

Series: Questions

Title: Wherefore Hast Thou Smitten?

Text: Numbers 22: 32

Date: January 1, 2015

Place: SGBC, New Jersey

I can think of no better way to begin this New Year than gathering together to hear a word from God our Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. God has been so gracious and good to us over this past year. May we each thank him for his faithfulness and goodness to us.

It is my prayer that in this New Year, God would give us a renewed zeal to serve him in spirit and in truth. May we werve one another better. It would be good to find more God-honoring ways to send forth the preaching of the gospel into the world. Our college students, should be looking for a place where we can hold a service on or near your campuses. I hope the Lord gives some of you a heart to go to a local nursing home to read scriptures to the elderly who cannot get out. I am happy to go preach the gospel at a nursing home, if you find an interest there. Be looking for a place we can broadcast on television and local radio, even in the newspaper if they will print articles. Also, it is time we all keep an eye out for a building or land. These are a few suggestions of ways we can better spread the preaching of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But as we serve Christ and our brethren, we are sure to face opposition. We will look at three different occasions where men were opposed in providence. God orders all things in his good providence. So here is the question we will try to answer from these three passages, how do we know when opposition in the Lord's providence is showing us Christ is for our way or against our way?

EXAMPLE ONE: OPPOSITION IN PROVIDENCE WHICH IS AGAINST OUR WAY

In Numbers 22, we have Balaam receiving opposition in providence from Christ. Balaam was a false prophet. The thing that Christ did to Balaam was not for Balaam; it was for the Lord's glory and the good of his elect amongst Israel. Our purpose in looking at Balaam is simply to learn something about God's providential dealings with us who are his true children.

You recall that God's enemies had come to offer Balaam a reward if he would curse God's people. The second time they came, Christ told Balaam he could go, upon one condition, the men had to come call Balaam a third time, "And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, *and* go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do." (Nu 22: 20) But Balaam went his own way rather than the way of the LORD, "And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. And God's anger was kindled because he went:..." (Nu 22: 21-22) That was the reason God opposed Balaam. Balaam was going in a way which was not God's way, his way was contrary to God's will.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Therefore, Christ stood in the way against Balaam, "and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him." (Nu 22: 22) Christ did this, not for Balaam's good. He was a false prophet. But be sure to get this point. God's way always involves these key principles: one, God's way is according to his word; two, God's way brings God glory in Christ; three, God's way is for the good of God's people; and four, God's way draws his child nearer to Christ, to trust Christ to provide. Balaam's way was against God's way in all these key elements of obedience.

ALL PROVIDENCE IS GOD'S PROVIDENCE

Christ is the LORD of hosts. His whole creation is at his disposal to use as he will. As God's children we should pay attention because everything coming to pass is God's providence, "Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants *were* with him." (Nu 22: 22) Christ chose to use the ass rather than the two servants. Balaam's disobedience more resembled a beast and was opposite that of a servant. Remember, God works in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform.

Christ is able to hedge up our way and the way of his enemies so that if he will have you hear him then you will hear him. We will not have to guess when God works in our lives. "And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field..." (Nu 22: 23)

This was the first time Balaam's ass ever disobeyed him. This would have been a good time for Balaam to ask those questions: Is this way according to God's word?; is this way for God's glory?; is this way for the good of God's people?; is this way drawing me to trust the Lord to provide? When new things begin to happen in providence in our lives, it is a good time to examine if our way is God's way by considering these key principles of obedience.

DISOBEDIENT HEARTS ARE BLIND HEARTS

Yet, we see in this false prophet what a hard, disobedient heart will do, "and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way. But the angel of the LORD stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall *being* on this side, and a wall on that side. And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall: and he smote her again." (Nu 22: 23-25)

This is the second time, his beast has ever disobeyed. Now it is looking more like it is time to ask those questions. And look how specific God can be in his providence. Balaam's foot is crushed. Maybe Balaam should ask, "Am I walking in a way contrary to God."

Next, the Lord hedges up the way even more narrow, "And the angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place, where *was* no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam." (Nu 22: 26-27) If you are Balaam, and your beast fell down under you, maybe it is time to consider that the best thing for me to do is to fall down, submitting to God's rule over me. But not the hard heart of rebellion, "and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff." (Nu 22: 27)

Notice, Balaam exerted no strength to obey the way of the Lord; but he exerted much strength in his own way, in the way the Lord forbid.

