



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Numbers 24:14-25

“Skywatch 85’: Halley’s Comet or Jacob’s Eternal Star”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We’re certainly happy to have you here this morning, and these past few Sunday’s we have been departing a bit from our customary form of ministry which is the ministry of expository teaching of specific books of the Bible and we have been talking about the method of grace in our redemption and then last Sunday and this Sunday we are devoting our time to thinking about the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ in connection with Christmas.

And last week we looked at that famous Messianic passage in Genesis chapter 49 and verse 10, where Jacob when he was giving the blessing upon his sons for Judah gave this remarkable promise, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come and unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be.” And we tried to point out that contrary to what some people tell us, that is that the early church sometimes in the second century there is a sense in which New Testament scholarship is now believes were really written in the first century though along time after our Lord’s death. The writers of Scripture are said by a great deal of scholarship to ransack the Old Testament to find texts in order to prove that Jesus was the Messiah, the texts being taken out of their contexts and the texts not really in context saying what they have attempted to make them say. And we pointed out that in connection with Genesis

49 that if these writers really did ransack the Old Testament for texts to prove that Jesus was the Messiah, the way they used the Old Testament was very restrained, because they omitted some that were very very definitely Messianic such as 49:10 in Genesis and the passage we’re going to look at today, and furthermore even omitted texts that modern scholarship would regard as Messianic texts. So, like so many of the theories of men, they do not bear up under the test of time.

Our Scripture today is Numbers chapter 24 verse 14 through verse 25 and we are looking at the last of four prophecies given by a heathen prophet. I say heathen, there is a little bit of a debate over this point, but since Balaam’s name appears in the New Testament at least three times and each of these three times in an unfavorable way, it seems more likely that we should treat him as a man who had a great knowledge of facts about God and even about the Lord God of Scripture but who did not in his own heart know what it was to know that God in a saving way. The fourth of his prophecies is a remarkable prophecy as also are the other three, but this one stands out and particularly for the seventeenth verse which will be the focus of our attention today. In the 14th verse now as he draws near the end of his prophetic ministry to Balak, King of the Moabites, we read,

“And now, behold, I go unto my people: come therefore, and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days. And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: He hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: (Now this, because of the construction of the Hebrew text, can mean I see him but not now, I behold him but not near. In other words, it’s a reference to the fact that he sees this individual in his ecstatic trance, his prophetic ecstasy, but the fulfillment of the words he for sees or sees as being

in the distant future.) there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.”

There are different ways of rendering some of these words; I’ll pass by them because this is a rather debated section from the standpoint of the Hebrew text. But I would like to make one comment, last week, in discussing Genesis 49:10, I pointed out that in the Aramaic paraphrase of the Old Testament in Targum Onkelos, the term Messiah was added by the Jewish paraphasers, indicating that the Jewish interpreters of the Old Testament regarded that text as a Messianic text. In other words, a text that had to do with the Messiah. And Meshikah, the Aramaic word for Messiah was used in that specific text.

Now it so happens that in Targum Onkelos again, at Numbers 24:17, we again have the term Meshikah, introduced into the text as explanatory of one of these key terms and that too indicates that they regarded this text as a Messianic text. So it’s a text agreed to by Christians and by Jewish interpreters as being a text referring to the Messiah who is to come. Verse 18 continues,

And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly. Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city. And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable, (And by the way, the term parable does not have the same sense as it does in the New Testament as an illustrative story, but in this context, it refers to a prophetic burden that is something that the prophet says he must say because it’s been given him.” He took up his parable and said, Amalek was the first of the nations; but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever. (Now first of the nations does not mean that Amalek was the first nation but rather that he was the first of the nations to oppose the Nation Israel.) And he looked on the Kenites, and took up his parable, and said, Strong is thy dwelling

place, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock. Nevertheless the Kenite shall be wasted, until Asshur shall carry thee away captive. And he took up his parable, and said, Alas, who shall live when God doeth this! And ships shall come from the coast of Chittim, and shall afflict Asshur, and shall afflict Eber, and he also shall perish for ever. And Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place: and Balak also went his way.”

