

**Question:** Why was God angry with Balaam that he went to Balak (Numbers 22:22) if He had allowed Him to do that (Numbers 22:20)?

**Numbers 22:20-22 (NASB)**

**20** God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men have come to call you, rise up and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you shall you do."

**21** So Balaam arose in the morning, and saddled his donkey and went with the leaders of Moab. The Angel and Balaam

**22** But God was angry because he was going, and the angel of the Lord took his stand in the way as an adversary against him. Now he was riding on his donkey and his two servants were with him.

**Answer:**

### **1. First delegation from Balak: God gives Balaam a clear command.**

When the messengers from Balak came to Balaam the first time to ask him to go with them and curse Israel, God expressly forbade him to go:

**Numbers 22:7-12 (NASB)**

**7** So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam and repeated Balak's words to him. **8** He said to them, "Spend the night here, and I will bring word back to you as the Lord may speak to me." And the leaders of Moab stayed with Balaam. **9** Then God came to Balaam and said, "Who are these men with you?" **10** Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent word to me, **11** 'Behold, there is a people who came out of Egypt and they cover the surface of the land; now come, curse them for me; perhaps I may be able to fight against them and drive them out.'" **12** God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed."

### **2. Second delegation from Balak: Balaam seeks a way to go to the Moabite king.**

When the second delegation from Balak came, more distinguished than the first, with the same request and with the promise of honouring Balaam richly for cursing the chosen nation, instead of heeding God's command that he received the first time and sending Balak's servants away, Balaam said he would find out what else God would speak to him:

**Numbers 22:18-19 (NASB)**

**18** Balaam replied to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, either small or great, contrary to the command of the Lord my God. **19** Now please, you also stay here tonight, and I will find out what else the Lord will speak to me."

Balaam's words from verse 19 originate from his greed, since God clearly declared His will to him in this matter during the first visit of the Moabites. On the one hand, Balaam did not want to act against God, but on the other desired the reward promised by Balak and instead of holding on to God's command was seeking a way to get it. God allowed him to go to the Moabite king, but under the condition that Balaam would only do what He would tell him.

**Numbers 22:20 (NASB)**

**20** God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men have come to call you, rise up and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you shall you do."

However, since God's anger burnt against Balaam when he was going to Balak despite Him giving Balaam the permission to do so, he must have disobeyed God's will in another way.

### **3. Balaam on his way to Balak: correct interpretation of Numbers 22:22 and the encounter with the Angel of the Lord.**

Key to the correct interpretation of this verse is the fact that the Hebrew text does not say that “But God’s anger was kindled because he went” (ESV) or “Then God’s anger was aroused because he went” (KJV), but “God’s anger burnt when he was going”. Firstly, the Hebrew word כִּי (*kî*) can mean both “that” as well as “when” and in this case it is the latter sense that gives the correct sense in this verse. Secondly, a participle is used in the Hebrew – הֹלֵךְ (*hōlēk*) – which means “he was going” (Hebrew participles are tenseless and the tense has to be determined from the context – in this case we know it is past tense). Translation “he went” is incorrect, because the Hebrew text says that God’s anger burnt against Balaam at the time when he was going to Balak and not that “God’s anger burnt when he went” or “that/because he went”.

Choć Księga Liczb 22:22 nie podaje powodu gniewu Boga, to może on zostać wywnioskowany z jego późniejszego postępowania.

Although Numbers 22:22 does not give the reason for God’s anger, it can be deduced from Balaam’s conduct that followed. Balaam’s disobedience consisted in him being overcome with his greed of reward and probably rejecting in his heart God’s command about speaking only what He would tell him when he was still on his way to Balak. For this reason the Angel of the Lord appeared to Him and told him that his way was contrary to Him (the Hebrew word וַיִּפֹּל literally means “to fall headlong” and so can be rendered “be reckless”, “be perverse”, etc.), allowing him to go under the condition the condition that Balaam had already received from God before He went on the journey – that he would only proclaim what He would tell him (“the Angel of the Lord” is pre-incarnate Jesus Christ who appears in this way in the Old Testament and often speaks in the first person in the name of God, which is in this case shown by comparison of Numbers 22:20 and 22:32). It is also remarkable that the donkey should see the Angel of the Lord, but not Balaam – himself a prophet. Although the text does not say, quite probably it was greed that blinded him to such a degree.

#### **Numbers 22:32-35 (NASB)**

**32** The angel of the Lord said to him, “Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out as an adversary, because your way was contrary to me. **33** But the donkey saw me and turned aside from me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, I would surely have killed you just now, and let her live.” **34** Balaam said to the angel of the Lord, “I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing in the way against me. Now then, if it is displeasing to you, I will turn back.” **35** But the angel of the Lord said to Balaam, “Go with the men, but you shall speak only the word which I tell you.” So Balaam went along with the leaders of Balak.

#### **4. Balaam comes to Balak: Balaam prophesies according to the Word of oGod, but eventually falls because of his greed.**

The events that took place after Balaam came to the king of Moab confirmed the sinful motivation of his heart. Although he prophesied according to what God told him (Numbers 23-24), he eventually did succumb to his desire for gain and honour and contributed to Israel’s misfortune in another way. This is stated in Numbers 31:16 (cf. Deuteronomy 23:5; Joshua 24:9-10):

#### **Numbers 31:16 (NASB)**

**16** Behold, these caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, so the plague was among the congregation of the Lord.

Balaam’s greed is also condemned by Peter and Jude in the New Testament:

#### **2 Peter 2:15 (NASB)**

**15** forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

#### **Jude 1:11 (NASB)**

**11** Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

**5. Conclusion: God knows which path is best for us, but allows us to act according to our free will.**

God first commanded Balaam not to go to Balak since He knew that it could become a stumbling block for him. Seeing that he desired to go nevertheless, God allowed him to, but under the condition that he would only speak what He would tell him. Balaam eventually did fall because of his greed, however. The story of Balaam shows that God always knows what is best for us and although he allows us to go our own way, any path whose motivation is a desire contrary to His Word will lead to ruin.