DISOBEDIENCE TO GOD MOCKS GOD

Next, listen to Balaam condemn himself, "And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee." (Nu 22: 28-29) It is more evidence of the blindness of the heart of disobedience that Balaam was not even alarmed by the fact that God enabled the ass to speak.

Still, here is the key thing the Lord is teaching us. Disobedience to God mocks God. Balaam had mocked the LORD three times. Balaam said to his beast, "If I had a sword I would kill you." And there Christ stood with a sword in his hand, unseen by Balaam who was mocking Christ far more than the beast mocked Balaam.

Now listen to Christ use this dumb ass to rebuke Balaam for his madness, “And the ass said unto Balaam, *Am* not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since *I was* thine unto this day? was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay.” (Nu 22: 30) This was an uncommon occasion ; Balaam’s ass had never done this to him. Uncommon occasions ought to especially grab our attention. But the false prophet was mad; his heart was set on disobeying God. More importantly, Christ has never been unfaithful to one of his true children. Therefore, we ought always consider that Christ’s way is the best way.

WE NEED CHRIST TO OPEN OUR EYES

When we disobey, the only way you and I will see that it is the Lord opposing our vain way is if the Lord opens our eyes, “Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face.” (Nu 22: 31)

When the Lord opens the eye of faith in his true child then we bow and fall flat. It is not outwardly, but from the heart, in spirit and in truth. Here is another question in our series where the LORD asked a sinner a question, “And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times?”

God only asks sinners questions in scriptures to show us our sin. Balaam would have been wise to consider that the problem he faced in the way was his own disobedience to the Lord. He would have been wise to see that every ounce of strength he exerted to overcome the obstacles in his way was only himself fighting against the Lord who stood in his way. This is what we would be wise to consider. The Lord tells him that very thing, “behold, I went out to withstand thee, because *thy* way is perverse before me: And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive. And Balaam said unto the angel of the LORD, I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again.” (Nu 22: 32-34)

Balaam said he sinned because he did not know the LORD stood in the way against him. But the LORD stood in the way against him because he had sinned. His sin was that he disobeyed the word of the Lord, which was for him not to go with the men unless they called a third time. This was why the Lord stood in the way against him. Be sure to get the key offense: he disobeyed the word of the Lord.

God commands us to gather with his people around the feet of Christ to hear the gospel through his preacher. He commands us to believe on Christ, trusting Christ to present us to God in the righteousness of Christ, not our own. God commands us to love our brethren by faithfully gathering together and caring for each member in his body, the church. Is it any wonder we face so many obstacles in our lives when we disobey the word of the Lord? Have you ever considered the Lord is standing in your way and you cannot see him because your heart is blinded by your own disobedience?

In this case, the Lord used something in his providence—the beast upon which Balaam travelled—to show Balaam his displeasure at the way Balaam was going. But all the while it was the Lord standing in his way. How can I know if it is the Lord standing in my way? Be sure to understand this, it is not by providence alone. I must ask those key principle questions: one, is my way according to the Lord’s word?; two, is my way for God’s glory?; three, is my way for the good of God’s people?; and four, is my way trusting Christ? With Balaam the answer to all these questions was no. What is your answer?

SECOND EXAMPLE: OPPOSITION IN PROVIDENCE NOT AGAINST OUR WAY

In this example, the Lord sent opposition against his people in the form of enemies. But this time the Lord was not showing his displeasure at the way his people were going. Still, by reading the opposition in

providence wrongly, his people ceased from going in the way the Lord would have them to go. The example is in Haggai 1: 1-2: “In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD’S house should be built.”

In order to understand, we have to go back to see what happened. When God delivered the children of Israel out of captivity, God gave them the word to build his house. So they began with great zeal. In Ezra 1: 1-6 we read, “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem. Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all *them* whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem. And all they that *were* about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all *that* was willingly offered.”

But when the children of Israel would not allow the enemy to join them in building the Lord’s house then they experienced opposition from their enemies, Ezra 4: 4-5, “Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia” Verse 23-24 “...they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power. Then ceased the work of the house of God which *is* at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.”

