

A GOD-FEARING BAD MAN

– *NOVEMBER 2.* – *NUMBERS 22:1 TO 23:10.* –

"A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."

– **James 1:8.**

AFTER the Israelites had entered Canaan and were fully recognized as God's holy nation, it would appear that all dealings between God and the Gentiles were discontinued. Before that, apparently men of faith in God were more or less recognized by Him – for instance, Abraham, Job, Melchizedec and Balaam – the latter constituting the central figure of today's lesson. Balaam lived on the Euphrates River, in the country which Abraham left when he came to Canaan. He was known far and near as one whose messages either for good or for evil were sure to come to pass. In other words, he was considered an oracle.

When the king of the Moabites perceived the Israelites conquering all with whom they battled, he greatly feared them, even though they had not molested the Moabites. He conferred with the ruler of the Midianites, and then sent messages four hundred miles to the Euphrates to get Balaam to come to pronounce a curse against the Israelites. A considerable reward was offered.

The Prophet Balaam inquired of the Lord whether or not he should go on this mission. The reply was, No; Israel was blessed of the Lord, not cursed. Balaam gave the decision, and the messengers returned. Balak was all the more insistent and sent fresh messengers of higher station, intimating higher rewards. Balaam knew the mind of the Lord on the subject, but was a money-lover and somehow hoped for a chance to get some of the rewards of unrighteousness. In response to this second inquiry, whether or not he could go with the men, he obtained permission to go.

It was on this journey that Balaam was reproved by his ass. An angel of the Lord stood in the pathway, in a narrow place where the ass, seeing the angel, could not pass him. Balaam's eyes not being opened, he saw not the angel. The ass, being beaten, remonstrated. Even this miracle did not stop Balaam's money-lust. He coveted the wealth, and would do anything in his power to obtain it – merely stopping where he must.

Balaam was received by Balak, king of Moab, with honor. He directed that altars be built and sacrifices be offered to God. He would have a form of godliness, even while desiring to do contrary to the Divine will, which he already knew. The sacrifices offered, he began his prophecy, which the king hoped would be a curse, but which was really a blessing, the words being Divinely inspired. As wrote St. Peter, "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21.) The king complained that instead of a curse would come a blessing. Balaam remonstrated that he had said from the beginning that he would be powerless to utter anything except the Divine message.

The disappointed king, fearful of Israel, sought the exercise of black art in some manner against them. He took the Prophet to another viewpoint and urged the curse of at least this many of the host. Altars were built again; sacrifices were offered again. And again the hoped-for curse instead of blessing did not come. Getting desperate and angry, the king insisted that at least a portion must be cursed, and led the Prophet to another standpoint, from which a still smaller wing of the host of Israel was visible. But here again the results were blessings, not curses – for the third time.

A DOUBLE-MINDED MAN

The double-mindedness of the Prophet, Balaam, was abundantly manifested by his course, as we have examined it. He wished to be a Prophet of the Lord and to speak His Word in His Name; but he also wished riches, and the honor which would

accompany them. He wished for what God's providence had not seen best to give him. Right and wrong – God's way and the way of riches – both were before him. Which would he choose with all his heart? He chose neither one. He tried to have both – to be a servant and mouthpiece of God, and to gain the rewards of an opposite course. – 2 Peter 2:15,16.

Alas, how many in every age have had the Balaam spirit! Jesus warned against this spirit, saying, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." How many have found the Master's words true! How many have found that the Lord would reject from His counsels and His fellowship those who regard iniquity in their hearts; and who, if they would not love to serve it, at least would love its rewards. Let us remember that God looketh upon the inward parts – the heart. Let us remember how it was written of Jesus: "Because Thou hast loved righteousness and hast hated iniquity, therefore God, even thy God, **[R5323 : page 297]** hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." – Psalm 45:7.

In God's dealings with our Redeemer, He has exemplified the principles of His righteous Government. A double-minded man is unreliable in every way – not pleasing to God, not acceptable to Him.

THE HEART WITH THE TREASURE

The Master said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Those who set their affection chiefly upon earthly things can with difficulty avoid the snares that go with them. Balaam's only safe course was in heart loyalty to God. Knowing the mind of the Lord on the subject, he should have delighted himself therein, and should to the fullest have rejected every overture looking in an opposite direction. The nobles who took King Balak's second proposition should have been kindly, but firmly, told that the Divine will was the law of Balaam, the Prophet; that he would not for a moment consider anything to the contrary of the Divine will; that

money, wealth and honors as inducements to a course of opposition to God's will would be an insult. Let us each apply this lesson in life's affairs. Let God be first in our hearts, as well as in our words and acts.

