

*Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises*

**SLIDE: Hanukkah 2014: December 16<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup>**

Good morning. We're in the middle of the 8 days of the Jewish festival called 'Hanukkah', the Festival of Lights.

Hanukkah celebrates an event that occurred about 170 years before the birth of Christ, and the actual event itself is not in the bible. Last book of OT was Malachi, about 430 BC, so, there was a period of about 400 years in the history of Israel when no major or minor prophets arose. During this intermediate time between the Old and New Testament writings, Alexander the Great conquered most of the eastern world and in the conquered territories, there was a heavy Greek emphasis on the culture. Alexander himself treated the Jews and their religion with kindness, but like what happened in Egypt, rulers arose after his death "who knew not Joseph" and treated the Jews harshly. They to stamp out the religion, and the Greek Syrian ruler Antiochus IV desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem, proclaimed himself as god, and outlawed Jewish practices – especially that of 'Brit Mila', the circumcision of a baby boy on the eighth day after his birth.

You may remember that circumcision on the 8<sup>th</sup> day is the sign of the God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants, as commanded by God in Genesis chapter 17.

The Jews under eventually rebelled and were victorious. They entered the Temple to clear it of the Greek idols and built a

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

new altar. They lit a Menorah (large 7-branch candle holder) but had only enough oil to last for one day; new oil would take seven days to prepare in accordance with the regulations for purification. They lit the Menorah anyway, and a miracle happened – instead of burning for one day, the Menorah stayed lit for eight days. That's why Hanukkah is celebrated for 8 days.

By the way, the Hebrew term 'Hanukkah' means Dedication or sanctification – they were re-dedicating the Temple.

Well, most people see Hanukkah as just a Jewish holiday and are surprised to learn that Jesus observed the celebration of Hanukkah!

John 10:22-39: At that time, the Feast of the Dedication (a.k.a. Hanukkah) took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

Now, Jesus had to be careful how He answered that question. Remember – Hanukkah commemorated a victorious revolt against the Greek overlords, and many of the Jews who came to Jerusalem for the festival were caught up in the nationalistic fever and would like nothing better than to find a leader to lead a revolt against the Romans. It would have been easy for

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

riots to break out if Jesus proclaimed plainly that he was then Messiah in this atmosphere. The Romans would not like that. Jesus' time to go to the cross had not yet arrived.

So, as He often did, Jesus answered them with the statement that upset the crowd; He said, "I and the Father are one."

This answer did set off a mini riot, but against Him, not against the Romans. They tried to stone Him. His statement had heavy religious overtones – remember, the festival celebrated a victory over Antiochus IV, who – a mere man – proclaimed himself god on the very same temple mount. Jesus, the LORD manifest in human flesh, made the same claim, but His claim was true.

Jesus declared that He was the fulfilment of Hanukkah (the festival of Dedication) by saying the Father "sanctified" the Son. The Father was in Him, and He in the Father (10:38).

- So, Hanukkah is also a Christian celebration, or should be.

By the way, the Jews tradition is always to have good food on most of their celebrations. There's an old the joke associated with Hanukkah: *"They tried to kill us; we won; let's eat."* Good advice.

*Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises*

You might notice that the Hanukkah Menorah has 9 candles, whereas the official Temple Menorah has only 7. 8 of 9 candles represent the 8 days that the menorah miraculously stayed lit, and the 9th candle is the 'shamash', the "servant" or 'helper" candle, which is used to light the other candles, one per night, for eight nights.

- I think it is easy to draw your own conclusions to what this represents.

So, today during the Festival of Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, that arose out of a spiritual darkness where pagans tried to stamp out the sign of God's covenant with Abraham – I don't believe that it is a coincidence that Light and Darkness and the Covenant with Abraham and the Birth of the Messiah are topics in this presentation today.

**SLIDE: Intro – God Keeps His promises**

'God keeps His promises.' We're been discussing the story of Balaam. As you may remember, the nation of Israel, led by Moses, is camped just across the Jordan River and is preparing to cross into Canaan. They're camping on the King of Moab's land, and – in spite of Moses' assurances to the contrary at

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

God's command – he's afraid that his smaller nation is the next target.

Since his gods are in hiding and are of no help, Balak hires Balaam, a famous sorcerer, to persuade the God of Israel *to change His mind* about the promises He made to the Israelites; then, Balaam would be able to put a curse on Israel, and the nation of Moab would stand a better chance of being victorious in battle.

Balaam makes three attempts to curse Israel, and he is totally unsuccessful; each time, instead of cursing, God forces Balaam bless Israel in a prophetic oracle. God also makes a statement that, unlike men, He does not lie and He does not change His mind and He always keeps His promises.

Now – normally, we'd be continuing in oracle 2 today; but because this is the Sunday before Christmas, I'm going to skip ahead to Oracle #4. The scene is that Balaam has failed in his 3<sup>rd</sup> attempt to curse Israel and King Balak is furious; he says to Balaam, *“Enough – get out of here; I'm not going to pay you for your failures. Go Home.”*

And as Balaam turns to leave, the Spirit of the Lord comes upon him and he again starts to prophesize – in effect, God gives King Balak a “free-be” – the 4<sup>th</sup> oracle.

Balaam's 4th oracle: Numbers 24:14-19

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

May the Lord be on my mind, on my lips, and in my heart – that I may proclaim His Word both earnestly and in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ (Philippians chapter 1 (1:27)).

**Book of Numbers chapter 24** Balaam here is speaking to Balak: And now, I am about to go back to my own people. Come now, and I will advise you as to what this people will do to your people in the future.”

<sup>15</sup> Then he uttered this oracle:

“The oracle of Balaam son of Beor;

the oracle of the man **whose eyes are open;**

<sup>16</sup> the oracle of the one **who hears** the words of God,  
and who knows the knowledge of the Most High,  
who sees a vision from the Almighty,  
although falling flat on the ground with eyes open:

<sup>17</sup> **I see him, but not now;**

**I behold him, but not close at hand.**

**A star will march forth out of Jacob,  
and a scepter will rise out of Israel.**

He will crush the skulls of Moab,  
and the heads of all the sons of Sheth.

<sup>18</sup> Edom will be a possession,  
Seir, his enemies, will also be a possession;  
but Israel will act valiantly.

<sup>19</sup> A ruler will be established from Jacob;  
he will destroy the remains of the city.”

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

SLIDE: 4<sup>TH</sup> ORACLE

'I see him, but not now;  
I behold him, but not close at hand.  
A star will march forth out of Jacob,  
and a scepter will rise out of Israel.

*“I behold him... A star will march forth out of Jacob.”*

“BEHOLD” = see, observe; behold! = stop and see

- It is an exclamation meant to draw attention to something. It is used especially to announce things that are considered startling or important. The phrase is often written with an exclamation mark.

Predictive prophecies are like promises that God make as to what will happen. Here, Balaam gives THE prophecy that was the reason why the magi came to Jerusalem looking for the king of the Jews. It was this very prophecy, issued thru the mouth of a pagan sorcerer, that helped fulfil so many other prophecies about the *coming Messiah being a light to the Gentiles*

- How appropriate that this prophecy of Balaam – a gentile – would result in the very first gentiles to see and worship the Messiah in Bethlehem 1400 years later.

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

Now, in looking at the prophecy, we read: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not close at hand." Last week, Bill noted that Hebrew prophecy usually has several levels of fulfillment – it usually is prophesizing about something in the *near future* and also about something that will occur *later on*.

- Regarding this prophecy about the star and scepter in Israel (scepter = king), scholars identify its first fulfillment in King David 400 years later – which in itself is quite a prediction, because at the time the prophecy was given, Israel doesn't have a human king.
- The greater fulfillment is by Jesus 1400 years later in Bethlehem.
- And, there will be a final fulfillment – at King Jesus's return at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming.

Having two or three fulfilments of this same prophecy may sound somewhat odd to our Western ears – with us, *it's usually one and done*. But that's not the Hebrew mind-set. We forget the fact that, although the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the NT written in Greek, it was Jewish followers of Christ who wrote the entire NT – with the possible exception being Luke, and even that is debatable.

*Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises*

This makes the Bible a thoroughly Hebrew document inspired by the Holy Spirit and written by people having an eastern mind-set. We must also remember God chose to have it this way, and His choices are omniscient choices.

So, does the specific culture (Hebrew) of the Biblical writers actually matter? You bet it does.

**SLIDE: Patterns**

I've talked previously about patterns in the Bible and I want to revisit that issue again today, because I believe that they are crucial in appreciating the Ongoing Purpose of God in redemption.

God created a Universe and a system of life that emulates Himself, and therefore it is orderly and not chaotic. The Lord established patterns for His universe to operate and even about how HE operates within identifiable patterns. The Tabernacle, for example was a physical model of a spiritual reality in heaven, and Moses was instructed to have it build according to the “pattern” God showed him on Mt. Sinai.

