

Balaam - No. 2

by Charles E. Wigg

We may wonder, why did Jehovah give him permission to go. Did He not know what the outcome of it all would be? Yes of course He did, but though He takes no pleasure in judgement, (it is His strange work Isaiah 28:21), yet righteousness must be fulfilled, His pronounced judgement must fall, though it grieved Him so much. The way that the false prophet grasped the opportunity, to make himself rich, even though it meant the sacrifice of thousands of lives, made God angry. He came in angelic form to be an adversary to the soothsayer. The tables were turned now, because the name Satan, means adversary. However, so bright did the promised gold of Balak glitter in his eyes, it dazzled him to such an extent, that he could not see Jehovah standing with a sword drawn ready to slay him.

His poor donkey, that had served him so faithfully ever since he had owned it, could see what the one who boastfully claimed to be a "man of opened eye" could not. It turned aside into the field, thereby saving the deceiver's life, but only received punishment for her kindness. Further on when confronted with the Angel and the sword, the donkey crushed Balaam's leg against the wall, only to suffer once more for her kindness. Then in a narrow place: where there was no escape from the sword of the angry Jehovah. The poor creature then lay down under Balaam, only to be beaten again by the enraged fool. At this point Jehovah opened the mouth of the donkey, and enabled it to speak with the voice of a man. But even this was not noticed as anything unusual by the false prophet, so bent was he on his errand of mischief.

A dialogue followed between the prophet and the donkey. The poor dumb donkey, seeking to show the unreasonable and cruel character of the prophet's actions. The Sorcerer fuming out his anger and threatening to kill the faithful animal that had done nothing more than save the false prophet's life. However his anger turned to fear, when God took the prophet's eyes off the reward he fancied awaited him, and opened them to the terrible danger in which he was. In craven fear, Balaam bowed his head, and fell flat on his face. Jehovah had witnessed the cruelty of the deceiver towards the faithful donkey. (Just as He observes the cruelty of men to animals today).

Balaam was terrified, and was convicted of his sin, of covetousness, and his willingness to sacrifice the lives of so many, all for a passing reward. He told that he would return to his place, if his going displeased the Mighty God. However justice must be done. God's proclaimed righteous judgement must fall upon His unbelieving, rebellious people. God knew very well that the prophet would never enjoy the reward that he so craved for. God knew that the prophet would never again return to his house. God knew that the wicked man would be slain by the swords of the very people he wanted to curse. However God pointed out to him that the way he was taking was perverse, (for ruin), before Him, yet He allowed the prophet to go on, to reap the harvest that awaited him. However God took the opportunity to warn Balaam that he was to be careful to say only what God gave him to say.

Thus it was that with renewed fear, he went with the princes of Balak. I wonder what they were thinking all this while? Even if they did not see the Angel of the Lord, yet they must have heard the dumb donkey speak. They must have heard God speak to Balaam, and the false prophet speak to God.

On arrival he was welcomed by Balak, who rebuked his hesitance in coming. But Balaam was quick to confess that the power of Jehovah was greater than any power that he had wielded, though that power was truly great. The power of evil was here restricted by the power of God, which was so much greater.

The whole drama began with a feast, the sacrifice of sheep and oxen, prepared by Balak, for Balaam and the princes. Balak then took his guest to a place where he could see all the camp of Israel. From here he would look down on the people. It was one of the high places of Baal, the pagan god of the seasons. He was in effect looking through the devil's eyes. He resorted to black magic, seeking divination from the entrails of the sacrificial animals. Seven animals of each sort, bullocks and rams were offered, but not to Jehovah. There was but one sacrifice that was acceptable to Him, and only one place where that sacrifice could be offered;- the brazen altar that stood in the court of the Tabernacle.

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When Balaam opened his mouth to speak, God made him to say things that he never intended to say. God put the words in Balaam's mouth, and he was too terrified to do anything but utter them. His parables are beautiful, and they revealed both God's appreciation of His redeemed people, and his own inner longings. He was compelled to confess that Israel was blessed by God. He was compelled to admit that they were to be a separate people. Dwelling alone, not to be reckoned amongst the nations. And he revealed his great desire that he himself might die the death of the righteous. This was never to be, because he died the death of the wicked man that he was. The sight of Israel camped around the Tabernacle. The sight of the pillar of cloud on the Tabernacle, was just too much for him. Balak of course was very angry, the powerful man had done just the opposite to what he had hired him to do.

Balak then reasoned that there might be a way to bring down the curse of God on His people. So he took Balaam to another place, from where he could only see those who lived at a distance from the Tabernacle, the fringe-dwellers. Sad to say, there have always been such, and there are such today, in the Church at large, or even in the local Church. There are those who are Christians only in name, and whose lives are a dishonour to God. People who bring the name of the Lord Jesus into reproach, who cause the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. If the false prophet saw only those, perhaps God would give him leave to bring the curse.

