

BALAAM'S PROPHECIES AND EVIL COUNSEL

BIBLE TEXT Numbers 23:1-30; 24:1-25; 31:8, 16; II Peter 2:12-17

LESSON 111 - JUNIOR COURSE

MEMORY VERSE: "Happy Is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God" (Psalm 146:5).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Numbers 23:1-30 (KJV)

¹ And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven oxen and seven rams.

² And Balak did as Balaam had spoken; and Balak and Balaam offered on *every* altar a bullock and a ram.

³ And Balaam said unto Balak, Stand by thy burnt offering, and I will go: peradventure the LORD will come to meet me: and whatsoever he sheweth me I will tell thee. And he went to an high place.

⁴ And God met Balaam: and he said unto him, I have prepared seven altars, and I have offered upon *every* altar a bullock and a ram.

⁵ And the LORD put a word in Balaam's mouth, and said, Return unto Balak, and thus thou shalt speak.

⁶ And he returned unto him, and, lo, he stood by his burnt sacrifice, he, and all the princes of Moab.

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

⁸ How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, *whom* the LORD hath not defied?

⁹ For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.

¹⁰ Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth *part* of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!

¹¹ And Balak said unto Balaam, What hast thou done unto me? I took thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast blessed *them* altogether.

¹² And he answered and said, Must I not take heed to speak that which the LORD hath put in my mouth?

¹³ And Balak said unto him, Come, I pray thee, with me unto another place, from

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

The Beauties of the Gospel

Balak and Balaam are high on a mountain overlooking the camp of Israel. Balak has won his point in getting Balaam to come to curse God's people; and his hopes are high — but he is going to be disappointed. These are the children of the Most High whom He loves and blesses; and Balaam said, "How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied?"

Many people today admit there are beauties in the Gospel, and they admire the righteousness of God's people; but they themselves do not have the honesty of heart to give up their sins to serve the Lord. God does use such people to speak good words for His Kingdom, and souls may even be saved through their preaching; but such ministers who do not have the love of God in their hearts are deceiving themselves; and more frequently deceive the people, too, rather than help them.

Balaam was a false prophet whom God used to bless Israel in spite of their enemies. Through divine inspiration Balaam declared the goodness of God to His people, and cried, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" They were beautiful words, and Balaam would have really enjoyed to die thus, but it cost more than he was willing to pay. Balaam loved the riches of this world more than he loved God. No doubt, everybody in the world would like to get heavenly rewards, but they are not willing to live to please God.

The Dust of Jacob

Balak and Balaam first offered sacrifices of seven oxen and seven rams on seven altars. God's children always offered sacrifices on one altar, to the one and only true God.

After the sacrifices, Balaam asked God what to say. From this hill Balaam could see much of the camp of Israel, and he exclaimed, "Who can count the dust of Jacob?" It reminds us of the promise God gave Abraham, before there ever was a Jewish nation: "And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered" (Genesis 13:16). As Balaam saw all the tents of the Israelites he must have thought that prophecy had already come to pass. Balaam also prophesied that the Israelites would be a separate people, not numbered among the nations; and through the centuries the Jew has never lost his identity.

Balak was very much disappointed that the curse he had planned had turned into a blessing, but he took Balaam to another peak, and asked him to prophesy again. From here he could see only the outer borders of the camp, and perhaps Balak thought he could at least curse a part of the people, those who were afar off. Balaam still insisted that he could say only what God permitted.

God's Happy People

God had already blessed Israel, and He now told Balaam He

whence thou mayest see them: thou shalt see but the utmost part of them, and shalt not see them all: and curse me them from thence.

¹⁴ And he brought him into the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bullock and a ram on *every* altar.

¹⁵ And he said unto Balak, Stand here by thy burnt offering, while I meet *the LORD* yonder.

¹⁶ And the LORD met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, and said, Go again unto Balak, and say thus.

¹⁷ And when he came to him, behold, he stood by his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab with him. And Balak said unto him, What hath the LORD spoken?

¹⁸ And he took up his parable, and said, Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor:

¹⁹ God *is* not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do *it*? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

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

²¹ He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God *is* with him, and the shout of a king *is* among them.

²² God brought them out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn.

²³ Surely *there is* no enchantment against Jacob, neither *is there* any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!

²⁴ Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat *of* the prey, and drink the blood of the slain.

²⁵ And Balak said unto Balaam, Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all.

²⁶ But Balaam answered and said unto Balak, Told not I thee, saying, All that the LORD speaketh, that I must do?

²⁷ And Balak said unto Balaam, Come, I pray thee, I will bring thee unto another place; peradventure it will please God that thou mayest curse me them from thence.

²⁸ And Balak brought Balaam unto the top of Peor, that looketh toward Jeshimon.

²⁹ And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here

would not change His mind. He loved Israel because among them the name of the true God was uplifted. "Happy is that people, whose God is the LORD" (Psalm 144:15).

No evil could come against the Children of Israel so long as they obeyed their Commander. Time after time God told them that if they kept His commandments no evil should befall them. "And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth" (Deuteronomy 28:1). The only provision was that they obey God. All the other nations were powerless against them if they kept His Law. Think of the honor and glory that would have come to Israel if they had loved God with all their heart, through the years! Instead, because of their disobedience they were scattered throughout the world, without a country or flag, for about 2,000 years. Not until the year 1948, right in our own day, did they again become a nation.

