

BALAAH ASKING COUNSEL.

NUM. XXII—XXIV.

THE children of Israel have reached the promised land a second time.—Thirty-eight years previously, they found themselves on its borders; but, (dismayed at the report of the spies,) their heart failed by the way, and, as a consequence, they had to turn and retrace their steps to the shores of the Red Sea. Now they have marched afresh towards Canaan.—The camp is pitched, (at the time the history given us in these chapters transpires,) in the plains of Moab, on this side Jordan, by Jericho.

Before making a particular application of this history, it will be well, so as to complete it, to call to mind what Scripture tells us, further, about Balaam. We see from Num. xxxi, 16, that the occasion of the sin of the children of Israel, in the matter of Peor, (which

drew down the plague on the congregation of the Lord,) was through his counsel. Verse 8. of the same chapter shews us the miserable end of one who had said, "Let me die the death of the righteous;"—Israel, conquerors of Midian, slay him with the sword, along with the five kings, and all the males, of the vanquished people.

The New Testament mentions him only three times, yet this is done in such sort as to throw great light on the principles and character of the man. In the dark picture drawn by Peter of the unjust, reserved by the Lord unto the day of judgment to be punished, we find, among others, the following features;—Receiving the reward of unrighteousness,—counting it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings, while they feast with you; having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls; an heart they have exercised with covetous practices, cursed children which have forsaken the right way, are gone astray, *following the way of Balaam, the son Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness*: but was rebuked for his iniquity; the dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, forbad the madness of the prophet. These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with the tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. (2 Pet. ii.)

Jude thus describes the triple character of the apostacy (the principles of which were already manifested, and working in the Church, in his day): "Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and

run greedily *after the error of Balaam for reward*, and perished in the gainsaying of Core." (v. 11.)

Lastly, in the epistles of the Lord Jesus to the seven churches of Asia, Apoc. ii-iii., (regarded by students of prophecy, for the most part, as presenting a picture of the successive phases through which the Church would pass down here on the earth,) He who has the sharp sword with two edges, writes to the angel of the church in Pergamos : " I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold *the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel*, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication."

Surely, we have, here, declarations of the Word enough, and more than suffice, to show how odious was the character of Balaam.

At present, however, it is not our purpose to search into all that is taught us in this history ; but only, as to the dominant trait in the character of the son of Bosor.

Balak sends messengers to Balaam, of the elders of Moab and Midian, (who take in their hands wherewith to hire the soothsayer,) to invite him to come, curse the people of Israel. Balaam (notwithstanding that which is evidently evil in the demand) asks counsel of the Lord, Who tells him, " Thou shalt *not* go with them ; thou shalt *not* curse the people, *for they are blessed.*" On this, Balaam tells the messengers of Balak : " Get you into your land, for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you."

But Balak returns to the charge. He sends yet again, princes, more, and more honourable than the former, commissioned to bid him come, and he shall be plentifully rewarded. Balaam replies : “ If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more.” Yet, he sends them not away ; but says to them : “ Tarry ye here this night.” Anew, he asks counsel of the Lord, to know what the Lord would say unto him MORE ; and God replies, “ If the men come to call thee, rise up, and *go with them.*”

Balaam goes with the princes of Moab. But God’s anger is kindled because he goes ; and an angel stands in the way, for an adversary against him.

The ass of Balaam, seeing the angel, (with a drawn sword in his hand,) turns out of the way. Balaam smites the ass, to turn her into the way. The angel of the Lord stands in a path of the vineyards, having a wall on the one side and a wall on the other, and when the ass sees the angel, she thrusts herself against the wall, and crushes Balaam’s foot. He smites her again. The angel goes forward, and stands in a narrow place, where there is no way to turn, either to the right hand or to the left, and when the ass sees the angel, she falls down under Balaam. Balaam’s anger is kindled, and he smites the ass with a staff.

The Lord, now, causes the ass to speak, and she reproves Balaam. He also opens Balaam’s eyes, and he sees the angel, who tells him : “ Behold, I went out to *withstand* thee, because thy way is *perverse* before me.” Balaam says : “ I have sinned ; for I knew not that

thou stoodest in the way against me; now, therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again." The angel tells him: "Go with the men." So Balaam goes with the princes of Moab.

