

Permission Granted/Permission Withheld

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Permission granted.

And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, *and* go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do. Num. xxii. 20.

Permission withheld.

And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants *were* with him. Num. xxii. 21, 22.

The permission given to Balaam was conditional; "If the men come to call thee," etc. Balaam, in his eagerness, "loving the wages of unrighteousness," does not appear to have waited for the men to call him; instead of this, he volunteered to go with them. Hengstenburgⁱ observes that Balaam "immediately *availed* himself of the permission of God to go with the Moabites, which he could only do with the secret purpose to avoid the condition which had thereby been imposed upon him, 'The word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do.'" Again, "since God's anger was directed against Balaam's going *with a definite intention*, it involves no contradiction, when afterwards his going was permitted."

Kiel thinks that God's anger was not kindled till near the close of Balaam's journey, and then by the *feelings* he was cherishing. A "longing for wages and honor" caused him to set out, and "the nearer he came to his destination, under the guidance of the distinguished Moabitish ambassadors, the more was his mind occupied with the honors and riches in prospect; and so completely did they take possession of his heart, that he was in danger of casting to the winds the condition which had been imposed upon him by God." Hence the divine anger was awakened.

Aben Ezra and Bechayaiⁱⁱ say that the Lord had already manifested his will to Balaam that he should not go to Balak, but as if imagining God to be mutable, he again inquired if he might go, when the Lord, who impedes not the ways of men, permitted it,—If, knowing my will, you still choose to go, do so. Hence his actual going displeased the Lord.

Henry: "As God sometimes denies the prayers of his people in love, so sometimes he grants the desires of the wicked in wrath."

(An Examination of the Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible by John W. Haley, Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1875, 69-70, Text Modified)

ⁱ History of Balaam and his Prophecies, pp. 345, 372.

ⁱⁱ Menasseh ben Israel's Conciliator, i. 265.