The Pagan ritual was repeated, the altars built, the animals offered, but to no avail, God would not allow the devil to bring a greater curse on even the worst of His people. When Balaam opened his mouth, he could only praise the faithfulness of God to the word that He had spoken. That word had promised blessing to His people, and nothing could change that. There is a lovely verse in 2 Timothy 2:13, which says that "If we are unfaithful, He abides faithful, for He cannot deny Himself", (J.N.D. Trans.) In spite of seeing only the fringe dwellers, still he could not curse them. God saw no iniquity in Jacob, because they had been redeemed by the blood of the passover lamb. (See Rev. 12:11.) They were destined to be the head of the nations, because the shout of a King was amongst them. They had not come out of Egypt, they were not tarnished by the defilement of that Pagan nation, God had brought them out. They at last would manifest the royal character of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The All victorious one, who turneth not aside for any

Balak was disgusted, he wanted that the prophet should not bless or curse the people. However there remained just one more possibility. He would take him to yet another vantage point, where Balaam would see the waste, the wilderness, the place where they had wandered for forty years, where all their base ingratitude, the rebellion of their sinful hearts was shown. Perhaps such a view would cause even the patient Jehovah to remove the blessing, and permit the curse. So the previous procedure was repeated, however this time Balaam realized the futility of seeking for enchantments. He no longer consulted the evil spirits, but came to understand that they were powerless in the presence of the Almighty God. He realized that it was God's delight to bless His people, and though it displeased him and threatened to rob him of the reward that he so lusted after, he was compelled to fall in with the wishes of God. As he said in an earlier parable, God has blessed, and I cannot reverse it.

The false prophet then set his face towards the wilderness, it was his intention to bring accusations against the people of God. He was about to remind God of all the failures, the murmuring, the rebellion, and the base ingratitude of those unworthy people. However when he opened his mouth to speak, the Spirit of God came upon him. His eyes were taken off the wilderness, and all the past failures of Jehovah's people. Instead he saw their tents surrounding the Tabernacle, and the pillar of cloud that hovered above it. He saw the order and beauty of the whole layout of the camp. Truly they were a blessed people! Perhaps his mind traveled back to his own miserable dwelling. Though it may have been rich, luxurious and opulent, yet it was far from the presence of God, and a dwelling place haunted by demons, a place of the curse. In spite of all their failures there was not a people on earth like these. Truly they were a blessed people!

He was compelled to acknowledge that these were a people with a destiny. God had brought them out of Egypt. The blessing of God would come through them to all the world. The waters of blessing would pour from their buckets. Their seed (Jesus Christ) would be in many waters. His blessing and salvation would come to men of all

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the nations of the world. Israel's King would be higher than Agag, (the official title of the Ruler of Amalek, - which represents sin in the flesh). Agag is a figure of Satan, who rules wretched lost men, by enslaving them with sinful habits. He who commits sin is the slave of sin. John 8:34. Satan's tyranny will at length be broken, Christ will be exalted as head over all. The great strength of Judah's royal Lion would at last be seen, be experienced by those people that He loves. Blessing would come to all who blessed the people of God, and a curse would come on all that cursed them. Let all nations beware!

Balak is incensed, rebuking the prophet for his unwillingness to go against the word of God. Sarcastically he states that the God before whom Balaam trembled, had kept him back from the honour and reward that he was able to bestow. The false prophet weakly pleads his inability to do other than what the great God of Israel commanded him, (for fear of the personal consequences). But before he returned to his people, (he never returned to Mesopotamia), Believing that the reward he lusted after would never be his, he now makes bold to say things that would further irritate the Moabite king. At the same time he revealed his own eternal loss and doom. After once more trumpeting his own imagined greatness, he speaks of a Star that would arise out of Jacob, and a scepter that would arise out of Israel. Thus he speaks of Him who later tells us that He is the bright morning STAR, who will at last usher in a new day. First a Millennial Day, (a morning without clouds), then an Eternal Day.

In doing so, Balaam confesses his own lost estate. "I shall see HIM, but not near, I shall behold HIM, but afar off". (J.N.D. trans.) Oh the misery of the lost in Hell, to be able to see the glory of the One who would have saved them. To see the blessing, the surpassing joy of those whom He has saved, yet never to taste or to enter it, but to suffer eternally in the flames of hell! The false prophet was compelled to utter things that he hoped would never happen; things which his darkened mind could never grasp, or understand.

How these things should warn us in these days when the Lord Jesus said many false prophets and false Christs would arise. Oh that the blessed Lord Jesus may cause the scales to fall from the eyes of many, so that they may see the real nature of those wolves in sheep's clothing. Ignorance is a curse, but simplicity is a blessing. The Lord preserves and blesses the simple, (Psalm 116:6.) The entrance of God's word gives light, and makes wise the simple, (Psalm 119:130.) May God grant to all my readers that sweet simplicity!

We may have thought by casual reading, that we have come to the end of the matter of Balaam and his parables, but there is a lot for us to learn yet. That man who uttered such wonderful words, became one of the most infamous men who ever had anything to do with the people of Israel. He becomes one of the most frequently mentioned Gentiles in the Bible, both in Old Testament and in New. There was a dreadful epilogue to these chapters, and the events they describe. We shall examine this in the pages that follow. It shows us the fiendish cunning of Satan's ways, and the ways of his 'ministers' also.