Blessings Continue

Balak was so angry at the end of Balaam's second pronouncement that he said if Balaam could not curse Israel he could at least refrain from blessing them. Balaam really did want to curse Israel, for we read in Joshua 24:10, that God said, "I would not hearken unto Balaam; therefore he blessed you still."

It seems that Balaam had tried up to this time to use some of his old enchantments, but now he gives up entirely to let God speak through him And what sublime words came forth! There is admiration for the orderly array of the tents of the Israelites. He prophesies of the future glory and power of their armies as they go forth to subdue kingdoms; he promises blessings upon all who bless Israel, and curses upon all who curse them.

Balak tried to quiet Balaam, and he ordered him out of his country. He said he had hoped to promote Balaam to great wealth and honor, but the Lord had kept him back from it. Balaam knew enough about the Lord to know that no amount of riches, not even a house full of gold and silver, could change the mind of God to bring a curse upon people whom God wanted to bless. And, besides, Balak could not have given Balaam anything if God had not provided it.

Of Jesus

The words of God must be spoken, and Balaam prophesied once again. This time his prophecies were of days a great way off, but prophecies just as sure to come to pass. He spoke of the Star that should rise out of Jacob, and a Sceptre out of Israel. This was speaking of Jesus who would come as a Star of hope to the downtrodden of the world. He would come from the tribe of Judah, and "arise with healing in his wings" (Malachi 4:2). Malachi also speaks of Him as the "Sun of righteousness." When Simeon took the Baby Jesus into His arms, at the time His parents brought Him into the Temple, he called Him "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:32). Jesus would bring light and life to all who believed on Him.

The Sceptre was a token of authority, and that part of the prophecy foretold the time when Jesus will come again and rule a thousand years on this earth in righteousness. No wicked king will be able to stand against Him. We call that period of time the Millennium.

Condemnation of Balaam

Balaam had spoken beautiful words at the inspiration of God, but they did not do him any good because his heart was evil. The

seven bullocks and seven rams.

³⁰ And Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bullock and a ram on *every* altar.

Numbers 24:1-25 (KJV)

¹ And when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness.

² And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding *in his tents* according to their tribes; and the spirit of God came upon him.

³ And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said:

⁴ He hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling *into a trance*, but having his eyes open:

⁵ How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, *and* thy tabernacles, O Israel!

⁶ As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the LORD hath planted, *and* as cedar trees beside the waters.

⁷ He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed *shall be* in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted.

⁸ God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn: he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce *them* through with his arrows.

⁹ He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed *is* he that blesseth thee, and cursed *is* he that curseth thee.

¹⁰ And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together: and Balak said unto Balaam, I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed *them* these three times.

¹¹ Therefore now flee thou to thy place: I thought to promote thee unto great honour; but, lo, the LORD hath kept thee back from honour.

¹² And Balaam said unto Balak, Spake I not also to thy messengers which thou sentest unto me, saying,

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

Apostle Paul tells us, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (I Corinthians 13:1). Balaam never received any reward for the sublime blessings he poured out upon Israel. In II Peter 2:17, we find the reward of those people among whom Balaam is included: "These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever." There is no place for such people in Heaven: "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which, are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:27).

Israel's Idolatry Punished

If Balaam had gone back to his home, Israel would have had no ill effects from Balak's efforts to curse them. But Balaam had a more subtle way of bringing trouble to God's children. The only time the Children of Israel could be defeated was when they sinned against their God.

Salaam offered advice to Balak which caused many of the Israelites to come to worship the strange gods of the Moabites. Then God's anger was kindled against His own people, and 24,000 people died in a plague because of their idolatry.

We do not hear of Balaam again until the Israelites went to fight the Midianites. God gave His people victory, and among the conquered soldiers Balaam was found and killed (Numbers 31:8).

QUESTIONS

- 1 Why was Balak displeased with what Balaam prophesied?
- 2 Where did Balaam get the words he spoke?
- 3 What are some of the prophecies he made about Israel?
- 4 Have any of them come to pass? Name some.
- 5 How many people died through the counsel of Balaam?
- 6 What was Salaam's end?

¹⁴ And now, behold, I go unto my people: come *therefore, and* I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days.

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

¹⁶ He hath 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 Sceptre 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 remaineth of the city.

²⁰ And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable, and said, Amalek *was* the first of the nations; but his latter end *shall be* that he perish for ever.

²¹ And he looked on the Kenites, and took up his parable, and said, Strong is thy dwellingplace, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock.

²² Nevertheless the Kenite shall be wasted, until Asshur shall carry thee away captive.

²³ And he took up his parable, and said, Alas, who shall live when God doeth this!

²⁴ And ships *shall come* from the coast of Chittim, and shall afflict Asshur, and shall afflict Eber, and he also shall perish for ever.

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

Numbers 31:8 (KJV)

⁸ And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; *namely*, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian: Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword.

Numbers 31:16 (KJV)

¹⁶ Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.

2 Peter 2:12-17 (KJV)

¹² But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption;

¹³ And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, *as* they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots *they are* and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you;

¹⁴ Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children:

¹⁵ Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam *the son* of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

¹⁶ But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet.

¹⁷ These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever.