

BALAAM'S PROPHECY AND ITS FULFILLMENT

*I see Him, but not now;
I behold Him, but not near;
A Star shall come out of Jacob;
A Scepter shall rise out of Israel....*

Numbers 24:17

If a man came to you today and said he was the Lord, you would have difficulty believing him. You probably wouldn't even *think* of believing him, especially if he seemed to be exactly the same as any other man, unless, of course, you expected the Lord to come to you and had ways of knowing He was the Lord when He came to you.

This was the use of the prophecies of the Lord's advent, and it was a very important use.

For when the Lord came on earth, He did not want to force anyone to believe in Him and to follow Him. He wanted people to be completely free to acknowledge Him as their Lord if they wanted to. And so, when He came on earth, He willed to be born as a little baby, and to grow up through childhood just as all people do. He seemed to be the same as other people.

But how, then, could people come to know that He was really not like other men, but was the Lord their God? They were able to do so, if they wished, because of the prophecies that the Lord made in His Word about His coming.

There are a great many prophecies about the Lord's coming in the Word—prophecies that not only told people that the Lord would come, but also how He would come, the signs by which He could be recognized, the things that would happen at the time of His coming, and the things that He would do when He came.

One of the best known prophecies was made by Balaam. Balaam was an ancient prophet who lived at the time when the Children of Israel were nearing the end of their journey from Egypt to the Land of Canaan. He had been called by the king of Moab to put a curse on the Children of Israel so that the king of Moab could defeat them in battle.

Even though Balaam knew that he could not utter a word as a prophet unless the Lord permitted him to, he still decided to try to curse the Children of Israel. He was tempted to do this evil thing by the great riches the king of Moab promised him. But each time Balaam tried to curse the Children of Israel, words of blessing came from his mouth instead! Finally, Balaam was inspired

to make a prophecy that a star would come out of Jacob and a scepter would arise out of Israel.

The ancient people, particularly the wise men living in the East, cherished this prophecy, for they knew that it meant that the Lord would come to establish His kingdom one day, and that a special star would appear at that time.

And so, hundreds of years later, as we are told in the second chapter of Matthew, when the Wise Men saw a special star appear in the skies, they knew that it was a sign that the Lord had come. It was a sign that a Divine King had been born in the Land of Israel. And, as you know, when they saw the star, they rejoiced greatly and made preparations for their long journey. First, they went to Jerusalem, thinking that they would find Him who was born King of the Jews in the palace at Jerusalem. But, when they got there, they did not find Him. Instead, they were told of another prophecy, which said that the Lord would be born in Bethlehem of Judea.

And when they found the Lord in Bethlehem, the Wise Men presented Him with their precious gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Then they went home by another way, without telling Herod exactly where the Lord could be found. And, as you know, after the Wise Men had gone, Joseph, being warned in a dream, took Mary and the Baby and fled down to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod. This was something that had also been prophesied in the Word hundreds of years before. And, when you read about the stories of the Lord's life on earth, if you pay attention, you will notice how very often it is said that prophecies are being fulfilled.

It was because He fulfilled these prophecies that people who wanted to were able to recognize the Lord, to believe in Him, and to follow Him, and so to be blessed by Him.

Now, the use of prophecy is not only to tell us about things that would take place in the future. They also teach us to know the Lord, and to know what is true and good from Him. When we learn the prophecies from the Word and learn about how the Lord fulfilled them all, we, too, can come to know the Lord if we want to, and to worship Him as our God. We, too, can come to love Him and seek to do His will. And so the prophecies of the advent in the Word help us, even as they helped people long ago when the Lord was born on earth.

Amen.