Now actually, that’s a brief summary of what happened to Balaam after he gave this prophecy. But there is more to it as the remainder of the Book of Numbers indicates. What seems to be the teaching of the Book of Numbers is that after Balak refused the council of Jehovah through the false prophet Balaam, Balaam may have thought it worthwhile to try to sell his information for he was that kind of prophet. He may have gone to Israel in the plains of Moab and recounted to them the prophecies, hoping that they would put some money in his pocket. They evidently refused to do that. Now this is speculation, you understand? This is known in critical scholarship of the Old Testament as the S. Lewis Johnson theory. [Laughter] But it’s not really known that way because this has been suggested by some German commentator some time ago. But at any rate, he went back to; he may have gone back to Balak and said, “I know the way in which you can get Israel to sin. I cannot do anything but prophesy the word of God to them, I cannot prophesy anything but God’s blessing upon them, but since we cannot corrupt them with a false prophecy, (it was thought if a prophecy was made that even a false prophecy would come to pass often with reference to people.) There is another way we can corrupt them, we can corrupt them from within.” And so we read in the very next verse of the next chapter, “And Israel abode in Shatter, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab.” And then over in chapter 31 of the Book of Numbers, we read, that Balaam was slain, but then in verse 16, “Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.” In

other words, corrupt them by means of sexual enticement so that they will worship the false gods that you worship. And that evidently was a successful ploy on the part of Balaam and therefore the verse with which our Scripture reading ends is just a general statement that ultimately Balaam went back home and returned to Mesopotamia and Balak went back to the land of the Moabites. May the Lord Bless this reading of his word and let’s bow together for a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] We give Thee thanks, Lord for this beautiful day, for this wonderful season in which we think of the ministry of the Lord Jesus in such a special way. We thank Thee that he took to himself an additional nature and as the Son of God came as the incarnate Son and lived in our midst a life that glorified Thee, that fulfilled all of the commands of eternal God in heaven, all of the terms of the Covenant of Redemption, and then ultimately offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross at Calvary for the people of God. We thank Thee that his name is called Immanuel and that his name is called Jesus, for he saves his people from their sins. How marvelous to be one of his people, and to know the forgiveness of our sins, truly, Lord, Thou hast been marvelous in abundant grace to us and today we give Thee thanks.

We pray that our own enjoyment of the Christmas season may have him first in our minds and in our hearts and in our families. Deliver us Lord from the superficiality and artificiality of the society of which we have become a part. And Lord, deliver us from the false worship of the Lord Jesus Christ at this Christmas season. Enable us to put our priorities where they ought to be in the worship of the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us. We are grateful and thankful for the blessings we have from him.

We pray Thy blessing upon this gathering of people here. Bless Lord, this season for them in a very special way. We pray for this assembly, we ask Thy blessing upon it and all of its activities. We pray Thy blessing upon the whole church of Jesus Christ at this time of the year, may we be fruitful in Christian witness. We pray for our country.

We ask especially Lord for some who are unable to be here due to illness, some who are in the hospital, we especially pray Thy blessing upon them, give healing Lord and comfort and consolation and the assurance of Thy presence and blessing, in the midst of all of the experiences of life. And we pray Thy blessing upon us as we sing, as we listen to the word of God today. In Jesus Name. Amen

[Message] Our subject this morning as you can tell from the reading of the bulletin is, “Skywatch 85: Halley’s Comet or Jacob’s Eternal Star.” Literally, the entire world is watching the skies, east and west. And the east and the west have a scientific interest in all of this, as you well know. Europe, with its European Space administration, has its skycraft; Giotto Russia has its Vega I and Vega II; Japan has its Suisei and Sakigake. I hope I pronounced that, at least our Japanese friends can recognize it, and the USA has Spartan and Astro I. Comet fever has attacked a great part of the United States, and there’s a great deal of fallout. Candy pills in honor of Halley’s Comet, tailed Frisbees all of these things in addition to the customary things such as all kinds of tee-shirts, medals and other types of gimmicks characterize the interest of the world in Halley’s Comet. Scientists are particularly interested, because they hope that perhaps they can get some light on the beginning of our solar system.

