7-14; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

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The narrow path of righteousness lies somewhere between cheap grace and burdensome legalism. One extreme says Jesus did everything for us so we can live as we please, while the other says we must earn our way into God's favor, and can easily fall out of it. A common element of both is the premise that God created us for our own pleasure. We can see that in the emphasis on grace, which assumes that God would lay no further burden on anyone after vanquishing the devil who sought to kill us. The other position presumes to take the place of God by using His word to establish standards of orthodoxy that may or may not have been His intent. The part about being created for our own pleasure actually means the pleasure of those who establish and enforce the standards. They may be miserable persons, but being in charge of the eternal destinies of others just might give them some sense of accomplishment in an otherwise dreary existence.



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This is how religion without relationship works. Whichever path one takes, the result is lip service to God's standards of righteousness, but no real commitment to Him. It's a human failing that happens whenever we think we have God figured out. That's why we desperately need to understand and live out a biblical perspective on life in God's Kingdom. Paul has advice on that:

According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another builds on it. But let each consider carefully how he builds on it. For no one can lay any other foundation than what is already laid—which is *Yeshua* the Messiah. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear. For the Day will show it, because it is to be revealed by fire; and the fire itself will test each one's work—what sort it is. If anyone's work built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss—he himself will be saved, but as through fire.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 TLV

Paul's writing, here and elsewhere, indicates a partnership with God. He alone created us, and He alone redeemed us from the destruction mandated for our rebellion against Him. Our Creator intends to have His image bearers operating within the design parameters He established for us so He could manifest Himself in the works He created us to perform. As we yield to Him, He works through us. In the process, He accumulates glory for Himself, and He and we share in the pleasure of the accomplishments.

That is how it should be, but when we put our Creator in a box, the best we can hope for is a distorted caricature of the Creator's intent. That's not just a Christian phenomenon; it's a problem with which God's Covenant people have wrestled from time immemorial. We recognize that God *will* have a Kingdom, which means He will populate that Kingdom with His chosen people. When we realize we are part of that select number, we could grow either complacent or militant about our place in His Kingdom. Only a genuine relationship with our King can keep us on the narrow path. That's another lesson we learn from our Hebrew ancestors, such as David – who in turn learned the lessons from his ancestors and expressed those lessons in psalms like this:

*ADONAI* executes justice—  
judgments for all who are oppressed.  
He made His ways known to Moses,  
His deeds to the children of Israel.  
*ADONAI* is compassionate and gracious,  
slow to anger, and plentiful in mercy.  
He will not always accuse,  
nor will He keep His anger forever.  
He has not treated us according to our sins,  
or repaid us according to our iniquities.  
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is His mercy for those who fear Him.  
As far as the east is from the west,  
so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

Psalm 103:6-12 TLV

What do we learn from this psalm? Perhaps we focus on that last bit about God removing our transgressions from us as far as the east is from the west. Christians recognize that as a description of Messiah Yeshua's atoning work on our behalf. Jews recognize the same Divine intervention, although without emphasis on Messiah's work. Both are right in understanding that God alone is our Salvation, and He alone brings the remedy for the sins, iniquities, and transgressions that separate us from Him and from one another. Hopefully we also notice the line about His mercy applying to those who fear Him. That's a key to understanding the earlier lines about God making His ways known to Moses, but the only thing the children of Israel saw were His deeds.

This explains why Israel fell so abruptly from the heights of God's protection from assault by the spiritual and physical forces of Balaam and Balak. King Balak of Moab asked the shaman Balaam to curse God's people, apparently not realizing that, as the seed of Abraham, they were under God's direct protection. The story of Balaam and Balak tells us what God meant when He told Abraham,

My heart's desire is to make you into a great nation, to bless you, to make your name great so that you may be a blessing. My desire is to bless those who bless you, but whoever curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Genesis 12:2-3 TLV

That promise to Abraham is the reason everyone who calls on the Name of the LORD to be saved is adopted into His Covenant people of Israel. Not that we become Jewish or replace the Jewish people, but we share with them the adoption into the heavenly Kingdom of priests that intercedes on behalf of the nations. That's the holy calling we have shared with our fathers and mothers in the faith, but it's also the holy calling we won't understand and walk out unless we pursue a relationship with our God.

Moses pursued that relationship, but most of the ancient Israelites did not. They received God's protection as He turned Balaam's intent to curse Israel into blessing and thwarted Balak's plans. His protection has been there through the ages, even when, in judgment, multitudes perished – such as in the sin of Baal Peor. The Hebrews may not have known what Balaam and Balak were doing, but they did fall for the enticements of the Moabite women who seduced the Israelite men into worshipping their false gods. Because they lacked deep relationship with the true God, these men fell victim to deception that appealed to their senses, and God had to bring harsh correction.

Sometimes the harsh correction comes in the form of plague, foreign occupation, and famine, and sometimes it comes in dashed dreams, broken health, and bitter spirits. It's hard to tell whether such things are works of Satan, consequences of our own sins, or circumstances God allows to refine and mature us. We may never know until we enter eternity, but the only way we can get through such difficulties is by clinging to the God Who not only saved us, but earnestly desires to teach us His ways.