

June 3

Scriptures: Read Numbers 24 & 25

Key Verse: "...Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace... because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for... Israel." (Numbers 25:12, 13)

Overview

Here we see the third and final desperate attempt of Balak to get Balaam to curse Israel. Once again, Balak took him to a different place in hopes that the place would make the difference and that from there Balaam would be able to curse them. For the third time they again sacrificed upon seven altars, but here we learn before—he knew it was of no avail.

The ancient sorceress would seek for omens in the livers and organs of the animals that were offered to the gods (in this case Baal of Peor). The One and only true God of Israel would never reveal Himself through such an abomination; rather, His Spirit came upon Balaam who was but an instrument to speak His truth. This was by no means an infilling, for it was only temporary; God's Spirit was only upon him but not within him, as He was with true men of God (27:18). Balaam was faithful in his calling to be spokesman for any deity, so He did speak truly the words God gave him. Surely, because of the angel's strong warning, Balaam was afraid to do otherwise. Yet his heart and motivation were wrong, and through he could not curse Israel and thereby not receive "honor" from Balak (i.e. tangible honor, namely riches; 24:11), it seems he looked for another way to make his long journey worthwhile.

Much to Balak's displeasure, Balaam's third oracle was yet another blessing, describing the beauty of Israel, their coming exaltation and victory, and finally repeating the promise God had given to Abraham (24:9; cf. Gen.12:3). For Balak, this was the last straw. In extreme anger, he fired Balaam without pay (24:11), but Balaam was not quite finished; the most beautiful oracle was yet to come. Each successive oracle had brought a higher revelation, and until this point in Scripture, the fourth oracle brought the fullest revelation of the Messiah: "A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel... Out of Jacob One shall have dominion" (24:17, 19; cf. Rev.22:16; Gen.49:10). Then Balaam continued to foretell the disaster that would befall those nations, which had disaster to see Israel cursed (24:20-22).

Although the story is not told, we can imply from later references that Balaam did not depart for his home immediately after the fourth oracle (24:25; 31:8), but rather remained among the Midianites and suggested to them means whereby Israel could come to destruction: by leading them into idolatry and immorality (31:16; Rev.2:14). He knew it was impossible to curse that which God had blessed, but he also knew the Holy God of Israel would not tolerate sin. Balaam's advice was followed and their evil scheme against Israel worked. However, Midian later suffered the penalty for their participation in the seduction of Israel (25:17-18; ch.31).

We read here of the last rebellion and divine judgment of Israel during the wilderness experience. It was while they were at their final encampment on the eastern side of the Jordan River before entering the Promised Land. Satan's schemes are deceptive, for Midian's friendship and Israel's compromise with them brought Israel greater problems than would a conflict. They broke the

covenant with their God as they succumbed to the evil seduction of the Medianite women who led many astray into idolatry and fornication. Those Israelites who led the wickedness were killed and put on public display to warn others of the consequences of sin. Many others died by a plague sent by God which would have consumed them all if not for the brave, holy zeal of Phinehas which stopped God's wrath (25:7-8, 11; Ps.106:28-32) and seemingly awakened the people to realize the depth of sin into which they had fallen. It is tragic that by the end of God's judgment a total of 24,000 had died. God blessed and honored Phinehas because of his faithfulness (the Lord will honor those who honor Him, 1 Sam.2:30) and promised him His "covenant of peace: and from his family (Aaron's line was to come Israel's high priests. The true and final High Priest, whom all the high priests symbolized, is Jesus Christ, who brought into fulfillment the promised covenant of peace (Heb.7:21-25).

Prayer

O Lord, when the schemes of the enemy come against us, delivers us. Keep us from the trap of compromise with the world and its sinful ways.