

BECAUSE OF THE WAY

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~ Our Spiritual Safari expedition through the entire Word of God is looking for the Lord Jesus Christ on every page of Holy Writ; and we're considering Him from the viewpoint that we are sinners against the Holy and True Living God, and we acknowledge our need for Him leading our lives as our personal Savior. I, personally, feel that if we attempt to approach the Word of God from any other viewpoint, then we are not doing His will His way according to Scripture. God told the children of Israel they must come to Him as sinners, and that they also must come by faith. Well, they have believed God now, after a frightful forty years in the wilderness, and the desert wandering has ended. We'll see them begin to march now. The children of Israel have said goodbye to Miriam and Aaron in our last report as they both died and were buried. Here, we see the children of Israel marching, and they're finally on their way to the Promised Land! They have just experienced victory for the first time....

XXI

1 And when king Arad the Canaanite, which dwelt in the south, heard tell that Israel came by the way of the spies; then he fought against Israel, and took some of them prisoners.

2 And Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities.

3 And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah.

4 And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.

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~ God gave the children of Israel the victory at this time, but they immediately became discouraged because they weren't permitted to travel through Edom. So, in that discouragement, they begin to complain - again, of course. I think that characterizes most of us today who complain and murmur if we can't just "go right through" some situation the easy way - just like these people complained. Well, this is the eighth and last murmuring they will do; and, once again, it concerns manna. Remember, all of their complaining began about manna by the mixed multitude. Manna contained all the vitamins and nutrients required to sustain life - but that wasn't good enough for these people. Deuteronomy tells us, "... their feet did not swell." That means it was a healthy diet and they didn't contract beriberi from exclusively eating manna continuously....

5 And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.

~ I think some people would complain about steak, lobster and ice cream with chocolate every day! Well, the day will come for the malcontent when they want for a peanut butter sandwich! It's very easy to complain about everything today; and even more so to complain about the things that pertain to the cause of Christ. It amuses me that people will complain about sitting for an hour in a church pew listening to a longer-than-average sermon, but they will sit for four hours on a metal bleacher in the rain and snow until their legs are absolutely numb watching others chase a ball up and down a field. Isn't it interesting how we whine and complain to God in a way we would never let others see; but how many times do we thank God and rejoice in His goodness to us? Well, the children of Israel are complaining here, and God is a little tired of it. The judgment time has come for that, too. They are asking God why He only gave them manna and why He left them in the wilderness to die and all that....

6 And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.

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7 Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.

~ Well, that sure drove the message home that they were going to have to begin with God as sinners. God will bring us a very long ways very quickly when we will turn to Him completely. Many are not sure if they are born again; in fact, most do not think they are. However, they have, at least, begun with God as a sinner. Most people have an idea they are going to begin with God by giving Him something that He can't live without, perhaps as a church member or a big giver to missionaries. Well, the only way God ever begins with anyone is as a sinner, friends. Until we have that self-realization at the foot of the cross, we are going nowhere in our relationship with Him. Christ died for sinners, but if you can't see yourself in that capacity, then Christ is not going to be claiming you.

Well, these people finally realize they have sinned against the Lord and that's the beginning of the way back to God for them. However, let's keep this real because this area of doctrine gets very muddy sometimes. After we turn to the Lord, we are going to have to have some evidence of our faith in our lives. If we have no evidence of that faith, then we simply have no faith. Many people promise God they'll be good little boys and girls, but they never seem to get around to doing that, because they are not good naturally – they're sinners. However, even after all of that, we can believe God when He tells us that He still allows us to come to Him by faith; and that He always makes a way back for us. THAT, my friends, is the wonder of it all....

