

Balaam from stirring up the Moabites to a war, inevitably resulting in their extinction. He did not prevent him from giving that wicked counsel which, if God had not again interfered, would have led to the utter ruin of Israel. Balaam, seeing the anger of Balak, and deprived of his wages, gave the two allied nations the counsel that they should send Moabite and Midianite women into the camp of Israel in order to induce the people to commit adultery and to apostatize from Jehovah. If this could be done, he added, Jehovah would soon leave them in the hands of the enemies. It is safe to say that if God had inspired the blessings pronounced upon Israel, Satan inspired this counsel; for a more Satanic plot could never have been laid, even in the lowest depths of hell. The counsel was followed, and soon the camp of Israel became the resort of foreign women, a den stinking with apostasy and sin.

It had to be cleansed. God undertook to do this before it became too late. But this cleansing cost Israel the lives of 23,000 souls, and a war with the Midianites which almost exterminated this nation, a war in which Balaam, too, the originator of all this evil, fell. (See Numbers xxv; Revelations ii, 14.)

MOAB'S VICTORY AND DEFEAT.

When Israel took possession of and divided Canaan, a great political error and, what is more, a sin, was committed, inasmuch as people were permitted to live there whom God had doomed to destruction. As each tribe received their portion of the land they became so engrossed in the cultivation thereof and the accumulation of wealth that they became unwilling to help the rest in carrying out the will of God. And all found it more convenient to make slaves of the subjugated nations than to expel them.

The results soon became visible. Another generation arose. Living in the neighborhood of idolaters, having idolaters in their own cities and houses, the Israelites copied their examples, intermarried with them, and in the course of time turned away from Jehovah and worshipped Baal and Ashteroth. (Judges II; 13.) Now, the Canaanites, so long left undisturbed, gathered strength and combined together against Israel. Wars and sufferings followed. And in the same degree Israel yielded to licentiousness, ease and idolatry; they lost the faith and the energy of their fathers. Then they became an easy prey to their enemies.

The Moabites at one time also succeeded in conquering the children of Israel and kept them in servitude for a period of eighteen years. (Judges III; 12-32.)

The incident is thus related. Israel turned away from Jehovah. Therefore God strengthened Eglon, the Moabite king, and he formed an alliance with the Ammonites and the Amalekites and invaded Palestine, taking possession of Jericho, "the City of Palms," from which place he ruled Israel 18 years. But as the people again repented of their sins, the Lord delivered them from

the Moabitic yoke. Among the children of Benjamin was a resolute man called Ehud. He was once sent with the customary tribute to king Eglon. As soon as he had delivered his tribute he sent away the messengers who had accompanied him and stayed behind, pretending to have a secret message to the king. He suspected no treachery, but admitted Ehud to a private audience in a secluded place. As soon as the doors were shut, Ehud unsheathed his sword, and thrust it with such force into the body of the king that both sword and hilt disappeared beneath the surface of the skin. The king died instantly, and Ehud hastened home and mustered his people together. They came and drove away the Moabites, who were compelled to leave 10,000 men on the battle field. For eighty years this part of the country was free from hostile invasions.

DAVID RELATED TO THE MOABITES.

One of the prettiest little narratives of the whole sacred collection is that contained in the Book of Ruth, and it shows how the greatest king of Israel, David (and our blessed Savior himself through David), was partly of Moabitic descent.

During the reign of the Judges a famine came upon the southern parts of Canaan. A certain man of Bethlehem, Elimelek, then left his native soil and emigrated, together with his wife Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Kiljon, to the land of Moab. Elimelek soon died and the sons married two Moabitesses, Arpa and Ruth. After ten years both the sons were dead without children.

Naomi was now old and wanted to go back to her native country. Arpa and Ruth accompanied their mother-in-law. On the road Naomi tried to persuade them to remain with their own people, as she herself was poor and could offer them no inducements. Arpa took a most affectionate leave and returned home. But Ruth was determined to accompany her dear mother. She silenced all arguments by the noble declaration: "Where thou goest, there will I also go; where thou remainest I will remain. Thy people is my people; thy God is my God. Where thou diest, I will die, and there I will be buried. Before the Lord nothing but death can separate me from thee." After this strong expression of disinterested love, Naomi agreed to take Ruth along, and the two proceeded on their journey to Bethlehem. In this city Ruth became acquainted with Boaz, who took her to wife. In this marriage she became the mother of Obed, who was the grandfather of King David.

A MOABITIC SACRIFICE.

Later on, during the reign of King Ahab, we find the Moabites tributary to Israel. But when Ahab died, the Moabite king, Mesa, ceased to pay his tribute. Joram, who became king of Samaria after Ahab, then called upon Jehosaphat, the king of Judah, and together with the king of Edom they invaded the land of

Moab from the south. Seven days they marched in the wilderness with their army and found no water. The king of Israel feared that they would all perish. On the proposition of Jehosaphat, messengers were sent to the prophet Elijah to ask him what God would do. The prophet then called for a musician, and while this man was playing on his harp the Spirit of God came over the prophet, and he predicted the speedy relief and the victory over the Moabites.

The next day, one of the many rivers which empty themselves into the Dead Sea commenced to flow, although there had been no rain nor storm. The army was supplied with water. As the sun went up and shone upon the water the Moabites thought it was blood, and concluded that the allied forces had killed each other. The Moabite king, therefore, gathered his troops and hastened to the hostile camp in order to take the spoil. But he found a well-prepared army. A fearful battle ensued. King Mesa was defeated; his troops were scattered in all directions; and the allied kings broke down the cities, threw rock in the cultivated fields, hewed down the trees, filled the wells, and left the country a complete ruin. King Mesa then gathered seven hundred men of his routed army and tried to march against the King of Edom. But he could accomplish nothing. In this distress the cruel king and unnatural father took his own first-born son, the crown prince and slew him on the wall of the city in order to obtain favor from God and victory over his enemies. The religious and moral status of the Moabites at this time may be fairly judged of from this horrible burnt offering.

MOAB ONCE MORE.

Once more in the history of Israel, we find the Moabites causing the people of God to commit sin. This is after the return of the captives from Babylon. When Ezra had successfully led his company through the wilderness and established them in their native land, he found out that many of the priests and the Levites had formed intimate acquaintances with the Gentiles in the country, and with the Moabites among the rest. They had, as the expression is (Ezra. IX, 2), "taken their daughters for themselves and for their sons and mingled their holy seed with the nations of the countries." And the chiefs of the people had been the first in the iniquity. As the good old man Ezra heard this he tore his clothes and humbled himself before God, acknowledging the great guilt without even asking for mercy. Ezra's prayer on this occasion is well worth reading and contemplating. It shows how deeply he felt the sin of mingling together what should be kept separate.

The people, however, on perceiving Ezra's grief, repented. All foreign elements were put away, and a solemn covenant was made with God. Happy day when the people of God understand to keep themselves free from the influence of a corrupt world!