- Many of the OT concepts were just shadows of the coming messiah: the sacrificial system to cover sins, concepts of clean and unclean, holy and common, the

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

High Priest, the Ark of the Covenant, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, curing the blind, healing the sick and raising the dead

- When Jesus came, God expected the Jews to recognize Who Jesus was based on the patterns clearly set out in Scripture for the Messiah. But they didn't.
  
- Patterns in our redemptive history: Think about what happens when we exercise faith. God make promises In the OT and kept them 100% of the time. It is only logical that we should expect that God will continue to act as He has always done, and as He has promised to do. That's the pattern, and He does not change, as we saw last time.
  
- Some people teach (not talking about anyone here) that we should have a direct personal oracle from God whenever a new challenge or a choice arrives; while that may occur at times, more frequently, Scripture says that we are to pray and then act in accordance with the repeating God-patterns and principles that we have learned, expecting God to act as He has done previously. That is acting in faith – God has said He'd do something, He has repeatedly done that in the past, so we rely on the fact that He will again do it in the

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

future. All the redemptive patterns we need are already detailed in Scripture – we need no extra-Biblical revelation.

The reason why patterns in redemptive history run throughout the Bible because that's the way the Hebrews thought in their everyday **eastern mind-set**.

- And here's where we have difficulty. When we Westerners come up against something unexpected, we tend to ask the question "*why*".
- Hebrews, however, who operate with an eastern-mindset, would tend not to ask the question "why" right off the bat but rather "*is what we see part of a pattern that can show us how God will be acting?*" They knew that if they could recognize the pattern, they could expect certain things to happen, and then pray and act accordingly.
- And why did they approach life that way (notice I'm asking "why" – they didn't ask "why" first?) **Because many times, God didn't tell them why He acted as He did.**

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

They might eventually figure it out based on knowing His character and holiness, and then – maybe – they might be able to understand “why” God was doing what He was doing. But the main point was to identify the pattern.

- Jesus often used the principle of patterns in His teachings. All of Jesus’ parables were about patterns or linkages between events that the people could relate to and draw spiritual lessons therefrom.
- When talking about the coming destruction and rise of false prophets, Jesus used a pattern: (Mathew 24) “Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.”
- Now – even though we have a Western mindset, we do rely on patterns without thinking about it:
  - For example, once you reach a certain age, you find that when all your joints ache, it usually means that a storm is coming – because that’s the pattern from

*Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises*

our experience. Why? Who knows, but that's what happens.

- If I hang around the house too long, usually a honey-dew list will magically appear on the kitchen counter.
- After I discovered that flipping a switch on the wall will turn on a light, I expect that when I'm in a different room, the same result will be produced by flipping a similar switch. I don't have to be an electrician and understand how and why this happens, all I need to do is to recognize a pattern.
- Here's an example of a pattern the Jews should have recognized but didn't
  - When the Israelites crossed the red sea, they were "baptized into Moses". They went to Mt Sinai and then heard God's voice out loud – Yahweh said that they were His people and He was pleased with them; they were then led by the Pillar of Cloud into the Wilderness for 40 years, and they would face a series of tests – some human, some from Satan – unfortunately, they would fail miserably when they

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

took their eyes off of Him and forget their promises in the Torah.

- Now – fast forward 1400 years to Luke's Gospel and Jesus being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus and God the Father speaks out loud that this is His son in whom He is well pleased. Jesus is then led by the Spirit into the Wilderness for 40 days. Jesus faced tests of an exactly similar nature as the Israelites did in the Wilderness – only this time, the Devil was not just *behind* the scene but right out in front of the camera. The difference this time was that Jesus would pass the temptations.
- The point here is that the patterns and principles did not end in the Old Testament books – they continue to exist into the New Testament. And they continue today, because God does not change.

OK – Getting back to Balaam and Balak, we saw that they had an insurmountable problem with trying to curse Israel because God made a promise to bless Israel, and He does not lie or change His mind. But, they didn't understand the reality and

*Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises*

the sacredness of the Covenant with Abraham. Let's briefly revisit this.

**SLIDE: The Covenant with Abraham**

The word 'covenant' gets tossed around a lot, and I suspect that most Christians don't think much about. It is a term that is used throughout Scripture, and even when it is not explicitly mentioned, some type of "covenant" is part of the background of every Book in the Bible – and yet, the concept of "covenant" is somewhat old-fashioned for our 21st century customs. It conjures up images of tribal peoples taking oaths, performing sacrifices, and signing ominous treaties, so we tend to skip over it as we read Scripture.

