

Come to Understanding

They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding,
and they that murmured shall learn doctrine. — Isaiah 29:24

July 1, 2008

Volume 7 Number 13

The Blessings of Balaam

The children of Israel were on their way to the promised land when they entered into the plains of Moab:

1 And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side of the Jordan by Jericho. -Numbers 22

It had been years since they left Egypt. They had been miraculously spared from the Egyptian army, preserved from starvation through the provision of manna, and had conquered nations that had tried to block their path. They were being led by Yahweh back to the land that He had long ago promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They had only recently conquered the Amorites, a feat which instilled fear in the Moabites:

2 And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.

3 And Moab was very afraid of the people, because they were many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel. -Numbers 22

Therefore, Balak, the king of Moab, sought a prophet named Balaam to put a curse upon Israel:

6 Come now therefore, I pray you, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: perhaps I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed. -Numbers 22

Balaam was a prophet from Aram, which was another name for Syria:

7 And he took up his parable, and said, Balak the king of Moab has brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel. -Numbers 23

Worshipping the gods and goddesses of Syria (Aram) and the other nations, which Israel was about to do, was an act of evil to Yahweh:

6 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of Yahweh, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook Yahweh, and served not him. -Judges 10

Balak sent his messengers to Balaam in Aram (Syria) with the “rewards of divination,” as payment for the curse:

7 And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam, and spoke to him the words of Balak. -Numbers 22

God, however, told Balaam that he could not curse Israel because they were blessed:

12 And God said to Balaam, You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people: for they are blessed. -Numbers 22

After Balaam sent word back to the Moabite king that he could not curse Israel, Balak increased his offer to Balaam by also offering him honors:

17 For I will promote you unto very great honor, and I will do whatever you say to me: come therefore, I pray you, curse me this people. -Numbers 22

Balaam eventually went with Balak to the high places of Baal, which overlooked the encampment of Israel (see Numbers 22:41). Standing on the high places of the pagan god, Baal, Balaam and Balak offered sacrifices together (see Numbers 23:1-2). Then in response to Balak’s demand for a curse upon Israel, Balaam responded:

8 How shall I curse, whom God has not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom Yahweh has not defied? -Numbers 23

Balak then took Balaam to another high place in the sight of the people of Israel and again offered sacrifices (see Numbers 23:13-14). Balaam again responded, saying Yahweh’s blessing upon Israel cannot be reversed:

20 Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he has blessed; and I cannot reverse it.

21 He has not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither has he seen perverseness in Israel: Yahweh his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. -Numbers 23

Finally, Balak and Balaam went up to another high place called Peor, where they again offered sacrifices, anticipating a curse for Israel (see Numbers 23:27-30).

Then Balaam prophesied yet another blessing upon Israel:

9 He bowed, he lies down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesses you, and cursed is he that curses you. -Numbers 24

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense,
and caused them to understand the reading. — Nehemiah 8:8

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After three blessings were bestowed upon Israel, Balak declared his frustration with Balaam:

10 And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together: and Balak said to Balaam, I called you to curse my enemies, and, behold, you have altogether blessed *them* these three times. -Numbers 24

Even if Balak would give him his house full of silver and gold, Balaam said he could say nothing contrary to what Yahweh says:

13 If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of Yahweh, to do *either* good or bad of my own mind; *but* what Yahweh says, that will I speak? -Numbers 24

Therefore, Balaam offered a final prophecy which was even greater than the first three. In what appears to be a clear reference to the coming of the Messiah, Balaam said that in the "latter days" a "Star" shall come out of Jacob and a "Scepter" shall rise out of Israel:

14 And now, behold, I go to my people: come *therefore*, and I will advise you what this people shall do to your people in the latter days.

15 And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor has said, and the man whose eyes are open has said:

16 He has said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, *which* saw the vision of the Almighty, falling *into a trance*, but having his eyes open:

17 I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.

18 And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly.

19 Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remains of the city. -Numbers 24

He added that judgement would finally come upon the enemies of Israel (See Numbers 24:20-24). Then apparently satisfied that Israel had been cursed, both Balaam and Balak rose up and departed:

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25 And Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place: and Balak also went his way. -Numbers 25

Shortly after Balaam's final blessing, the people of Israel turned their backs on Yahweh. They committed whoredom with the Moabites and bowed before their gods:

1 And Israel stayed in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab.

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

3 And Israel joined himself to Baalpeor: and the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel. -Numbers 25

As a result, twenty four thousand Israelites who had "joined" themselves to Baalpeor were killed at Yahweh's command. The slaughter was so great that it was called a "plague:"

9 And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand. -Numbers 25

What had happened to the blessings that Balaam had pronounced upon Israel? Yahshua (also called Jesus) said that Balaam had taught Balak to put a "stumbling block" before the children of Israel that caused them to sin:

14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. -Revelation 2

After hearing Balaam repeat the wonderful blessings that Yahweh had pronounced for them, Israel had apparently wrongly assumed that their salvation was secure, no matter what they did. Balaam had failed to mention to Israel that these blessings were conditional!

They would only receive these blessings if they listened to the voice of Yahweh and kept His commandments:

1 And it shall come to pass, if you shall listen diligently to the voice of Yahweh your God, to observe *and* to do all his commandments which I command you this day, that Yahweh your God will set you on high above all nations of the earth:

2 And all these blessings shall come on you, and overtake you, if you shall listen to the voice of Yahweh your God. -Deuteronomy 28

Otherwise, Yahweh says, they will be cursed rather than blessed (see Deuteronomy 28:15).

Furthermore, the name of Yahweh is exclusive and it is holy. Unless their priests give glory to His name, Yahweh says He will curse their blessings:

2 If you will not hear, and if you will not lay *it* to heart, to give glory unto my name, says Yahweh of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yes, I have cursed them already, because you do not lay *it* to heart. -Malachi 2

Balaam led Israel to believe that their blessings were unconditional. Therefore, Israel ignored the commandments of Yahweh. They bowed to other gods and gave them the glory that belongs only to the name of Yahweh. Consequently, Yahweh cursed their blessings.