But if, overtaken in a fault, Balaam had gone so far as to start on the journey with the hope of somehow gaining the evil reward, he should have been thoroughly aroused by the incident of the ass. Even an ass knew better than to attempt to go contrary to the Higher Power. Evidently the greater reasoning power and courage of humanity above that of the brute may be used to great advantage.

We see that Balaam's heart was wrong. He still continued to be a Prophet, but was ceasing to be a holy Prophet every minute that he toyed with the tempting wealth, the reward of unrighteousness. Alas, how his mind was debased, debauched, by the love of money! While outwardly he still remained loyal to God in that he would not utter a false message, yet inwardly his harmony with God was gone. The infection, from being a mere speck of a wish for the money, spread rapidly until it swallowed up everything noble and true in the man. The rot or blight which started in his heart, like the blight at the core of a beautiful apple, spread until nothing remained but the outward form.

The professed man of God groveled in the mire of sin in his desire to obtain Balak's proffered wealth. He said to the king, The reason I am not permitted to curse Israel is that they are blessed of the Lord; but I will explain to you that the Lord's blessing is with them because they are His consecrated people, in covenant relationship with Him, seeking to obey His Law. The only way in which you could bring a curse upon Israel would be by tempting them to disobedience to God.

Guided by Balaam, King Balak communicated with the leading people of the Midianites, and urged that their wives and daughters should apparently fall in love with the Israelites, and

introduce them to the sensuous religious rites practised by Midian. In proportion as they would succeed in ensnaring the Israelites into sin and idolatry, in that proportion the curse of Israel's Law would fall upon Israel. How sad it is, and yet how true, that knowledge is a dangerous thing to those who misuse it! How true it is today that none can make so successful tools of Satan as those who have some knowledge of God!

GOD PERMITTED THE LESSON

God could have hindered all those evil machinations, as He could hinder evil deeds and evil plans today. But He allowed matters to take their course, and a great lesson thus to be taught – for then as well as for now and intermediately. The scheme was successful. Some of the leading wives and daughters of the Midianites attracted some of the leading men of Israel to adultery, and to idol worship and orgies. Forthwith a plague started amongst the Israelites, according to their Covenant with God at Sinai, Ebal and Gerizim.

God's Covenant with Israel was that while they would be loyal to Him and His Law, their enemies could not prevail against them. They should be His people. They should be blessed in their every temporal interest. But if they would neglect His statutes and engage in idolatry, He would bring upon them various plagues. This course not only would punish them for their wrong doings, but serve as a lesson, a warning, to restrain them from excesses such as were common amongst the heathen.

We must remember that the death of thousands of Israelites on such occasions was the whole penalty for their sin. They did not drop into a hell of eternal torment, but merely fell asleep, to await the better Day of Messiah, the Antitype of Moses, when they will be awakened from the sleep of death and be brought to full, clear knowledge of those things which, at very most, they then enjoyed only in a typical way.

Not only did God punish the Israelites according to the terms of their Law Covenant, but He also punished the Midianites and Balaam. Under Divine direction Moses called for a thousand armed men out of each of the tribes. This army completely wiped out the Midianites as a nation, including Balaam, the Prophet, who, to secure the rewards of his nefarious advice, had evidently remained to oversee the work of iniquity.

Our glorified Redeemer, in His last message to the Church, foretold that some of His followers would imitate Balaam and, for earthly advantage, put a stumbling-block in the path of the brethren. The intimation is that the harlotry and false worship would be on a higher plane than that which stumbled Natural Israel – even as everything in this Christian Dispensation is antitypical.

BALAAM'S WONDERFUL PROPHECY

Several passages in Balaam's prophecy are very striking in their fulfilment. For instance:

"For from the top of the rocks I see him,
And from the hills I behold him;
Lo, it is a people that dwell alone
And shall not be reckoned amongst the nations."

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"Blessed be every one that blesseth thee
And cursed be every one that curseth thee."

* * *

"I behold Him, but not nigh;
There shall come forth a Star out of Jacob,
And the Sceptre shall rise out of Israel.
And One out of Jacob shall have dominion."

Surely we see fulfilled the declaration that Israel shall be separate from all other nations. What other nation of that day remains a people of preserved identity?

How true the statement that those who have cursed, or injured, Israel have brought injury upon themselves! As we scan the whole field of the world, we find that every nation which has dealt harshly with Israel has received severe chastisement or blight. On the contrary, Great Britain and the United States, nations which have blessed the Jew, have in turn received great blessings.

The lines referring to Messiah's Kingdom are equally true. The Sceptre did rise out of Israel. The One who is to have the dominion of earth is of Jacob's posterity, according to the flesh. As the bright and morning Star, He is leading on to a glorious sunrise – the dawning of the Messianic Day, which is to scatter earth's night and to bring blessings instead of the curse.

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