And yet, Scripture tells us that "Jesus the mediator of a new covenant" (Heb. 12:24). So, since Jesus what is doing for us has some context in reality, it's good to have at least a rudimentary understanding of it.

But, is it really all that important? Do we really miss something in Scripture if we leave the study of biblical covenants up to the scholars? A resounding "YES".

Now, you may remember that Michael Ferris did a presentation on The Covenant in November, and I would highly

*Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises*

recommend this to you – the audio is on the website. I'd like to briefly revisit this today because it directly relates to the Birth of Christ and the covenant God made with ABRAHAM.

The dictionary defines 'covenant as 'a solemn and binding agreement made by two or more individuals or parties to do or keep from doing a specified thing.' Synonyms include agreement, compact, contract, commitment, treaty, alliance, obligation, bond, relationship, promise, and pact.

The Hebrew word that is translated into English as "covenant" is *Berîyth* – which means "to cut". The Hebrew into Greek and then the Greek into English translation "covenant" is not exact, but it's somewhat close. Now, we are all familiar with various types of agreements that we can call covenants.

- When a person goes to work for a company, he may sign a contract wherein the employer promises him certain wages, benefits, and so on, and wherein the employee promises to give so much of his time in working for the company. We see this kind of covenant in labor agreements.
- Also, on a more popular level, every time we buy something with a credit card or on an installment basis, we enter into a contract or an agreement to pay the full amount for the merchandise or the service over time.

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

- All of these agreements are covenants – they promise *something* in return for *something*. So, every covenant contains two parts, a promise and an obligation. Now, all of these agreements I just mentioned have elements of *similarity* to the biblical covenants, but they are not identical.
  - The basic thing that makes Biblical covenants different from these other kinds of agreements is that biblical covenants involve the Creator of the Universe and have His stamp of approval. Biblical covenants are NOT promises made by EQUAL parties.
  - We do not approach God with our proposal of terms and get Him to agree with our conditions; rather, He approaches us with His terms.
  - It is God Himself Who pulls up the chair, so to speak, declares the terms and makes the promises. The Biblical covenant originates from one side only.

So, when the term is used to describe God's covenants with man, it simply refers to an agreement with terms he has set, that he has approved, and the fulfillment of the promises rests on His character.

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

**SLIDE: THE STARS**

In the next chapter of Genesis, God says to Abraham - "I will be a shield to you, and your reward will be great.' Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless"

<sup>5</sup> And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." <sup>6</sup> *Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.*" Genesis 15

God said to Abraham, who was about 75 at the time, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be'" (vv. 4-5).

Regrettably, I haven't taken the time recently to look up at the night sky, but I remember how it overwhelmed me. You can almost get lost in the immensity of what you're looking at. This view would have been even more magnificent in the thin air of the Holy Land. God told Abraham to count the stars - an impossible task. So, Abraham heard God's promise: *"You're not just going to have one child; your descendants are going to be as the stars of the sky."*

Now, I think that it would be a normal human reaction to such an overwhelming promise at his age for Abraham to say: *"Surely You're exaggerating, Lord. This can't possibly be true?"*

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

But Abraham responded in a way that became the ONLY acceptable response to the covenant promises of God for all people in all history.

“And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (v. 6).

Paul cited Abraham as his primary example to show that the just live by faith. We read: ‘So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham’. And God promised to Abraham “In you shall all the nations be blessed”, which was a promised that God would justify the Gentiles by faith alone,

Interestingly, Paul states in Romans 3: “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness”

- Here was the pattern of why Abraham didn't accept any rewards from the King of Sodom - his reward would be by unmerited grace from God, not by anything he had done to earn it by defeating the 5 kings.

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

- "This is a critical point. Paul reasserts that Abraham was not redeemed because of any of the works he performed in his lifetime. He was saved by faith, the same way any of us is saved. That's the pattern – saved by faith, not works.
- Did Abraham believe in Jesus? No – he did not even know about Jesus – Abraham had to await the appearance of Christ later in Paradise after Jesus died on the cross and went to free the captives. Abraham at the time of Genesis 15 perhaps knew the vague hints about a Savior, but he didn't know Jesus until then. But, he had faith in God's promise.

This rules out the popular but mistaken idea that people in the Old Testament were saved one way and people in the New Testament are saved another way. If we look carefully at *Romans 3-5*, we see clearly that the way of salvation is exactly the same in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Abraham was saved by faith, and the ground of his salvation was the merit of the One Who was to come, which was then transferred to his account. So, he was saved by Christ just as much as we are.