Now we think we already have that light, but many people do not think we have that light and so they are looking for light on the solar system, some clues to that. And also, they are still looking for extra terrestrial life. Why with the example of life that we have here anyone would want to find life any where else is beyond me. Perhaps it’s to protect ourselves from life like our life out there that would make some sense. But at any rate, all of these things are moving our scientists and therefore moving our world. But they’re all looking for the wrong star. They’re looking for the wrong heavenly body. The mad prophet from Mesopotamia gave us more important stellar insight than Halley’s cosmic snowball ever will.

If you’ll remember the story of Balaam, what an interesting character Balaam was, and what an interesting character Balak, the King of Moab was too for that matter. Israel has reached the borders of the Promised Land and there in the plains of Moab, and they hesitate there. And Balak, seeing the way in which Israel has dealt with Og King of Bashan and others, is very worried about his own nation, and so he looks out on this vast number of people and as he reflects in his royal mind he thinks if we could just get a prophet, a true prophet to prophesy against them then surely we could protect ourselves against terrestrial life represented by the children of Israel. And so word comes, there’s a fellow over in Mesopotamia by the name of Balaam, he’s a very good prophet, why don’t you send for him? And so Balak sent for Balaam and asked him to come and curse the children of Israel. And Balak first refused and then thinking that perhaps he could be persuaded by the kinds of things that many of us preachers are persuaded by, he sent men back with the rewards of divination in his hand. No doubt the whole system of how he might send out prayer letters and other things in order to get a lot of money. But at any rate, Balaam, after the Lord has said, “You shall not go,” tells the messengers from Balak, “Well, I’ll ask the Lord about it.”

Now the Lord had already given the word, but after all, the rewards of divination are enough to make a man ask the Lord a second time, and so he asks the Lord about going back and cursing the children of Israel. Then surprisingly, the Lord, because after all there is such a thing as the decretive will of God which is always carried out and then there is such a thing as the perceptive will of God the thing that pleases him. And there are things that are contrary to his perceptive will that come to pass. His decretive will will come to pass as he determines it will come to pass. As a matter of fact, even as Balaam knows from his prophecy because he prophesied just before this last prophecy, “God is not a man that he should lie neither the son of man that he should repent, hath he said and shall he not do it or hath he spoken and shall he not make it good?”

And so Balaam asked and the Lord said, “Alright, you may go, but you can only say what I tell you to say.” That’s a bad thing for a false prophet, he can not even utter any of his false prophecies, and he’s going to have to give the truth. But the rewards of divination are strong enough for him to go, and so he goes. And on the way, God speaks again to him out of mercy, he didn’t have to do it, but he was riding on a calm ass. As we will see, the real ass was riding, not being ridden. [Laughter] At any rate, at a certain point in the journey, the ass goes off into a vineyard and Balaam beats the ass and then they come to a very narrow place and the ass pushes him against the wall, and Balaam beats him again. And then finally the ass just falls down and Balaam again beats him and the ass turns and speaks.

Now that’s a miracle. That’s one of the miracles of the Bible. I heard a story one time of a unbeliever who was discussing with a believer Balaam’s ass. And he said I’d like to see you make an ass talk, and the believer was quick in replying, he said, “I’d like to see you make an ass.” So any one who can create an ass can create the ability for the ass to speak on occasion.

Well, E.B. Robertson who was professor of New Testament at Southern Baptist Seminary and one of the best known of the last generation of New Testament scholars once brought in some papers which he had spent the weekend grading. And his Greek class and he put the papers down on the desk, he said, “In Old Testament times it used to be regarded as a miracle when God spoke through an ass, but I see he is evidently going to do it again in our generation.” [Laughter]

By the way, there’s a very interesting blunder in connection with Balaam’s ass that I’ve always enjoyed thinking about. Back in the old days at Oxford University, all the students of the University had to take an exam in Scripture, think of that. Separation of Church and State? No separation like ours there. Our society is really fast on the way of making our society a godless society. But there in Brittan, they had to take Scripture exams before they could graduate from Oxford. Everybody, no matter what course you

were taking. So you can imagine, there were some rather interesting answers given to the questions that were given through the years. One fellow was answering the question, “Who was the first King of Israel?” And either by accident or real knowledge he replied, “Saul.” And then he wanted to give a little additional information so he said, “Who also was called Paul.” [Laughter] But one that I like particularly is the fellow who was asked to give the two instances in the Bible where we have the record of lower animals having spoken. And he at once replied, “Balaam’s ass.” And the examiner said, “That’s right, that’s one, now the other.” And the young man said, “The whale, the whale said to Jonah, almost thou persuades me to become a Christian.” [Laughter]