8 And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.

9 And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

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~ That is a marvelous lesson. The children of Israel were to look upon this brazen serpent for life by faith. I'm sure many refused to look upon it; most people probably thought it was nonsense and rejected it wholesale without regard. Most of them were looking for something that was a little more tangible than simply looking upon something man-made. Well, those who refused died and we don't have to guess at the meaning of any of this. When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus that dark night, Jesus saith, "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness; even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." Jesus is lifted up by dying for you and me and Barabbas, who were all murderers, thieves and robbers and liars who are ALL guilty and worthy of death. Jesus wasn't worthy of death, but He was made sin for us. Whosoever believeth in Christ Jesus shall not perish but have everlasting life. This is all done because God loves us, but God doesn't save us by His love. God so loved the world that He gave Jesus for those who would look upon Him and believe; believe as you watch Christ take your place on the cross - where you absolutely deserve to be.

Those who looked – lived; those who refused to look upon the serpent of brass – did not live! It was just that simple then and it's just that simple today; either you are a child of God who is looking to Christ as your Savior because you are a sinner - or you are not. If you're not looking to Christ, then it doesn't matter how many times you have been baptized or how often you go to church or how many churches you join or how many ceremonies you've conducted or how much money you give the starving children of the world – you just aren't in Christ! You still remain a hell-doomed sinner until you look to the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior; it's just as simple as that and it's just as complicated as that. The vast number of people who look to their own goodness and works and their own brand of self-righteousness is utterly terrifying today! They claim, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus," but Jesus won't be claiming them. They truly but erroneously believe that their own goodness is going to save them....

10 And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in Oboth.

11 And they journeyed from Oboth, and pitched at Ijeabarim, in the wilderness which is before Moab, toward the sunrising.

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12 From thence they removed, and pitched in the valley of Zared.

13 From thence they removed, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, which is in the wilderness that cometh out of the coasts of the Amorites: for Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites.

14 Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the LORD, What he did in the Red sea, and in the brooks of Arnon,

15 And at the stream of the brooks that goeth down to the dwelling of Ar, and lieth upon the border of Moab.

16 And from thence they went to Beer: that is the well whereof the LORD spake unto Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water.

17 Then Israel sang this song, Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it:

~ So, we see the children of Israel pick up and move on after the fiery serpent incident. Arnon is a river, and if you have a good Bible with a map, then you can trace their journeys all the way through here. The names of the places have very interesting spiritual meanings. They are singing songs as they move along. This is the first song of praise and thanksgiving Israel has sung since crossing through the Red Sea. The entire wilderness journey has been nothing but desert blues for them. Most of their murmuring and complaining was through their modern music, too - up until this point. Here, we hear the halleluiah chorus; and the thanks they give is for provisions made by supplying water....

18 The princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it, by the direction of the lawgiver, with their staves. And from the wilderness they went to Mattanah:

~ Well, that seems to bring capital and labor together. If you follow along in this chapter, you will find the Lord giving them a victory over Sihon the

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king of the Amorites. Old man Sihon is another one who wouldn't allow Israel to pass through the borders of his country. Well, they're going to pass through this king's borders this time! After that, we see the king of Moab come out and refuse to let them cross through - and Moab goes down just as hard as the rest of them. So, with that, the children of Israel march, and they are singing praises to God as they go. They are now ready - finally - to enter into the Promised Land; although we will have to wait through one more full book of the Bible to see them do so....

19 And from Mattanah to Nahaliel: and from Nahaliel to Bamoth:

20 And from Bamoth in the valley, that is in the country of Moab, to the top of Pisgah, which looketh toward Jeshimon.

21 And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, saying,

22 Let me pass through thy land: we will not turn into the fields, or into the vineyards; we will not drink of the waters of the well: but we will go along by the king's high way, until we be past thy borders.

23 And Sihon would not suffer Israel to pass through his border: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel into the wilderness: and he came to Jahaz, and fought against Israel.

24 And Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from Arnon unto Jabbok, even unto the children of Ammon: for the border of the children of Ammon was strong.

25 And Israel took all these cities: and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all the villages thereof.

26 For Heshbon was the city of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab, and taken all his land out of his hand, even unto Arnon.

27 Wherefore they that speak in proverbs say, Come into Heshbon, let the city of Sihon be built and prepared:

28 For there is a fire gone out of Heshbon, a flame from the city of Sihon: it hath consumed Ar of Moab, and the lords of the high places of Arnon.