For 18 years they ceased to build the Lord’s house, Haggai: 1-2, “Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them. Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD’S house should be built...”

They felt it was not time because they only looked at God’s providence. When the enemy stopped them, they thought God was telling them in his providence, “the time is not come, the time that the LORD’s house should be built.”

This is so important! We cannot judge whether God would have us to continue or stop by providence alone. That is one lesson we should get from these three passages. We read nowhere in the scriptures, that God stopped them from building. God indeed overruled the enemy and the enemy did stop them by force. Everything that comes to pass is by God’s providence. But God never told them to stop building. Yet, as we saw in the example with Balaam, Christ was using an occurrence in providence to stop Balaam. So how are we to know if the opposition we receive in God’s providence is God stopping us or if we are to continue even when opposed?

Remember, the key questions we must ask when we are opposed in God’s providence: one, is my way according to the Lord’s word?; two, is my way for God’s glory?; three, is my way for the good of God’s people?; and four, if I continue in my way am I trusting Christ? In the example of building the temple, the answer to these would have been yes. The opposition was only allowed to come up against them to draw his

child nearer to trust Christ more. But when they stopped obeying the word of the Lord by ceasing to build his temple, they were not trusting Christ at all. They were leaning to their own understanding of his providence.

Therefore, God sent his preachers declaring, “Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.” (Hag 1: 8) God has left his believing people in this world to build his spiritual house. Christ gather us with his preacher to hear and support the gospel of Christ. Christ is our one Foundation. Christ makes his children living stones through the gospel. Our purpose is to praise him with spiritual sacrifices which is the praise of our lips in public worship of him with his saints. As he calls out his people through our gospel he builds up his temple and brings them to praise Christ for making us obedient to preach his gospel to them. (Read 1 Pet 1: 25-2: 1-12)

Yet, when God’s providential opposition makes men cease from this command of our Savior and Head it is disobedience. It is a wrong interpretation of God’s providence. God is not teaching us to cease gathering with his people, the hard-times are to teach us to continue gathering with his people but to trust Christ to provide as we do so. In those who are hypocritical false professors, disobedience will continue and they will fall away. But Christ will make this word effectual in his child. This we see in our third example.

THIRD EXAMPLE: OPPOSITION IN PROVIDENCE TURNS US TO GOD’S WAY

In the third example, we see that God opposed his children who had stopped building his temple in order to turn them back to faith in Christ to build his temple. This is example is in Haggai 1: 3-7: “Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages *to put it* into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.”

When the enemy opposed them, since they thought it was not time to build the Lord’s house, they turned and began focusing on their own houses. During that time, they built up their own houses. For all those years, though they sowed much in their fields, they gathered little; though they provided themselves food and drink, they did not have enough and were not filled; though they clothed themselves, there was none warm; though they earned themselves wages, their losses and expenses increased so that it was like putting their earnings into a bag with holes.

This is not a health and wealth gospel. It is just the opposite. When Christ’s true child faces obstacles which would prevent us from gathering with God’s saints, in the process of trying to work out our own problems, we begin to try to be satisfied with the things of this world. We look to our way and our wisdom. But Christ will see to it that his child shall not be satisfied. He will blow upon every worldly thing. Christ is able to give us contentment and to be our contentment when we have little this world has to offer. But our Lord graciously will not allow his child to be satisfied with this world.

Also, notice, when faced with this opposition, they never said, “It’s not time for us to build our own houses.” When faced with opposition on the Lord’s house, quickly they said, “It is not time.” But when faced with opposition while building their own houses, rather than give up, they planted more, ate more, drank more and earned more. It was the same with Balaam. God told him to wait till the men came calling again. It required to much strength to wait so he went with the men the next morning. But then each time Balaam’s ass turned, he never gave up. Instead, he exerted more strength to beat and cuss his beast harder and harder and harder to turn him into Balaam’s way. When we are opposed in God’s way, we are quick to say, “It’s not the Lord’s will.” But when we do not get our own way, we expend all the strength we have to get it.

GOD WILL OPEN THE EYE OF HIS CHILD

Again, we need God to open our eyes to understand what he is teaching by his providence. So let's ask the questions again putting ourselves in their shoes.

