**Balaam’s Third Oracle**

Last year the trial of Kyle Rittenhouse dominated the news for 2 weeks. Rittenhouse was charged with murder after killing 2 men during a riot in Kenosha, WI in 2020. Rittenhouse claimed self defense while the prosecution’s case was based on the theory that he had no reason to fear for his life. Two of the witnesses called by the state actually damaged the prosecution’s case with testimony that both men killed by Rittenhouse were armed and had pointed their guns at Rittenhouse before he fired. Such surprise testimony is rare in trials since witnesses give depositions before the actual court date. Normally both the prosecution and defense attorneys know ahead of time what the witnesses will say during the trial, although either side can unwittingly open the door for potentially damaging testimony during cross examination. The cardinal rule for attorneys is not to ask questions in court to which you do not know the answer. In our study of Numbers chapter 24 we see Balak continuing to ask Balaam to curse Israel. His request opens the door for Balaam to continue to testify to God’s blessings for them.

The chapter begins with Balaam delivering a new oracle after Balak built 7 altars for him at the end of the last chapter. Verse 1 says that since he saw that it pleased God for him to bless Israel, he no longer attempted to use sorcery and the Spirit of God came upon him. Matthew Henry wrote that he was given the gift of prophecy by the Holy Spirit as was Saul even as he sought David’s death (see 1st Sam. 19:23). Henry also noted that even as he was favored by God, Balaam could not restrain himself from boasting of his gift of prophecy, calling himself the one whose eye sees clearly, hears the words of God and sees a vision from the Almighty. In his 3rd oracle, Balaam continued to praise the Israelites and again compares them to a lioness and having the strength of a wild ox. He also prophesied about a future king Agag (the NIV notes the title Agag was similar to Pharaoh) who was defeated by Saul (see 1st Sam. 15:18).

Balak was angered by this oracle and told him to leave at once and that he would not be paid. Balaam replied that he could not go beyond the command of God and warned Balak what would happen in the future. This is apparently a reference to a later time when David would defeat the Moabites and make them tax paying subjects of Israel (see 2nd Sam. 8:2). Like a witness who continues testimony beyond what an attorney wants, Balaam issued a 4th oracle without being asked or receiving any sacrificed animals. He begins in a similar fashion as the 3rd oracle then give prophecy about a future king who would come out of Israel. The king is referred to as a star and a scepter. This may be a reference to King David since he conquered Moab and Edom. Several writers believe this is a reference to the second coming of the future Messiah. Jesus called Himself the bright morning star (Rev. 22:16) and Jacob prophesied about Jesus as the scepter of Judah (see Gen. 49:10. Balaam ends his oracle by predicting the defeat of Amalek and the Kenites. The Kenites were friendly with Israel and Moses married a Kenite woman whose father was a Kenite priest (see Judges 1:16). The future defeat of the Kenites is probably a reference to their being taken into captivity by the Assyrians in the 700’s BC.

If I have shared the following analogy previously, please forgive the repeat. A scorpion asked a turtle to carry him on his back as he swam across the river. The turtle replied, “No, you will sting me and I’ll drown.” The scorpion answered “Why would I do that, if I sting you we both drown.” The turtle then agreed to carry the scorpion across but in the middle of the river, the scorpion stung the turtle which cried out “Why did you do that, now we will both die!”. The scorpion replied “It’s just my nature.” We are all by nature sinful people but we are no longer slaves to sin because of Christ crucified and resurrected. Even after clear evidence of God’s providence, both Balak and Balaam made conscious decisions to willfully continue their pursuit of sin.