Arrived in the presence of Balak, he is brought by him, successively, to the high places of Baal, the top of Pisgah, and the top of Peor, in order that he may see the tents of Israel, encamped in the plains, and *curse* them. He bids Balak build altars and offer burnt-sacrifices;—asks counsel of the Lord, who speaks to him;—pronounces his pithy discourses,—prophecies, and ceases not to bless Israel.

When Balaam asked of the Lord, the first time: "Shall I go?" God replied, distinctly, No; and, as distinctly, pointed out the ground of the refusal. It would seem, He gave this answer, because, either the soothsayer sought counsel of Him, for the *first time*, or was not *sure* he should be doing wrong in acceding to the invitation of Balak. But the Lord having told him he must not go, and that Israel was blessed, the position of Balaam was no longer the same. He now *knew* the will of God. Without the possibility of a doubt, it would be to do evil, to go into Moab. Impossible, he could be longer in uncertainty as to this.

Nevertheless, tempted afresh, he consults God afresh, to know, (as he says,) what He has MORE to say to him; and God answers him, that he may go.

But the sequel shows, how, from that moment, there was in Balaam growing blindness; in fact, he understands nothing, or next to nothing, of the efforts of the

angel to withstand him. He is never restored; he returns not to the right way; but, on the contrary, becomes, through his abominable counsel, a stumbling-block to Israel. His end is terrible.

Thus, the Holy Ghost says: "Woe unto those, who, having *forsaken* the right way, have gone astray, following the way of Balaam. From what has preceded, we may clearly gather, that the principle which destroyed Balaam was manifested when he asked a *second time* of the Lord, if he might go into Moab. That which happened to him afterwards, was but a consequence of this. When he asked of God the *second time*, already his way was *perverse*, already had he sold himself to the wages of iniquity, and the sequel of his lamentable history is nothing more, than the development of a like state of soul. Thus, it is immediately after this second enquiry, that the anger of the Lord is kindled against him. In the fact of the second enquiry, we discover the main and governing trait of the character of Balaam.

But it needs not long examination to discern, that this distinctive trait, is just in this, that Balaam, having cognizance of evil, asks counsel afresh, instead of forthwith fleeing it.

As Christians, we know full well, that God desires we should flee that which is evil, abstain from it, have no fellowship with it. We should be *saints*, set apart for Himself. His entire word leaves no room for a doubt; and he that sees not this, His will, in plainest

evidence, in Jesus on the Cross, and Jesus risen. has not, as yet, or but but little, learned Christ.

Who is he, dare say to a thrice Holy God : ‘ Allow me to be a liar, covetous man, fornicator, murderer, *for a day*’? or ; ‘ Allow me to participate *to a certain extent* in evil’—above all, when contemplating the terrible agonies of the Son of God in Gethsemane, and on the Cross ; or as having understood, never so little, of his portion in the glories consequent on those sufferings?

With recognition of evil, there needs no further enquiry, no further putting of the question : *What is to be done ?* This question is only legitimate when we find ourselves in presence of, at least, two resolutions, as to which we have to make up our mind ; but, evil being recognised, there is only one fit resolution—to abstain from it. God says ; “ Cease to do evil ;” “ Abhor that which is evil ;” “ Abstain from all appearance of evil.”

There is no possible means of sanctifying evil, or participation in it. It is written : “ Let him that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” The Holy Spirit tells us, Abstain forthwith.—The spirit of Balaam still asks, What is to be done ?

Further, let us not encourage ourselves in a wrong position, because, whilst there, we may still, perhaps, be getting light as to the word of God : when Balaam was with Balak, God ceased not to speak to him, even though His anger was kindled against him.

To seek counsel, as to whether a thing be evil, and still to seek counsel, when we know it is evil, are two acts altogether distinct. Not only may we ask of the

always sheep and never shepherds. Not under law, but under grace, we would not present to the Christian the fate of Balaam, and act upon him through terror,—it is because of the love of God, it is because he forms part of His ransomed people, His holy nation, of the royal priesthood, that we remind him, that it is those who, are led, (not by the spirit of Balaam, but,) by the Spirit of God, that are the sons of God.

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