Well, Balaam of course was then after the animal spoke, he was given to know that the reason the ass had acted as he was acting was because the Angel of Jehovah was standing in the way of Balaam going back to Balak the King of Moab. And so it was a preincarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ. God in mercy warned this prophet that even though he had said yes you many go, it was still not the thing that pleased him. Balaam then comes into the land, meets Balak, you can read all about it in Numbers 22, 23 and 24 and it’s a remarkable series of four prophecies all of which are Messianic prophecies.

An amazing thing when you think about it that God should use the mouth of this Mesopotamian ass if we may call him that, this Mesopotamian ass, to give us his word concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. You touch these chapters, read them through, ponder them and you will see that these prophecies have to do with divine sovereignty; I’ve read you one text. They have to do with unconditional promises made to the Nation Israel. They have to do with distinguishing grace, how he singles out the Nation Israel for special blessing as over against other nations, establishing the principle of distinguishing grace by a sovereign God. You also have marvelous statements concerning the Savior King who is to come, one of which we will spend a little time on in just a moment. You have references to divine judgment of the nations, and it’s ultimately

the supremacy of the Nation Israel in the earth, all plainly set out here. You have reference to the Old Testament believer’s death, and the things that have to do with that. Chapter 23 and verse 10, Balaam cries out, “Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!”

And then not to neglect this, for this is very important, you have Balaam making some remarkable statements concerning justification by divine sovereignty and faith. Notice the 21st verse of chapter 23, “He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perversity in Israel: the LORD his God is with him and the shout of a king is among them.” Now if there was any nation that was characterized by iniquity and perversity, it is the Nation Israel. Read the Old Testament, stubborn, stiff necked. God says of them. If he were describing us he would say much the same thing of course. But they stood out because of the marvelous way in which God dealt with them as over against the way he dealt with other nations. He showered his blessings upon them and he rebelled against his word. So to say with reference to them he has not beheld iniquity in Jacob nor has he seen perversity in Israel is a startling thing. Can only be understood by the doctrine of justification by faith. That is that on the basis of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the merits that he has won by his atoning sacrifice, those who through faith have believed in him are declared righteous.

Now that is a remarkable thing, every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ declared righteous before God. Declared to possess the righteousness of God, though we may be perverse, and iniquitous in our natures, declared righteous, for we are seen in our covenantal head, the Lord Jesus Christ. And then we become the recipients of the sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit who begins the long and it must be tedious work to bring us into likeness to the Son of God, completed when he comes and we enter into his presence. What a marvelous thing it is to be justified, to be declared righteous through

faith. Do you have it? Is that your possession? Can you really say that by virtue of what Christ has done, I stand righteous before the Lord God, accepted in the beloved one?

I have a former student who has a very important position today. He’s the pastor of the Moody Memorial Church. In one of his tapes which I listened to last year, he told the following rather remarkable story I think. Some folks bought a Rolls Royce and were later touring Europe. Well when they got over in West Germany, the Rolls broke down, which is a comfort to people who own Olds. But at any rate, it broke down and they couldn’t find anybody who could work on it and so they called the company and the company sent two mechanics out by plane to work on the car. And they arrived; they actually had to take the motor apart. They took it apart, they put it back together again, fixed it and the travelers went on their way. They finished their journeys, and then a few months later they remembered they had never received a bill from the Rolls Company. They had been expecting one for the mechanics little excursion, and since they didn’t receive any, they thought they should call the company. That may have been unwise, but it was useful for this illustration at any rate. So I guess it was divine providence that they called. Anyway, they called and they said, “Isn’t there a bill?” And the Rolls Company said, “There is no bill,” they said, “As a matter of fact, we have no record of this having happened. In fact, we have no record of anything ever having gone wrong with a Rolls Royce.” [Laughter] Well, we all know that things do happen to Rolls and that individual did, but from the company’s standpoint, nothing ever went wrong with a Rolls. Well that’s a poor illustration but at least points to the fact that when a person believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, he stands justified by virtue of what Christ has done.