29 Woe to thee, Moab! thou art undone, O people of Chemosh: he hath given his sons that escaped, and his daughters, into captivity unto Sihon king of the Amorites.

30 We have shot at them; Heshbon is perished even unto Dibon, and we have laid them waste even unto Nophah, which reacheth unto Medeba.

31 Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites.

32 And Moses sent to spy out Jaazer, and they took the villages thereof, and drove out the Amorites that were there.

33 And they turned and went up by the way of Bashan: and Og the king of Bashan went out against them, he, and all his people, to the battle at Edrei.

34 And the LORD said unto Moses, Fear him not: for I have delivered him into thy hand, and all his people, and his land; and thou shalt do to him as thou didst unto Sihon king of the Amorites, which dwelt at Heshbon.

35 So they smote him, and his sons, and all his people, until there was none left him alive: and they possessed his land.

XXII

1 And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan by Jericho.

2 And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.

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3 And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they were many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel.

4 And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time.

5 He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me:

~ Our safari ends this report with the beginning of the very long account of Balaam the prophet, son of Beor. His story runs for three and a half chapters as this man walks out before us and onto the pages of our Scripture. I will not be able to interpret this strange man completely for you at this time. That will have to wait until Simon Peter can explain it in his epistles, Jude can clarify it in his - and then Christ Himself can publish the disposition in Revelation. We'll encounter a few more incomprehensible characters along our way; but Balaam is certainly unique. We really – really – really need to become acquainted with this man. If you ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the hearts and motives of these Biblical men as we go – He will! Only the Lord can clearly delineate these characters in just a few words. Some men of the Bible just walk in the shadows all fuzzy and hazy and out of sight. Darkness is what hides their true natures of distortion and twisted individualism. I'm not sure I estimate them all correctly, to be quite honest; Cain, Esau, Balaam, Samson, Saul and Absalom; I'm not completely sure about any of them, to be honest.

What about the rich young ruler that desired to follow Christ? Did he ever return and follow the Lord? Many people hope that he did! Some even think he may have been Saul of Tarsus. Again, I just don't know. What about Judas? Most of us feel like lost individuals at some point but Judas is another very strange Bible character. Judas followed the Lord for three years and no one suspected anything of him except Jesus Himself. Then, we

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have Demas who seemed so faithful but forsook the apostle Paul. Ananias and Sapphira are another set of enigmatic and mysterious characters - just like Balaam; except Balaam may be the strangest in all of the Word of God! Is Balaam a genuine prophet of God? Some scholars believe that he was; others believe he was a religious racketeer. The consensus amongst conservatives seems to be about equal. The question is: is Balaam sincerely seeking to serve God or is he a fake and as phony as a seven-dollar bill?

You will have to be his judge as we attempt to make a composite profile and consider all of his ways before we render our verdict. We will be his judge and jury as the Holy Spirit lives through us to reveal that we must dismiss Balaam as unworthy of thoughtful consideration when we see the Word of God attach a rather significant and frightening role to this man in the life of the nation Israel. Micah tells us we better not forget Balaam. Some people sweep Balaam aside without a second thought, but more is said about Balaam in Scripture than there is about Mary, the mother of Jesus! More is said about Balaam than ten of the twelve apostles. Balaam is mentioned three times in the New Testament and each time it is connection with apostasy. Peter tells us about the way of Balaam; Jude tells us about the error of Balaam and Revelation tells us about the doctrine of Balaam. We need to know about Balaam, friends; and it just so happens we are going to spend a little time doing just that in our Spiritual Safari.

Balaam was a Midianite brought from Aram and he became a prophet with a very wide reputation. Balaam achieved results that are documented. When we first meet Balaam, he will seem like the genuine article, to be sure. He comes along just as Israel is ready to enter the land! Along comes Balak after him, who has no idea whether to attack Israel or attempt to make peace with them; and he solicits the services of Balaam. Balak is in a bad state, and he wants to know exactly what he should do. Well, in our next report, Balaam is going to show king Balak what king Balak should do - and it is as unholy as it can possibly be ~

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