

The Four Oracles of Balaam

Numbers 23-24

Numbers 23 - *"Then Balaam said to Balak, "Build seven altars for me here, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams." ² And Balak did just as Balaam had spoken, and Balak and Balaam offered a bull and a ram on each altar. ³ Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stand by your burnt offering, and I will go; perhaps the LORD will come to meet me, and whatever He shows me I will tell you." So he went to a desolate height. ⁴ And God met Balaam, and he said to Him, "I have prepared the seven altars, and I have offered on each altar a bull and a ram."*

⁵ Then the LORD put a word in Balaam's mouth, and said, "Return to Balak, and thus you shall speak." ⁶ So he returned to him, and there he was, standing by his burnt offering, he and all the princes of Moab.

⁷ And he took up his oracle and said: "Balak the king of Moab has brought me from Aram, from the mountains of the east. 'Come, curse Jacob for me, and come, denounce Israel!' ⁸ "How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? And how shall I denounce whom the LORD has not denounced? ⁹ For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him. There! A people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations. ¹⁰ "Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number one-fourth of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his!"

¹¹ Then Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, and look, you have blessed them bountifully!" ¹² So he answered and said, "Must I not take heed to speak what the LORD has put in my mouth?"

¹³ Then Balak said to him, "Please come with me to another place from which you may see them; you shall see only the outer part of them, and shall not see them all; curse them for me from there." ¹⁴ So he brought him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

¹⁵ And he said to Balak, "Stand here by your burnt offering while I meet the LORD over there." ¹⁶ Then the LORD met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, and said, "Go back to Balak, and thus you shall speak." ¹⁷ So he came to him, and there he was, standing by his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab were with him. And Balak said to him, "What has the LORD spoken?"

¹⁸ Then he took up his oracle and said: "Rise up, Balak, and hear! Listen to me, son of Zippor! ¹⁹ "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? ²⁰ Behold, I have received a command to bless; He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it. ²¹ "He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, nor has He seen wickedness in Israel. The LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a King is among them. ²² God brings them out of Egypt; he has strength like a wild ox. ²³ "For there is no sorcery against Jacob, nor any divination against Israel. It now must be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'Oh, what God has done!' ²⁴ Look, a people rises like a lioness, and lifts itself up like a lion; it shall not lie down until it devours the prey, and drinks the blood of the slain." ²⁵ Then Balak said to Balaam, "Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all!" ²⁶ So Balaam answered and said to Balak, "Did I not tell you, saying, 'All that the LORD speaks, that I must do'?"

²⁷ Then Balak said to Balaam, "Please come, I will take you to another place; perhaps it will please God that you may curse them for me from there." ²⁸ So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, that overlooks the wasteland.^[c] ²⁹ Then Balaam

said to Balak, "Build for me here seven altars, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams." ³⁰ And Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bull and a ram on every altar.

Numbers 24 - "Now when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not go as at other times, to seek to use sorcery, but he set his face toward the wilderness. ² And Balaam raised his eyes, and saw Israel encamped according to their tribes; and the Spirit of God came upon him.

³ Then he took up his oracle and said: "The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor, the utterance of the man whose eyes are opened, ⁴ The utterance of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, who falls down, with eyes wide open: ⁵ "How lovely are your tents, O Jacob! Your dwellings, O Israel! ⁶ Like valleys that stretch out, like gardens by the riverside, like aloes planted by the LORD, like cedars beside the waters. ⁷ He shall pour water from his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters. "His king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. ⁸ "God brings him out of Egypt; he has strength like a wild ox; he shall consume the nations, his enemies; he shall break their bones and pierce them with his arrows. ⁹ "He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him?" "Blessed is he who blesses you, and cursed is he who curses you."

¹⁰ Then Balak's anger was aroused against Balaam, and he struck his hands together; and Balak said to Balaam, "I called you to curse my enemies, and look, you have bountifully blessed them these three times! ¹¹ Now therefore, flee to your place. I said I would greatly honor you, but in fact, the LORD has kept you back from honor." ¹² So Balaam said to Balak, "Did I not also speak to your messengers whom you sent to me, saying, ¹³ 'If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD, to do good or bad of my own will. What the LORD says, that I must speak'? ¹⁴ And now, indeed, I am going to my people. Come, I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the latter days."

¹⁵ So he took up his oracle and said: "The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor, and the utterance of the man whose eyes are opened; ¹⁶ The utterance of him who hears the words of God, and has the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty, who falls down, with eyes wide open: ¹⁷ "I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near. A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel; and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult.