You’re not perfect, and in fact, as I look over the audience, some of you don’t look honest enough to be perfect. [Laughter] This is the day for fun; I hope none of you hold me responsible for what I say. But I know the Scriptures say, “All we like sheep have gone astray we’ve turned everyone to his own way and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” But God has so far as believers are concerned, no record of our

lost condition before him in the legal sense because Christ has borne our judgment and through his merits we stand righteous before the triune God in Heaven.

The implications of this doctrine include such things as his death covers our past, our present and our future. And of course, basic is our acceptance through faith of what he has done. That too wrought by the Lord God in sovereign grace. Our feelings do not really have anything to do with this. You might say, I travel a good bit, I don’t travel as much as I did, but you might come to American Airlines at the gate entering the plane and say, “You know I don’t really feel worthy to get on this American Airlines plane, I’ve had a very difficult day here in Dallas, and as a matter of fact, I know that my life isn’t what it should be I just don’t really feel worthy of getting on this plane.” Now if you started saying that to some of the people around the gate at American Airlines, they would say, “such people only have one oar in the water,” or “the light is on but no one is home,” or that “they have too many birds sitting on their antenna” or something like that. Strictly speaking, American Airlines is only interested in one thing, and that is your ticket. Do you have a ticket? And if you have a ticket, no matter how you feel, you can ride on that plane. Well so far as divine justification is concerned, the Lord Jesus has accomplished the work, God the Holy Spirit in his marvelous distinguishing grace brings us to faith and trust in Christ and we stand on the basis of what Christ has done. His work is reckoned to us and we can say I am accepted in the Beloved One.

Now Balaam, whether he understood that or not, he said that remarkable statement that God has not seen iniquity in Jacob, nor has he beheld perversity or perverseness in Israel. Well he has given his four prophecies, and Balaam is the kind of person who keeps on talking Balak didn’t want to hear anymore, but nevertheless, he goes on talking. He talks in astrological imagery. And that’s not surprising, because after all he was a Babylonian diviner and stars were used metaphorically of kings. You even find that in the Old Testament, you have the King of Babylon called Lucifer, son of the morning. And so that figure of a star suggests a king.

Well he begins his fourth oracle which is partly an expansion of the third, stressing the feats of Israel’s future king, the star. And he points out right at the beginning; it looks on to messianic times. Notice the 14th verse, “And now, behold, I go unto my people: come therefore, and I will advertise thee (That means I will inform thee, I will give the counsel concerning) what this people Israel shall do to thy people in the latter days.” Now this particular expression, b’ achariyth eyowmem, in the Hebrew text is an expression that almost always, perhaps not every case, but almost always refers to the Messianic days of the future gathered around the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. So it’s not surprising then this prophecy looks on into the future far beyond David in the Old Testament because after the time of David the prophets of the Old Testament used this prophecy when they refer to the future, indicating that they did not regard this as fulfilled in Old Testament times.

So, Balaam is going to go on, he’s going to talk about a star. One of the interesting things I think about Halley’s Comet is that for a long time, comets were thought to be harbingers of doom. And in fact and in some of the representations that artists have made of the appearance of the comet in years past represent that fact. And the famous Bayeux tapestry made many centuries ago has a picture of Halley’s Comet and then it has a picture of about six men who are obviously Anglo-Saxon. It’s representing the Norman Conquest. And then on one side are others and these men are standing in awe and the Latin expression is related to the word to wonder, *miro* and *stella* which means star and it says, “They are wondering over the star.” Well, that’s really the way stars affect us still. But especially a wonder in the heavens like that.

Well Balak, I say, couldn’t get Balaam to stop talking. There’s a story about the late Kingfish Huey Long. He’s been speaking on a bill in the United States Senate for more than two hours when he called for a glass of water. “Mr. Speaker, I rise to a point of order,” said Senator Johnson of California. “State your point of order,” the chairman said. “Mr. Speaker,” Senator Johnson said with a straight face, “I would like to draw the

attention of the Senator from Louisiana that it is out of order to run a windmill with water.” [Laughter]

Well, Balaam is going to go on talking even though Balak doesn’t want to hear anymore because everything that Balaam says is contrary to the Moabites. And he’s talking about Israel and he’s talking about the blessing of the Lord upon them. But we’re grateful for this remarkable statement in verse 17, “I shall see him but not know, I behold him but not nigh, there shall come a star out of Jacob.” What do we think of when we think of a star? Well we think of the sudden appearance of the heavenly body because late in the afternoons as you know when you look up into the skies, there are no stars and then you look back up just a short while later and there are the stars. They do appear suddenly. And then of course most of us think of looking at the stars against the background of darkness. So those two features, sudden appearance and darkness characterize stars.

