

Are Balaam's Words Still at Work Today?

One of the most beloved Bible stories found in the Torah takes place in Numbers 22. It is here where we read about Balaam and his talking donkey. Every child who has ever read a children's Bible is familiar with this story. Every parent who has been to either synagogue or church has heard about Balaam and his donkey. And every rabbi or pastor has given at least one sermon based upon this story. It is always easy to find an anecdote in which we can compare either Balaam or his donkey, and there is always a good donkey joke available to share.

However, many times in the midst of sharing about the miracle of a talking donkey, we miss a much deeper lesson that is shared in the story of Balaam. For those who might be unfamiliar, Balaam is a pagan sorcerer who is called upon to curse Israel by Balak the king of Moab. The story winds through the conversations that take place between Balaam and Balak, and between Balaam and G-D. Balaam is seemingly caught between his desire for wealth and his fear of the G-D of Israel.

In the middle of the story in Numbers 24, we find Balaam prophesying and speaking blessings over Israel. In verse 9 (TLV), we read:

"He crouches like a lion or a lioness— who would rouse him? He who blesses you will be blessed, and he who curses you will be cursed."

And in verse 17, we find:

"'I see him, yet not at this moment. I behold him, yet not in this location. For a star will come from Jacob, a scepter will arise from Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab and the skulls of all the sons of Seth.'"

Though these are some very powerful words, they are often simply read past because they are located in the text between the talking donkey and Phinehas driving his spear through the sinful man and woman in chapter 25.

Yet, these two statements, as well as the rest of the words spoken by Balaam, are vital in our understanding of the covenant promises of G-D to Israel and ultimately the promised inclusion of Gentiles by their being grafted into the Olive Tree of Israel (Rom. 11).

As a matter of fact, these words, spoken by Balaam at a time when Israel has spent the past few chapters and even these chapters rebelling against G-D, show us the power of the never-changing, never-ending and never-broken covenant promises of G-D. Think about it for a moment. Israel has whined and complained and because of their unbelief, a whole generation has been punished by not being able to enter the land of promise. Yet, at this moment in time, G-D reminds them of the promise He had made to Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3:

“My heart’s desire is to make you into a great nation, to bless you, to make your name great so that you may be a blessing. My desire is to bless those who bless you, but whoever curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

This covenant promise made by G-D to Abraham was threefold. First, that G-D would make Abraham a great nation. Second, the promise of blessings and curses. Third, the promise that all the families of the earth would be blessed.

Here, we find Israel at a low point in their relationship with G-D. Such a low point because of their unbelief that G-D uses a Gentile prophet to remind Israel of G-D’s covenant with them.

The second verse, Numbers 22:17 (posted above) is a prophecy about Yeshua. Notice the wording about the star and the

scepter, which are spoken about the connection of the star which would lead those searching to the Messiah and the scepter, which is prophesied by Jacob/Israel over Judah in Genesis 49:10.

Both of these references, the blessings and curses and the scepter prophecy, were spoken by Balaam to remind Israel that even though they had been walking in fear, unbelief, and rebellion, G-D would always keep His covenant.

But why would G-D choose to have a Gentile prophet speak these reminders about G-D's covenant and the promise of Messiah to Israel, instead of having an Israelite prophet speak these powerful reminders?

I believe the answer is found when we look at what Galatians 3:6 says:

“Just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,’

“know then that those who have faith are children of Abraham. The Scriptures, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, proclaimed the Good News to Abraham in advance, saying, ‘All the nations shall be blessed through you.’

A Gentile was used to speak these words because these words are so very important to Gentiles. Balaam was used to speak blessings over Israel just as, I believe, G-D is calling Gentile believers to speak blessings today over Israel. It is a reminder to Israel of their eternal covenant as the children of Abraham by faith. And it's a reminder to the Gentiles that, apart from their connection to the children of Abraham through Yeshua's fulfillment of this covenant, there is no other means of justification for them.

The message is clear, and we are reminded in the text of Numbers 22-24, G-D made an unbreakable covenant with Abraham, as we read in Galatians 3:15-17:

Brothers and sisters, I speak in human terms: even with a man's covenant, once it has been confirmed, no one cancels it or adds to it. Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. It doesn't say, "and to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "and to your seed," who is the Messiah. What I am saying is this: Torah, which came 430 years later, does not cancel the covenant previously confirmed by God, so as to make the promise ineffective.

And no one can cancel or add to that covenant to make G-D's promise to both Jew and Gentile ineffective. {eoa}

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