OK – After God's promise to give Abraham descendants, he promises to give him the land of Canaan.

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

**SLIDE: *How shall I know that I will inherit it?***

"Then the LORD said to him, 'I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.' And he said, 'Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?'" (vv. 7-8).

We are told that Abraham believed God's promise about the land, but he still was overwhelmed and puzzled and finally he asked, probably very sheepishly, the big question: "*How can I know for sure?*" Abraham trusted God but was hanging by his fingernails. **Abraham wanted a sign that God's promise would be fulfilled.**

Every Christian wrestles with this desire for greater certainty at some point. Anyone can believe *in* God; even the demons do that. Believing God Himself is a harder task. Believing God involves living on the basis of the Word of God and trusting the promises of His covenant.

God in His grace granted Abraham further assurance.

**SLIDE: Abraham fights off birds**

So He said to him, "Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10 Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

cut the birds. 11 The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away. Genesis 15

In essence, God said: *“If you want to know for sure that My promises are reliable, go and get these animals and bring them here. Then cut their carcasses lengthwise, and set the pieces as a pathway on the ground.”*

- This was a typical covenant ritual – the two parties in the covenant would walk together thru the blood of the animals and make promises to each other and swear that they should themselves be killed IN A SIMILAR MANNER if either of them broke this covenant.

SLIDE: GREAT DARKNESS

Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” (vv. 12–16)

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

I want to look at the darkness that terrified Abraham because it is part of a pattern.

The word for “darkness” here is a derivative of the Hebrew word “chosek”. (koseck)

**Click:** It does mean darkness, but not like “nighttime”, but a very negative darkness. It carries with it the suggestion of misery, destruction, death, sorrow, wickedness. A kind of darkness that that blots out good.

The exact same word (chosek – *'kosek'*) is used in Genesis chapter 1 when we read:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.  
<sup>2</sup> The earth was without form, and void; and *darkness was on the face of the deep*; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.”

Darkness was on the face of the deep - darkness, “Chosek”, a darkness that is foreboding. God then said “Let there be light”.

- Like the Darkness of Genesis 1:1, this Light ‘owr’ (pronounced ‘ore’) is not the light we usually think about when we hear the word. This darkness and this light were on Day 1 of creation, but God did not create

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

objects that omit visible light (the sun, moon, stars) until Day 4. So, this darkness and light was different than the darkness and light we think about normally. God called this light 'good' – He didn't call the darkness good. The darkness is a foreboding darkness that carries an evil destructive sense. The Light is a spiritual light that energizes & enlightens & brings life – none of the creatures or Adam and Eve were created in the darkness – **chosek** – they were only created after the **owr** (pronounced 'ore') was present. – They were created in light. It is good, as opposed to evil – truth, as opposed to a lie.

- When you switch on a lamp in a dark room, you get visual light, the type of light talked about on day 4. When you're in spiritual darkness, God breaks in and brings Light to your spirit and you are a new creation.

We also see this in Egypt in the 9<sup>th</sup> plague, “So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick **darkness** in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another; nor did anyone rise from his place for three days. But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.”

- **Darkness, the word 'chosek'.**

The Egyptians felt the darkness. The Torah describes this darkness *not merely as the absence* of light or even the loss of sight. The plague of darkness is something thick and tangible.

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

**SLIDE: smoking oven, flaming torch**

It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. 18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram."

I think that most Christians are basically familiar with the concept of a *theophany*. A theophany is a manifestation of God. We know that God is a spirit, so He doesn't have a physical body. We cannot perceive Him with our normal vision because He is invisible, but there are times in biblical history when He makes Himself visible by manifesting Himself through some means of the created order.

When God met Moses in the wilderness while he was a shepherd, God appeared as a bush that was burning but was not consumed. During the exodus, the people of God were led by a pillar of cloud by day and by a pillar of fire by night. These were theophanies.

Likewise, the "smoking oven" and "burning torch" in Genesis 15:17 are theophanies. God is no longer just speaking to Abraham; He is manifesting Himself to Abraham.

The most significant in this event is what the oven and the torch did. In his vision, Abraham saw the theophany move

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

between the pieces of animals laid out in two lines. In a covenant ceremony, both parties walk thru the divided carcasses of the animals and make promises to each other.

- Here, God was the only One passing thru the pieces of the animals. God was dramatizing His promise by saying, *“Abraham, if I fail to keep My promise to you, may I be ripped apart, may I be cut asunder, even as you have cut apart these animals.”*

**And Notice PLEASE – Abraham did not walk the gauntlet—only God did.** The promise is all one-sided. God said, “I will bring these things to pass, Abraham, and I swear it by Myself.”

