

**“Patience.”** When the people of Israel had left the wilderness, after being slaves in Egypt, and crossed the Jordan River into the promised land they came into conflict with the people of Moab. The king of Moab wanted to defeat the Israelites and so he offered money to a prophet from Assyria named Balaam, so that Balaam would curse the people of Israel and give Moab an advantage against them in war. The Lord spoke clearly to Balaam telling him to **not** go with the king of Moab and to **not** curse the people of Israel. But the king of Moab would not give up when Balaam initially refused. He sent more riches and told Balaam that he would give him **“whatever he wanted”** if he cursed the people of Israel. Balaam replied, **“Even if you gave me a whole house filled with silver and gold, I could not disobey the Lord.”** This seemed like a faithful and righteous response from Balaam. But then his very next words betray the truth of his heart, **“But stay here and let me see if the Lord changes his mind.”** Balaam knew the Lord’s answer already, but he was not happy with it. And so Balaam was going to draw this out until he got the answer he **wanted** from the Lord. The Lord’s clear word wasn’t enough for Balaam, he wanted to satisfy his desire for wealth. The Lord knew Balaam’s deceiving heart and so the Lord did not fight Balaam and instead told him to go see the king of Moab. Balaam had his heart and mind set on getting that wealth, so Balaam was only going to hear the Lord’s word in the way that he wanted to.

The next morning, Balaam went with the men of Moab to receive great riches from them and to curse the people of Israel. But while he was going and riding on his donkey, the angel of death stood in his way. Balaam was spiritually blind and could not see the angel. But his donkey could. So the donkey left the road and turned into a field. Balaam was angry and **beat** his donkey. Then the road went between two walls and the angel of death again stood in the way. The donkey squeezed along one wall to get away from the angel and crushed Balaam’s leg while doing so. Balaam again got angry and **beat** his donkey. Then further down, the road narrowed. There the angel of death again stood in the way. The donkey had nowhere to go, so it lay down and refused to walk. Balaam was angry and **beat** his donkey for the third time. Then the Lord opened the donkey’s mouth and it spoke to Balaam, **“What have I done to you that you are beating me?!”** Balaam said, **“It is because you are not listening to me! If I had a sword I would kill you!”** Then the Lord opened Balaam’s eyes and he saw the angel of death standing in front of him. And then Balaam realized that his donkey had saved his life three times.

The apostle Peter urges us to not be like the false prophet Balaam. Balaam was two-faced and double-minded. He wanted to speak the Lord’s Word and do the Lord’s will, but he **also** wanted the wealth that Moab was offering him. So Balaam was determined to find a way to get **both**. Balaam wanted to serve **two** masters—he wanted to serve the Creator **and** serve his desire for wealth—and nothing was going to stop him.

It was Balaam’s **impatience** that led him to try and serve two masters. Instead of taking the Lord at his word the first time and trusting that the Lord knew what was best, Balaam kept pushing because he didn’t like the Lord’s answer. Instead of **waiting** on the Lord to take care of him, Balaam saw the king of Moab as an opportunity to get what he **wanted** and to be taken care of financially. If Balaam would have just surrendered to the Lord’s Word and been done with it, everything would have been fine. But in his impatience, Balaam was like a **“blind animal.”** Even his dumb donkey was smarter than him—even his dumb donkey had eyes to see. Balaam was worse than a donkey. As the Scriptures say, he was like **“a dog returning to its own vomit”** and he was like **“a pig rolling in poop after bathing.”** Balaam had been given the Lord’s Word, he had been given the Lord’s command, and yet he kept going back to the vomit and filth of his selfish desires. Balaam wanted to vomit out the nastiness **and** have it in his stomach at the same time. Balaam wanted to be **clean** and **filthy** at the same time. But even a little bit of filth ruins what is clean. Add a little ice cream to some poop and the poop is just fine. Add a little poop to some ice cream and the ice cream is ruined. As Peter says, **“A person is enslaved by whatever controls him.”** Balaam could have been the Lord’s servant and slave, but instead he gave himself over to be controlled by his flesh and it led him back to the vomit and feces of his selfish desires.

Yet in the midst of Balaam’s impatience, it was the Lord’s **“patience”** that spared Balaam’s life. As Peter says, **“The Lord does not desire any to be destroyed. He wants all to repent.”** The Lord’s **“patience”** affords us the opportunity to repent, to look within and realize how similar we are to Balaam. As Peter says, **“The Creator’s judgment will come.”** But due to his **“patience,”** the Lord delays this judgment for our sake. The Lord is not slow in fulfilling his promise to judge the living and the dead—he has **“patience.”** And he has **“patience”** because he loves us. The Lord’s judgment is being delayed not because of those “other people out there,” but because of **us**. To give **us**, to give **you** the opportunity to repent. To give you and me the opportunity to learn **“patience”** and to be patient with life and with others as the Lord is patient with us.

Peter assures us, **“The Lord knows how to rescue the faithful.”** The Creator rescued Noah, sparing him and his family from the flood waters of judgment that destroyed all of human Civilization. And the Lord rescued Lot and his family from the fires that rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah. Peter tells us that Sodom and Gomorrah were a warning to **all** future generations about the coming judgment. He says, **“The heavens and earth have been storing up fire and it is being held back for the day of judgment.”** All of Civilization will be destroyed, melted away in fire. It will come suddenly, like a thief in the night. But this fiery judgment is not the end, for Peter says, **“We wait for the new heavens and new earth.”** The Lord in his **“patience”** will remake his creation and rescue his children through the fire.

How has the Lord been showing **“patience”** to you and your own double-minded hypocrisy? How has the Lord been waiting on you to stop serving **two** masters? How have you been like Balaam, trying to obey the Lord’s Word, yet **also** trying to serve your flesh at the same time? In what ways have you been returning to your own vomit—in what ways have you been rolling in filth after bathing?

**“In the Lord’s eyes, one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as one day.”** The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise. He has **“patience”** for your sake, for my sake. Consider the **“patience”** of the Lord as an opportunity to repent today and be saved. We all deserve what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah, but the Lord has held back to give us time to repent. He continues to have **“patience”** with us.

So don’t be like Balaam and hurt yourself and those around you in your impatience to get what you want, to satisfy your flesh, and to be in control. Is there a donkey in your life, trying to get your attention, over and over, trying to wake you up to the death and destruction your selfish desires are leading you to? Let’s stop being **“blind animals,”** let’s stop returning to our own vomit, let’s stop rolling in poop after we bathe in the cleansing Word of the Lord. **“The Creator’s judgment will come,”** like a thief in the night. So be ready and take advantage of the Lord’s **“patience”** with you and repent of your hypocrisy today. If you turn to the Lord with all your heart, he will bring you safely through the coming fires of judgment. **“The Lord knows how to rescue the faithful.” Amen.**