And when we think of the Lord Jesus Christ, we think of the star as he says here out of Jacob and we think of him against the blackness of humanity. And our Lord’s appearance among us in his First Advent is just like that. John says that “his life was the light of men, and the light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not.” We see so many illustrations of that today. You know I don’t think I’ve ever seen in my long life a Christmas season quite like this season to this point. I don’t think I’ve ever seen as much materialism, artificiality, false representation of what Christmas is about as I have seen this particular Christmas season. It is very difficult to find any true representation of the Lord Jesus Christ in anything that is being said. The songs that are sung, the things that are said, the things that are being advertised, the characteristics of people and even Christian people is a most discouraging and disappointing thing. But the star, out of Jacob, we’re never disappointed in that.

Mr. Spurgeon said he’s a symbol of government, the star, the pattern of constancy; you can always count on those stars when you want to find Halley’s Comet, you’ll look

up and you look for the Pleiades and on the basis of where they are, you can locate the comet. Men who traveled the seas could never had traveled the seas were it not for the Polar Star and the stars of the heavens; they are constant, representing the faithfulness of the Lord God. Objects of wonder, and the Morning Star of course, the herald of the day to come and the Lord Jesus called even that in the word of God. He says further, “A Scepter shall rise out of Israel.” And there again, we are called again to remember that Israel is destined for rule in this earth, let us never forget that.

Now there is a long series of Messianic prophecies which would take us literally many hours to unfold. I just hit the high points. Remember, when man was placed in the Garden of Eden, God said, “He’s to be the king of the earth, he’s to have dominion.” Then man fell, and shortly after man fell comes the first of the Messianic promises and we are taught by that promise and prophecy that the destiny of man shall be reached by a man, the seed of the woman. Shortly after, in further limitation of the Messianic program, we are told by Noah’s prophecy that this Redeemer, this seed of the woman shall come from the Semitic branch of mankind, distinguishing grace already in operation. Then we are told in the promises made to Abraham that he shall come from Abraham’s family, further distinction and limitation. Then we are told in Genesis 49:10 that he shall come from the tribe of Judah. There are many other things that we could add. We are told in Daniel when he should come, we are told in Micah where he would be born, in other words, Holy Scripture has unfolded a remarkable series of statements that would have identified the Lord Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah. That’s why Jesus said on the Emmaus Road, “All fools and sloth heart to believe all that the prophets have written, ought not the Messiah to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory,” and beginning at Moses and all the prophets he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

So the Scepter shall rise out of Israel. All of the societies of humanity opposed to the Lord God shall be smitten by the scepter, all the children of confusion shall be

destroyed, “Israel shall do valiantly, out of Jacob shall he come that shall have dominion and shall destroy him that shall remaineth of the city.” Amelek is pointed out for special treatment because Amelek was the first of the nations to open national conflict with Israel. And finally, the section ends with the prophetic reaction of, “And Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place: and Balak also went his way.”

Anyone reading these prophecies would come to the conclusion that Balaam was an eloquent prophet. But he was a whited sepulcher. Actually, Balaam would have been better off if he had never known about Yahweh. One thinks of some of the things that the Lord Jesus said in his ministry. In Matthew chapter 12, and verse 45 in one of his accounts of the unclean spirit going out of the man and walking through dry places seeking rest, finding none, “Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.” He said of Judas, “the son of men goeth as it is written of him, but woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed, it had been good for him if he had never been born.” And so in the case of Balaam, it would have been good for him if he had never been born, never known the things that he knew, for he knew many many things about the Lord God. Listen to the way he describes himself. He says, he’s the man whose eyes are open, he’s the man who’s heard the words of God, he’s the man who knows the knowledge of the Most High and he has been given Messianic prophecies, a lost man.