**SLIDE: PATTERN FOR Gospel of Grace**

Now, this is another pattern in our redemptive history – the Gospel of Grace. There is spiritual darkness—and then God dispels the darkness, breaks in with light. And He does all of the work Himself without any help from anyone else.

Speaking of patterns: Did you even wonder why the Jewish day begins as sundown or dusk?

- Genesis, it states “And there was evening and there was morning, one day.” By Divine decree, the Hebrew day starts

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

at dusk/sundown and goes thru the nighttime and then into the light of daytime.

- God is reinforcing the Gospel of Grace. Light dispels darkness, and He created the Sun all by Himself – He didn't need Adam's help to do it.
- We see this pattern again at the Cross, when Darkness covered the land, and then Jesus breaks forth in light on Resurrection Day!

There are other examples, but I think this is enough to illustrate the God-pattern:

#1. It is God Who does everything in dispelling the darkness- we contribute *nothing*.

#2. The Light comes after darkness – that's the pattern. That's the pattern for the end-times. So, Jesus said that when you see all these things (tribulation, etc.) look up, for your redemption is near.

*Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises*

**Peace in our time teaching**

- I want to pause briefly at this point to mention something that I know will bring me into conflict with some other committed Christians. I'm doing this at this point to illustrate how knowing the Hebrew mindset of reoccurring patterns in God's redemptive history and knowing the fact that God and Scriptural truth do not change can help us to avoid unintentionally being led down a false path.
  
- There is a viewpoint going around that, in these last days, Christians are going to have an increasing infilling of the Holy Spirit, experience a new revival, things will be getting better and better as we become more spiritually powerful, and we're going to change things here on earth so that Jesus can return for us – His bride – the Church.

**SLIDE** – **WHAT?** The teaching actually claims that Jesus the bridegroom is prevented from returning until His Bride is in better spiritual shape. The Lord cannot return until after the entire church gets the revelation of the

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

Bridegroom God, defeats God's enemies, and calls Jesus from heaven to return.

Where does this teaching come from? It mostly originates with an individual who claims to be one of the modern-day prophets; he says that God personally revealed this to them.

- Now, I won't mention his name, but his initials are Mike Bickle of the Kansas City Prophets and Toronto Blessing and International House of Prayer fame.
- Now – the idea that Christians will be more and more filled with the Holy Spirit as the end nears is the wish of every true Christian for ourselves and others. And the suggestion that we will develop spiritual power and not have to worry about any tribulation is comforting to hear; plus, the idea that we ourselves can hasten His return by becoming more holy certainly gives us an incentive to work harder.
- The problem is that Jesus said *just the opposite* would occur – He predicted an end-time apostasy in the church, not an end-time revival. He also warned that a spiritual deception will arise that is so convincing that even the elect would be led away, if that were possible.

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

- And regarding tribulation, a nun once told my 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys' class that since Jesus said there will be tribulation, we should expect to trib-bu-late.
  
- Unfortunately, the “peace in our time” teaching – not only by this individual but also by others who claim this mantle of prophesy – follows another pattern in Biblical history – it is a pattern where leaders falsely prophesize “peace, peace” just before darkness. The message of *“Peace and everything’s OK”* was preached by the multitudes just before the flood in spite of Noah’s warning; the same false assurance was preached by false prophets in Jeremiah’s time just before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, in spirt of Jeremiah’s warning. And it is estimated that a million Jews died during the Jewish revolt in 70AD. When the Romans surrounded the City of Jerusalem, inhabitants were assured by the priests and civic leaders that God would intervene to save them, whereas the Christians remembered Jesus’ prophesy and warning to flee when they see certain events fled the city. The Christians survived.

*Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises*

The Church has to begin to recognize illogical and unscriptural teachings, no matter how good they sound to the ear or how well-liked the person who is teaching it.

- The claim “God told me” cannot be blindly accepted based on someone’s misguided contention of prophetic status or on his likeability or even sincerity! Sincerity does not guarantee truth.

Does it make any sense that Jesus the Bridegroom is prevented from returning until His Bride has lost a few pounds and can sing hymns better? I know I’m being a bit facetious, but I’m trying illustrate a Biblical principle.

- If only Patti would pray another 5 minutes a day, and if only Sandy quits sneaking out at night to smoke Tiparillos and drink Red Bull in the gazebo, and if only Steve would stop lip-synching to Maria Carey songs during the worship service, then we will allow Jesus to return.

