

## Balaam.

DECEMBER 4. NUMBERS XXIV: 10-19.

*Golden Text, James 1: 8.*

THE ISRAELITES were within sight of "the promised land." Having beaten the Amorites and taken possession of their country, they were now encamped in the borders of Moab, on the east side of Jordan, opposite Jericho, ch. 22: 1. Balak, the king of Moab, was afraid of this invincible host—too numerous to cope with—besides, he knew well that God was on their side, and that to contend against such odds were hopeless. He had recourse to stratagem. In Mesopotamia, in the far east, there lived a man whose fame had spread as far as to Moab. He was reputed to be a prophet of Jehovah: *Balaam* by name. If this man can be bribed to come and curse the Israelites in the name of their own God, he will be able to prevail against them. Messengers were sent with rewards in their hands. Balaam, having consulted God, refuses to go, ch. 22: 8-13, but the sequel leaves no room to doubt his insincerity. The references to this transaction in the New Testament are conclusive, not only that he was a covetous man, 2 Pet. 2: 14, 15; but that he instigated the Israelites to commit a grievous sin which resulted in 24,000 of them being destroyed by a plague, ch. 25: 9. Deut. 4: 3. The phrase, "the doctrine of Balaam," in Rev. 2: 14, refers to that sin. Balaam thought, perhaps, that as God had apparently changed His mind, by letting him go in answer to the second deputation, ch. 22: 15, so now he would permit him to curse Israel. No. The Almighty had acted consistently with the usual procedure of providence in allowing him to follow his own impulses at that time, Hos. 4: 17, and was about to shew His power over this would-be prophet, by *constraining* him to say the very opposite of what it was his purpose and inclination to say, and by making him the medium of uttering some of the sublimest prophecies in Scripture. Vs. 10, 11. Balak taunts Balaam on his well-disguised fear of the Lord. Better men than Balaam have been sneered at by unbelievers. Vs. 12, 13. Balaam's reply is, in itself, a noble one, *but*, coming from him, it is only a master-piece of dissimulation. V. 14. *I go*—The presumption is that he did not go, but remained to work mischief in the camp in the manner already indicated, for he was soon afterwards slain among the Midianites, ch. 31: 8. Josh. 13: 21, 22. It is difficult to understand this man's real character. He must have had an *intellectual* knowledge of the true religion, but it had little influence upon his heart; and, like Simon Magus, he was ready to "trade" upon it, Acts 8: 9-23. So much of his history is recorded as a warning to all who make a shew of religion but are destitute of the power of it, 2 Tim 3: 5. Balaam was a man endowed by God with great natural gifts, who knew what was right, but who through vanity and presumption made shipwreck of his opportunities. "A man may be full of the knowledge of God and yet destitute of the grace of God." The best of men have reason to distrust themselves, lest while they teach and preach saving truth to others they themselves may miss the mark. 1 Cor. 9: 27.

## Last Days of Moses.

DECEMBER 11. DEUTERONOMY XXXII: 44-52.

*Golden Text, Psalms 90: 12.*

MOSES was the most remarkable man that ever lived. Deut. 34: 10-12. His life was spent amid vicissitudes unparalleled in the experience of any other person. 40 years in Midian, 40 years in Egypt, and 40 years in the wilderness, make the sum of his years 120. He was great as a *Lawgiver*, John 1: 17. 7: 19; as a *leader*, Josh. 1: 17. Is. 63: 12, 13; as a *prophet*, Deut. 34: 10 12. Acts 7: 37; as a *poet*, Exo. 15: 1-19, Deut. 32: 1-44, Rev. 15: 3; as an *author*—he is reputed to have written Job and the 90th psalm, and he wrote of Christ, John 5: 46; as a *historian*, to him are we indebted for the Pentateuch, Luke 24: 27, 44; as a *mediator*, Exo. 32: 11, 31, 32. He was conspicuous for *meekness*, Num. 12: 3; for *faith*, Heb. 11: 24-26; for *faithfulness*, Heb. 3: 2; for *humility*, Num. 11: 29. The one weak point in his character was infirmity of temper, Exo. 32: 19. Vs. 44, 45. *This song*—The hymn called "The Rock," recorded in this chapter, which became the national anthem of the Hebrews. *Hasheha*—Joshua. *These words*—nearly the whole of Deuteronomy, V. 46. *Your hearts*—as distinguished from merely committing them to memory. God demands the homage of our hearts, Rom. 10: 10. *Your children*—If the religious education of the youth is neglected, the hope of a nation is gone. V. 47. *It is your life*. The knowledge of God ensures happiness now and hereafter, Prov. 3: 13-22. Deut. 30: 15, 16. V. 49. *Nebo*—The place of Moses' death is almost as much a mystery as the manner of it. Modern research has failed to discover any mountain precisely answering to the description here given; and so it is literally true that "no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day," Deut. 34: 6. Vs. 50, 51. *And die*—even this great man could not escape the penalty of sin, Rom. 5: 12-14. He neither died of disease nor of old age, ch. 34: 7, but then and there, as a mark of God's displeasure with him in the matter of presumptuously smiting the rock at Kadesh Meribah, Num. 20: 9-12; where it is seen that the crime charged to Moses was in reality that of *unbelief*—the besetting sin of the world—the more inexcusable in one who had so many tokens of God's favour. In God's sight it amounted to *rebellion*, Num. 27: 12-14. Hence the sentence pronounced at that time, which prepared Moses for the solemn announcement now made, and which he received without murmuring or surprise. V. 52. *Thou shalt see the land*—God is faithful to all His promises, 1 Thes. 5: 24. He had already assured him of this, and this glimpse of Canaan would be to him as it were a foretaste of heaven and a comforting token that, although justly punished, he was not rejected of God. Moses was conspicuously a man of faith and prayer. This gave him courage in the hour of danger and calm in time of trouble. His appearance with Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, Matt. 17: 3, after the lapse of 1484 years, is conclusive proof that death does not end man's existence. Faith in God is that which alone takes away the fear of death. Ps. 23: 4.