Alexander White, the great Scottish preacher, preaching on Balaam commenting upon the fact that the Angel of Jehovah caused Balaam to have a crushed foot to remind him that he was proceeding in a path that was contrary to the will of God, asked his congregation, “Do you have a crushed foot tonight?” It’s a question we can all think about. What about the path that we’re following? Is it true that God has been speaking to us and warning us and ministering to us, seeking to shepherd us back into the right

way, trying to bring us to put our priorities where they ought to be? But we have refused like Balaam. And with crushed feet are seeking to follow our own will.

Well they’re remarkable prophecies, I just want to conclude with this comment, Balaam in one of his prophecies says, “Let me die death of the righteous, let my last end be like his.” That’s a wonderful aspiration, let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his. But this man who said let me die the death of the righteous, so far as we can tell, perished eternally. In fact, in the New Testament, as I’ve mentioned, he’s always mentioned in an unfavorable way, but in the passage in which he’s referred to in Jude, the implications seem almost overwhelming that he was a lost man. Listen, Jude is describing these false professors of the truth,

“Woe unto them for they have gone in the way of Cain, ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward and perished in the gainsaying of Core. They are spots in your feasts of love, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;”

That’s pretty plain, Balaam, who said, “Let me die the death of the righteous,” died the death of the unrighteous it seems. If we must star gaze, my dear friends, at this Christmas season, or at any other season for that matter, let’s shake comet fever. Give up the comet capers that characterize our kind of society and look to the real star.

Time magazine had a very interesting lengthy article on Sky watch ’85 as you might expect and that’s where my title finds its source. But there was an interesting little comment about a month or two ago, some scientists out in Arizona at one of the important places for observing the skies, were looking at a television screen as the information from the telescope was being taken and put on the screen and the scientists who were there became a little disappointed in what they were seeing, and they felt if

they got out and looked at the stars themselves with their own equipment with their binoculars, they could see a little better than they were seeing. And so they all went outside, it was a rather cold night, but they stood out there, and they were looking at them with their binoculars, and finally, one of the men said, “I see it, I found it!” And they all said, “Where, where, where?” And he told them exactly where it was and Hiram Spinrod [phonetic] from the University of California at Berkeley, a cosmologist, put his binoculars on it and then he turned and said, “It’s a wimp.” It’s a wimp, he saw it in its early stages of course, but he said, “It’s a wimp!” I say to you my friends; Halley’s Comet is a wimp in comparison with Jacob’s star. That’s the real heavenly miracle, the Star of Jacob.

Thomas Hobbs once said, “Hell is truth seen too late.” That has impressed me. “Hell is truth seen too late.” May God help us not to see this important truth too late, that salvation is through Christ, that happiness and significance in human life finds its source in a life in Christ, under him, with him and his interests preeminent. All of our other Balaam and Balak like activities are activities diverting us from the Star out of Jacob and the Scepter from Israel. May God help us to have a different kind of Christmas in nineteen eighty-five. And may Sky watch nineteen eighty-six be devoted to Jesus Christ.

If you’re here today and you’ve never believed in him we remind you that Christ has offered the atoning sacrifice. The Star out of Jacob has come, he has offered the sacrifice by which we may stand righteous before him and die the death of the righteous. May God bring you to faith in Christ, may he help you to realize that you’re represented by the darkness back of that bright star. Dark in your sins, dark in your rebellion against God, but you may receive forgiveness through the blood that was shed. Come to Christ, believe in him. Don’t leave this auditorium without the assurance of the forgiveness of sins. May God speak to you to that end, let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we are indeed grateful to Thee that by Thy grace Thou has enabled us to understand the priorities of human life. Oh God give us that supernatural strength and enablement required to fulfill Thy will perceptive will in our lives. We give Thee thanks and praise for the Lord Jesus Christ and if there should be some here who do not yet have that assurance of the forgiveness of sins, may at this very moment there go up a prayer Thee, Lord I acknowledge that I’m a lost sinner under divine guilt and condemnation. I see Christ as the one who has offered the atoning sacrifice. I relinquish all hope and claims and righteousness through my active ...

[AUDIO ENDS ABRUPTLY]