This entire notion is actually contrary to the principles in the gospel of grace. Think about it – the gospel of grace is that Jesus does everything to accomplish our salvation and we are *helpless* to contribute anything. This new teaching has US doing all the needed work and

*Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises*

Jesus is the One Who is helpless until we – thru our work and personal holiness – make it possible for Him to return.

- And besides conflicting with the Scriptural patterns of redemption, besides being contrary to plain logic, and besides being diametrically opposed to what Jesus said would occur at the end time, it is also contrary to Jewish cultural practices of Biblical times.
  - In Hebrew society, it is the Father who sets the time when the Groom can return for the Bride, not the Bridegroom and not the Bride. When Jesus came the 1<sup>st</sup> time to us, the Father determined the time – the Book of Galatians says that He came “in the fullness of time.” Noting to do with and advanced spiritual state of the Jewish people.
  - In the marriage process, the Groom doesn't set the date for his return and neither does the Bride set it – it is the Father of the groom who sets it.

So, the teaching is contrary to the Biblical patterns in redemption history – God always is the One who takes

*Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises*

the initiative and He depends on no one else for fulfillment of a promise. It would be contrary to the Biblical pattern for Jesus to depend on any human work.

➤ For some to prophesize today that it will be otherwise is just plain pride and presumption. The role of the Holy Spirit is to point toward Jesus – the fact that the teaching points to **US is evidence of its error.**

➤ The teaching shows an unfamiliarity with the concept of patterns in Biblical revelation, it rewrites what Jesus actually said would be the situation at the end, and shows an unfamiliarity with historic Hebrew wedding protocols.

➤ And, it also reveals a susceptibility to be deceived.

➤ Not questioning whether those that teach this love the Lord. I don't know, but I suspect most do Dispute between two ministers 'do you think that will you even see him in heaven?' 'Maybe, but probably not – he loves Jesus much more than I, and he will be so much closer to the throne than I am – perhaps I will be able to see the back of his head way in the distance.

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

- But, at the same time, I note that Jesus said to Peter – “get thee behind me Satan” when Peter opposed the Plan of God that the Messiah would die for the sins of the many.
- Jesus didn’t kick Peter out of the kingdom – but He stood up against false-thinking that ultimately undermined His sovereignty.

OK – I hope everyone is Ok – we can talk later if need be.

**SLIDE: BEHOLD**

READ: Isaiah 7:14 – “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a **sign: Behold**, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which translated means, “God with us.”

The word “behold” caught my eye in preparing presentation. I was surprised at its frequency. “Behold... ‘God will provide for Himself the lamb, my son.”

Behold is an exclamation meant to draw attention to something. It is used especially to announce things that are considered startling or important. And, in order to “*behold something*”, **there must be light present.**

*Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises*

The above prophesy of Isaiah was made in response to a situation when the king of Judah believed that he would be overwhelmed by his enemies. All the king saw was darkness and death. God made a promise for deliverance, but the king was skeptical and needed a sign to demonstrate that God's promise was real.

- Abraham also wanted a sign to assure him that God was sincere about His promise of land and descendants, and God walked thru the sacrifices to show His faithfulness. Here, God gives the sign of deliverance in the form of a prophecy: **Behold**, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us."

BEHOLD:

Luke 1:44: For **behold**, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy.

Luke 2: Simeon: "**Behold**, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

John 1:29 – The next day he \*saw Jesus coming to him and \*said, “**Behold**, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Matthew 3:16: After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and **behold**, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove *and* lighting on Him,

Matthew 21:5: “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘**Behold** your King is coming to you, Gentle, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

John 19:5: Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. *Pilate* \*said to them, “**Behold**, the Man!”

John 19:26: When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He \*said to His mother, “Woman, **behold**, your son!”

Matthew 27:51: And **behold**, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.

Mark 16:6: And he \*said to them, “Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

crucified. He has risen; He is not here; **behold**, *here is* the place where they laid Him.

[Here's the connection with the Birth of Jesus](#)

SLIDE: The Annunciation

**And behold**, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David." Luke 1:31-33

SLIDE: Magnificat

The angel tells Mary that her aged cousin Elizabeth is 6 months pregnant, and she goes to visit her. And on hearing Mary's voice, Elizabeth says "Behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy". Mary then says this prayer of praise:

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant... For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed...."

*Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises*

**SLIDE: Magnificat 2**

Mary ends her prayer by linking the birth of Jesus with God fulfilling the promise He made to Abraham. "He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as **he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring** forever."

