

The details of this incident should be a warning to all those who flirt with religion and treat it as something to be used to service their own agenda and purposes. Such people seek to manipulate and mould circumstances in a pattern of their choosing rather than to be moulded by the Immortal Potter Himself. This is something we all need to guard against as the old man will seek to deceive and take over as is his want. Only by being aware of his devices and goals will we be in any way ready to resist his wiles. However, we can only successfully resist through the power of the Word and prayer.

Balaam went through the motions of pious religion. He organised the heathen King and got him to make altars and sacrifices. He was the controller not the doer. He sought the glory and was not prepared to do the graft. The king of Moab wanted to manipulate Balaam, but Balaam was also using him. Balaam officiated as pseudo-priest to make the sacrifices in conjunction with Balak. They worked together in fellowship. After slaying these 14 animals Balaam asked Balak to stay at the altars whilst he sought higher ground. He moved himself into the heavenlies, although this was not so much spiritual, as it should have been, but physical, he literally *"went to an high place."*

That God condescended to meet with Balaam does mean that He endorsed all that Balaam was doing. He was a false prophet as, the New Testament endorses, see 2 Peter 2v15 & Jude v 11, Rev 2v14, as well as Nehemiah 13v2 *"but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing"*. Balaam wanted to curse but God restrained him. Instead *"the LORD put a word in Balaam's mouth"*. This demonstrates that God can inspire even false prophets when it is in His purpose to do so. Any words need to be carefully considered, are they really divinely inspired? What effect do they have upon the hearer/reader?

A parable is a hidden message which uses a word picture and specified details to convey important information, but not on the surface, it must be dug for. Like all scripture, every jot and tittle is divine, and must not be casually dismissed but examined for meaning. If we just approach everything as a child, we will just receive milk and never grow further as we should and must if we are to be faithful. Meat must be bitten off and chewed, it is food for the strong, who have developed beyond the naïve.

Balaam had been called from Aram, Aramaic is the language of the Levant spoken even in the days of Jesus, it was the regional area later called Syria. In Roman times Palestina (named after the Philistines to slight the Jews) was only a sub-region of their province of Syria, Matthew 4v24. Luke 2v2. These are also called the mountains of the east. He said that he saw Israel *“from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him”*. Only from the heights can Israel truly be perceived. They inhabited the plains and were looked down on by their adversaries which included Balaam. They were alone and isolated and different and distinct from other peoples. Balaam is inspired to focus on this element. *“Lo the people shall dwell alone and shall not be reckoned among the nations”*. This is both a desired position for the adversary, who wishes to expose the Israelites as remote and therefore vulnerable, but also is a desired position for those who are truth holders as they do not wish to be compromised by being confused as being the same as the uncircumcised. This is significant and they relish their status as being God’s chosen people and unlike any other.

Again, Balaam might come across as a pious religious man. *“How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed? Or how shall I defy whom the LORD hath not defied”*. He almost seems to be a concerned believer! The sheer size of the nation which generated such a cloud of dust was a terror to their enemies. Even the fourth part of the encamped nation, was significant. Could Moab alone withstand the onslaught of the

myriads of each a quarter of the host of Israel? Under Moses the armies of Israel were organised around the twelve tribes with a directional cohesion at the points of the compass. The eastern camp was headed by Judah which was the tribe designated to be the one from which the Messiah would come when the lion was roused. It was the eastern camp which would have been presented to Moab.

*"Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like his".* Like so many Balaam wanted to be counted among the faithful, but protestations and assertions are not what determines your position but what you actually do. There are so many Balaams who assert their own faithfulness but are sadly lacking with regard to any personal integrity.

Balak gets Balaam to agree to approach the camp from another direction where the scale of the problem of the sheer size and critical mass of Israel is less obvious in a vain attempt to reset the agenda. This is a common tactic of the failed. They will always have another go, once they have adjusted the apparent odds to be more favourable. Modern politicians as well as churchmen use this approach all the time as anyone who follows such matters will know. They relocate to Mt Pisgah which is between Jerusalem and Bezer two of the future cities of refuge once the nation is in the land on both sides of the river Jordan. *"Thou shalt see but the uttermost part of them, and shall not see them all".*

The second parable is given in verses 18-24. Again, Balaam although unworthy, is inspired by God to deliver the divine verdict. He begins with a statement that none can deny and indeed those who compromise truth retain sufficient elements in their protestations to appear to be reasonable and spiritually minded, or at least to the uninitiated. *"God is not a man that He should lie, neither the son of man that He should repent".* The false prophets seek to circumvent the plain teaching of scripture by redefining language rather than just abandoning it altogether even though in effect that is what they do.

They desperately cling on to the appearance of godliness by appealing to the majesty of the Word. God did not get it wrong in Genesis when it says that creation took place over six days, but a way is manufactured to squeeze billions of years into the record, even though, it is just not there. The atheists know that very well, it is only deluded Balaamites who argue to the contrary, whereas sincere Bible students are content to accept what the Bible actually teaches.

Verse 21 is particularly interesting. *“He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel.”* This is contrary to the record of Moses who records the waywardness of that nation and its sad continuing catalogue of sin and perversion away from the divine. Why then does Balaam say this under inspiration? Jeremiah 50v20 records a time when these offences are negated, erased or redeemed. Not just forgiven but cancelled altogether. This is mercy on a scale not possible under the Mosaic Law where justice is required to be seen to be done. This is something new, part of the Messianic status of a redeemed Israel. The next phrases illustrate this as we should expect. *“The LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them”*. This presence of a King is post-Mosaic! The element of the cancellation of sin is also post-Davidic. This is far in the future in scope and sets up the ultimate intentions of the Eternal with His people. This disobedient and gain-saying people was to become an immortal host of sinless disciples.

No enchantment or divination was possible to be effective against Israel because God would protect them. This promise of divine protection later became part of the problem when Israel became complacent and acted with impunity. *“Evil shall not come nigh unto us!”* This divine promise was conditional upon their subjection and obedience but Israel, like many today became under the deception of unconditional grace which has never been God’s way.

The manifestation of the host of Israel then, in Balaam’s day, was an earnest of what would become possible only under a future

reformation and transformation under the glorified Messiah, the Lion King of Judah. With the Christ at their head, the nation would transcend even the revolutionary successes of the emerging Joshua. *“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 the prey and drink the blood of the slain”*. This is the King-messiah that the Jews wanted when Jesus came two thousand years ago, but they did not yet understand that he first had to be the suffering Lamb of God, slain for the sins of the world.

It was appropriate that the enemies of Israel should be warned of the glorious future which the initial conquest of the land would foreshadow. It is ironic and poetic that a false prophet should sound out these truths, rather than Joshua or Moses.

A Voice from the Altar

Russel Noonan