One, is this according to God's word, for me to turn from God's house and spend all my focus on my own house? No. In Ezra and in Haggai 1: 8, God said, "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house." Understand, the literal temple of God typifies Christ's spiritual house, his church. We are never to cease gathering with God's people in his house. Be sure to understand that God controls the providence which opposes us. But it is not sent to make us cease gathering with God's people, it is meant to make us trust God more in the process. God chose us in Christ; Christ has delivered us and made us the righteousness of God in him; the Spirit quickened us and gathered us with his people. He did it that Christ might use us to spread his gospel. By this means he shall gather his living stones and build up his spiritual house. (1 Pet 2: 5, 9) So no, I do not have God's word that I should focus my attention and my resources on my own house and leave his house waste. His word says, "Build my house."

Two, is this for God's glory, that I build my house rather than his house? No. In Haggai 1: 8, God told them "build the house; and I will take pleasure in it and I will be glorified." Our all-powerful Head promises to provide us with all things we need to preach his gospel and worship him with his people. It will glorify him when we gather with his people in spite of every financial or persecuting hardship we face. He promises to make the word effectual in the hearts of his elect. Believing Christ will glorify him.

Three, is this for the good of God's people that I build my house rather than his house? No. It pleased God to save by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe, not by us spending our time and resources on our own houses. He promises to call out his sheep by the gospel, not by me pampering me and my family in my own house, with my mind set on my own financial obstacles.

Four, is it causing me to trust Christ more to build my house? No. God put the obstacles in my way to teach me my need of gathering where Christ will feed me, clothe me, and protect me in his own house. He promises to provide me everything I need while serving him; we have to trust him to do so. Christ promises to keep us by his power as we work in his vineyard; we have to trust him to do so.

So after answering these questions, we discern that God's providence is teaching us that he would have us to trust him and to build his house rather than our own. Let's see if that is true according to God's own word. God sent his messenger to declare the reason they encountered their financial and economical difficulties in Haggai 1: 9-11, "Ye looked for much, and, lo, *it came* to little; and when ye brought *it* home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that *is* waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed *from* her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon *that* which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands."

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Let's wrap this up with a few reminders of what we have seen here

First, the Savior Jesus Christ is the LORD of hosts. It means everything that comes to pass in providence—even opposition—is under his control, accomplishing his purpose. Ignore the second causes. Look to God. If we are children of God we will. And we will seek to understand what God is teaching us in his providence.

Secondly, we cannot discern God's purpose by examining the opposition alone in his providence. Providence alone will not teach us whether Christ would have us continue or to cease in the way we are

going. In our first example, with the disobedient beast, Christ was stopping Balaam. But in the second example, though the enemies stopped the building of the Lord's house, it was still time to build the Lord's house. Then in third example, the opposition in providence was to teach them it was time to trust Christ more but God did not mean it was time to build their own houses and leave his house waste. With the drought, the LORD meant it was time to cease building their own houses and turn to the Lord's house. If we had merely discerned by the opposition in providence alone, we would have judged the purpose of the Lord in each of these examples wrongly.

Thirdly, in each case, we understand opposition in God's providence by asking these questions key principle questions: one, is my way according to God's word?; two, is my way for God's glory?; three, is my way for the good of God's people?; four, is my way drawing me nearer to Christ to trust him? If yes then the opposition in providence is not to make us stop. It is to draw us nearer to Christ to behold his glory in finishing the work.

When the answer to these questions is no, Christ is opposing us to turn us to Christ, to draw us nearer to Christ, to make us behold his glory in his way. The whole time they faced hardships it was the LORD's doing—Haggai 2: 15-17: “And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the LORD: Since those *days* were, when *one* came to an heap of twenty *measures*, there were *but* ten: when *one* came to the pressfat for to draw out fifty *vessels* out of the press, there were *but* twenty. I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands; yet ye *turned* not to me, saith the LORD.”

But when we answer yes, and continue or turn back to Christ's way, Christ declares that he will provide—Haggai 2: 18-19, “Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth *month*, *even* from the day that the foundation of the LORD'S temple was laid, consider *it*. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless *you*.”

Believe on Christ. If God spared not his most cherished possession but delivered him up for each of his elect people then we can be sure God will provide us with us every lesser thing we need to worship and serve him in this life. (Rom 8: 32)