**SLIDE: Zacharias – prophecy in Luke**

- Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, also links both his son John and Jesus with God fulfilling the promise He made to Abraham.

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people... to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham..."

**SLIDE: Zacharias 2**

"...because of the tender mercy of our God whereby the **sunrise** shall visit us from on high to give **light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death**, to guide our feet into the way of peace".

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

Then Zacharias prophesies about the sunrise and light breaking into the darkness and shadow of death.

**SLIDE: Angels announcing birth**

And **behold**, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and **the glory of the Lord shone around them**, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for **behold**, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this *will be the sign* to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

- This time, the sign will not be a torch and fire pot passing thru the blood of dead animals, it will be a newborn child – new life.
- Born in the darkness of night thru the pain of childbirth comes the Light of the world, the light to the Gentiles.
- Lying in a manger, here is the fulfilled promise that had been sealed in a covenant with Abraham 1800 years earlier. The covenant that was sealed by God Alone passing thru the slain animals

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

- Here is the Lamb Who lies among the animals that will soon no longer need to be slain to cover sin.
- Here is the SEED that blesses the Nations as promised to Abraham.
- And He is the Lamb Who came by the grace of God, not by the merit of any man.

Depression

This presentation touches a lot on a spiritual darkness and then God's light breaking thru. It's the most wonderful time of the year... but, not for everyone. Many people feel very lonely at Christmas for a variety of reasons and fall into a depression. Some even despair of seeing the light ever again.

- Despair can have many effects – you may not even want to get out of bed, or you may be afraid to go out of the house or meet other people. If you never had it, it's difficult to imagine its impact.
- Ever been seriously sick or in pain at night – wish for the sunrise? (expand) **Longing for the light**
- Many people were surprised to learn that Mother Teresa experienced several decades of spiritual dryness and a profound sense of being disconnected from God. Ten years after her death, a collection of her personal letters to her spiritual advisors was

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

published under a title that embodied her plea to Christ: "Come Be My Light". She described her spiritual depression at times, using words like "dryness" "darkness," and "torture." She wrote (quote): "(I feel as if) there is no God in me... the pain of longing is so great...I just long & long for God... The torture and pain I can't explain."

Such language brings to mind the **"dark night of the soul"** described by a catholic saint in the 16th century.

The "dark night of the soul" is a condition that the greatest of Christians have suffered from time to time. It was what provoked David to soak his pillow with tears. It was a condition that earned for Jeremiah the nickname, "The Weeping Prophet." It tormented Martin Luther do much that he thought it would destroy him. This is no ordinary fit of depression, but it is a depression that is linked to a crisis of faith, a crisis that comes when one senses the absence of God or has a feeling of abandonment by Him.

The fact that a Christian can feel depression in your emotions doesn't give evidence that there is Christ's joy is not deep within your heart. The joy that is presently hiding deep inside secretly sustains us through these dark nights and can never be extinguished by spiritual depression.

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

In his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthians, Paul addresses this issue.. He says that the treasure we have from God is a treasure that is contained not in vessels of gold and silver but in “jars of clay.” For this reason, he says, “that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us”. In other words, the power that turn this darkness to light can only come from God, not by our effort.

He writes: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” (2 Cor. 4:7-10).

This passage indicates that there ARE limits to the depression that we experience. The depression may be profound, but it is NOT permanent, nor is it fatal.

These are powerful events that we must endure, but in every place, he notes their limits. Afflicted, but not crushed. Perplexed, but not in despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Struck down, but not destroyed.

It is perfectly reasonable that believers can suffer grief. Jesus Himself was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Though grief may reach to the roots of our souls, it must not result in bitterness. Grief is a legitimate emotion, at times

Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises

even a virtue, but there must be no place in the soul for bitterness – has Bill has noted.

Luther said: *“When one is possessed with doubt, that though he call upon the Lord, (it seems like) he cannot be heard, and that God has turned his heart from him, and is angry, ... (you) must ... arm (yourself) with God's Word that promises that He hears (you). As to the when and how God will (respond), this is (completely unknown); the place, time, and person are accidental things; **the substance and essence is the promise.**”*

What is the promise? The promise is not to leave you orphan. As in the pattern of redemption, the dark night of the soul always gives way to the brightness of the noonday light of the presence of Jesus.

Isaiah 60: “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.”

**SLIDE: Behold**

“Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; For the LORD GOD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation” Isaiah 12:2

*Balaam: Oracle #2 Promises*

Rev. 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

John 6:40: For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who **beholds** the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

**Behold! Merry Christmas.**