

GRACE GAZETTE

Volume XIX

Issue 8

Published occasionally for Zion's mourners

Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

BAALPEOR

And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.

Numbers 25:3

Without the gospel, the Old Testament, is shrouded in mystery and the truth that it contains is largely hidden from its readers. John wrote, "For the law was given by Moses, but *grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." (John 1:17-18) The writer of Hebrews wrote concerning this very fact when he said, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, *Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.*" (Heb 1:1-2)

We see this same fact illustrated in the account of the Ethiopian Eunuch, who confessed his inability to grasp the truth hidden (in plain sight, as we would now confess) in Isaiah's prophecy as Philip drew near to his chariot and asked him if he understood what he read. He replied, "*I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?*" (Acts 8:34) The LORD had sent to this Ethiopian, (whom HE had quickened) a preacher of the gospel, bringing "*life and immortality to light*". Until the gospel which is embodied in the New Testament scriptures is brought forth, how can men believe, in HIM of whom they have not heard? It is by this unfolding of the gospel that light is shed upon the relative darkness which surrounds the Old Testament; like the cloud of smoke and fire which surrounded Sinai. The knowledge of CHRIST and HIS resurrection from the dead, exceeds all other knowledge, when the LORD enables men to hear it.

The LORD JESUS HIMSELF commented upon this fact as HE pointed out the superiority of John the Baptizer over all of the other Old Testament prophets. "*Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist*". Yet HE went on to point out that the least of those who have received the "light" of the gospel are in the same fashion, head and shoulders above the understanding given to John who was the last of the Old Testament prophets and died without having seen the crucified and risen CHRIST.

No prophecy (whether past, present, or future) in all of the scriptures can be rightly understood apart from the revelation of CHRIST JESUS as the REDEEMER KING, who has shed HIS own blood for the remission of HIS people's sin and triumphed over death. "*Worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*" (Rev 19:10) When CHRIST is revealed to the awakened mind of the sons of GOD, the LIGHT shines in the darkness and crooked things are made straight, blind eyes are opened, and deliverance is wrought. "*The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.*" (Isa 9:2)

Paul spoke of the principle of PERFECTION displacing that which is partial when he wrote to the Corinthians of the superiority of SUBSTANCE over shadow. "*But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*" (1Cor 13:10-11) The unfolding of the Gospel of the glory of the blessed GOD, reveals the purpose of GOD in giving to HIS children the myriad of teachings which HE provided to the OT saints.

Thus, we can say that the NT is a commentary (i.e.; an explanation) on the OT. The TRUTH of GOD never changes, but the unveiling of that TRUTH to the minds of those whom HE is pleased to

awaken is now most clearly made manifest in the testimony of those who walked daily with HIM. *"Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word."* (Luke 1:1-2)

Balaam is an enigmatic figure in the OT. He is the only person, that we know of, who has ever had a meaningful conversation with a donkey. Though he was (as is revealed in the NT) a false prophet of the highest order (see II Pet 2:15), yet he spoke much truth concerning the LORD's blessing upon HIS elect children, even expressing a desire to be like them in death. It is difficult if not impossible to ascertain what his error was by simply reading the narrative concerning him in the book of Numbers. It is hinted at in Psalm 106 but it is plainly revealed in Revelation 2:14; *"But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication."* (Rev 2:14)

Balaam is an example of a man who is determined to find a way (as he supposed) to overturn the will of GOD. In this quest he is not unlike those who exalt the free will of men; making men the sovereign rather than HIM who sits upon the throne of the heavens. Balaam was so determined to collect a reward from Balak (the king of Moab) for cursing the children of Israel, that he would not stop his efforts to do so, in spite of the LORD's constant reminder to him of the folly of his quest. He ultimately failed to cause GOD to curse them by his divinations and even wound up blessing them instead with his prophetic utterances (much to his own surprise as well as his donkey).

Since he could not place a curse upon the children of Israel, he ultimately convinced Balak to send Moabite women to seduce them, and bring upon them the result of their own sin. In order to teach the children of Israel of their own innate corruption and the terror of the law, the LORD ordered this chain of events. Moralists of all sorts will gasp at the thought of such, but we are certain that nothing can occur in the Earth which is not according to the good pleasure of the LORD. We are also equally certain that all events occur to ultimately result in the blessing of the LORD's people. *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."* (Rom 8:28)

The whole forty-year journey of the nation of Israel in the wilderness was ordained by GOD for the benefit of HIS people, even though it did not appear so at the time. Even as the prophets of old had no clear understanding of those things which they were led to write. *"Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into."* (1Pet 1:10-12)

All of the activity of Balaam and the results thereof, including the folly of Israel in worshipping Baal at Peor, occurred for our learning. In these things we are taught the natural propensity of everyone of us to depart from the way of the LORD if HE does not restrain us. The most eloquent of prophets or teachers may indeed be as Satan who transformed himself into an angel of light. *"Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works."* (2Cor 11:15)

Just as surely as false prophets and physicians of no value arise, in order to turn the eyes of the sons of GOD away from CHRIST and HIM crucified, the LORD will *"lift up a STANDARD"* against them. As the plague raged in Israel, the LORD raised up Phinehas who wielded a javelin to destroy the sin of the Israelites in piercing it at its source. (see Num.25:7-9) Thus the plague was stayed.

There is ONE, of whom Phinehas is but a type and foreshadow, who has pierced HIS own body on the tree of Calvary in order to stop the plague of sin and deliver the house of Israel. We speak of HIM who is the SUBJECT of all of the scriptures from the beginning to the end. HE is the SAVIOR of sinners. *"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. (Rom 3:25-26)* Do you believe in HIM? mam