Stumbling Block II

Balaam, the Stumbling Block Prophet

In the last article, we discussed **the concept of stumbling blocks** and how God greatly despises those who cause His children to fall into sin. In this article, we will examine one of the two most infamous stumbling blocks in the Bible.

After being led by the Prophet Moses for 40 years in the desert, the Israelites found themselves in the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River. The King of Moab, Balak, and the Moabites were distressed because they heard how the Israelites had previously defeated Sihon, the king of Amorites, and Og, the king of Bashan. Realizing that they were probably next, King Balak sent messengers to a non-Israelite prophet named Balaam in hopes that Balaam would curse the Israelites and therefore bless his military campaign against them. The king's messengers arrived and bribed Balaam to curse the Israelites. Balaam happily accepted their gifts, but told them to wait and see how God would respond on this matter. Shortly thereafter, God replied to Balaam saying, ***"You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed"*** (Num. 22:12). Upon sharing this message with the others, the messengers of the king became very frustrated. Nevertheless, they tried another three times to convince Balaam to curse Israel. Each time, Balaam would happily accept King Balak's bribe, but then would subsequently bless Israel. In a fury, King Balak exclaimed, ***"I called you to curse my enemies, and look, you have bountifully blessed them these three times!"*** (Num. 24:10).

In order to appease King Balak, Balaam becomes one of the most infamous stumbling blocks in the Bible. Balaam realized that God loved Israel and the only way God would curse Israel is if they would sin, so he instructed King Balak to cause Israel to stumble. Once Israel was living in sin, God would leave them, and then King Balak could destroy them. King Balak was very happy with the advice of Balaam and immediately found ways for the Israelites to commit sin. In Num. 25:1-3, it is written that ***"Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel."***

Even a thousand years after this event, Balaam is regarded in the New Testament as the icon of all stumbling blocks. Our Lord Jesus Christ remembers the actions of Balaam as He rebukes the church located in Pergamos. Our Lord says, ***"[T]o the angel of the church in Pergamos write…'I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.... Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth'"*** (Rev. 2:12, 14, 16).

Balaam was a prophet of God, but, because of his greedy actions, he is remembered as the stumbling block of Israel. It is amazing to think that one man could cause so many of God's chosen people to sin, but that is a reality that is present even in today's society. Unfortunately, God's children are sometimes inspired by some of the most uninspired musicians, actors and actresses, and athletes who live lavish lifestyles; promote the consumption of drugs and alcohol; denigrate their bodies in their clothing (or lack thereof) and tattoos; and degrade the value of family and marriage in their unashamed promiscuity. Such celebrities are undoubtedly following the course of Balaam, who, in his desire to acquire wealth and status in the eyes of King Balak, became a stumbling block of the entire nation. Such people are in desperate need of repentance, otherwise, ***"it would be better for [them] if a millstone were hung around [their] neck[s], and [they] were drowned in the depth of the sea"*** (Matt. 18:6).

In the next article, we will examine another person deserving of the title "one of the most infamous stumbling blocks in the Bible."

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