¹⁸ "And Edom shall be a possession; Seir also, his enemies, shall be a possession, while Israel does valiantly. ¹⁹ Out of Jacob One shall have dominion, and destroy the remains of the city." ²⁰ Then he looked on Amalek, and he took up his oracle and said: "Amalek was first among the nations, but shall be last until he perishes." ²¹ Then he looked on the Kenites, and he took up his oracle and said: "Firm is your dwelling place, and your nest is set in the rock, ²² nevertheless Kain shall be burned. How long until Asshur carries you away captive?" ²³ Then he took up his oracle and said: "Alas! Who shall live when God does this? ²⁴ But ships shall come from the coasts of Cyprus, and they shall afflict Asshur and afflict Eber, and so shall Amalek until he perishes." ²⁵ So Balaam rose and departed and returned to his place; Balak also went his way."

Background Notes

In Numbers 22, Balak, the pagan king of Moab, hired Balaam, the "diviner" from Mesopotamia, to come and use his occult powers to curse the nation of Israel. The sacrifices that Balaam offered in Numbers 23 would have been offerings to try to

appease the strong “God of the Hebrews.” But the God of Israel was not appeased! Balaam wanted to curse Israel for money, but he was forced to bless Israel instead – against his will!

This does not mean that Balaam became a believer. No, it simply means that God overruled in the entire situation, and Balaam’s four oracles were really the Lord’s blessing upon Israel.

Doctrinal Points

1. The oracles of Balaam predicted Israel’s covenant blessing.

Hundreds of years earlier, God made an **unconditional covenant** with Abraham (Genesis 12). God confirmed this covenant many times to the patriarchs of Israel. That unconditional covenant included the promise of the seed, the promise of the Land, and the promise of future blessing. These promises are all confirmed in Balaam’s oracle.

- **The promise of a seed:** *“Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number one-fourth of Israel? (23:10).*

- **The promise of a Land:** This Land promise is implicit throughout these oracles, because Israel is seen as victorious over all her enemies, like a lion that devours her prey (23:24). Israel’s king and kingdom will be exalted. A king and a kingdom imply land possession. *“His king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted” (24:7).* The conquest and possession of Canaan is implied in Numbers 24:8 - *“He shall consume the nations, his enemies...”* The oracle predicts that Israel would also possess the land of Edom (24:18). This prophecy was partially fulfilled at the time of David and Solomon, but it awaits complete fulfillment during the End Times. Notice the phrase “the latter days” (24:14). Ancient Edom is now part of the modern state of Jordan, but it will be part of Israel in the future.

- **The promise of future blessing:** *“He shall pour water from his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters” (24:7).* This is a wonderful picture of prosperity and blessing, especially in view of the many dry places in Israel today.

- **The promise of blessing for those who bless you:** Now look at the last part of Numbers 24:9 - *“Blessed is he who blesses you, and cursed is he who curses you.”* That’s exactly what God promised in Genesis 12:3, as part of the Abrahamic Covenant! So God’s covenant promises to Israel were confirmed in Balaam’s oracle. The oracles of Balaam predicted Israel’s covenant blessings.

2. The oracles of Balaam predicted Israel’s coming Messiah.

In the last few verses of Numbers 24 we have the prediction of the overthrow of a number of Israel’s enemies, including Assur - the Assyrians (v22). The prediction also includes western powers like Greece and Rome, which at various times sent ships from Kittim and Cyprus (v24).

But the most significant prediction is the prediction of the coming Messiah: *“I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel...”* (v17). Here’s a **Messianic prophecy** in the oracles of Balaam!

By the way, this may have been the prophecy that God used to direct the wise men who came from the East to Israel at the time of our Lord’s birth. This prophecy would have been known in the Mesopotamian area because of Jews who were living in and around Babylon and Persia at that time. So, under the supernatural control of the Holy Spirit, the oracles of Balaam predicted Israel’s coming Messiah.

Practical Application

You never know how God may use your personal quiet time!

I once took a course from a professor who downplayed the concept that two million people came out of Egypt at the time of the Exodus. In his opinion, only a few Semitic slaves escaped out Egypt into Canaan. But over the years this story grew into a Jewish legend, and the “few Semitic slaves” grew into a nation of two million people who supposedly escaped from Egypt and passed through the Red Sea!

While I was taking this course, I “just happened” to be reading the book of Numbers in my personal quiet time. Here in Numbers 22-24, Balak took Balaam up onto three different mountains to view the children of Israel on the plains of Moab, but there were so many Israelites, and they spread out so far, that only a portion of them could be seen! Sounds like more than just “a few Semitic slaves,” doesn’t it?

That episode convinced me to trust in the accuracy of God’s Word! If you don’t believe in a massive exodus from Egypt (at least two million people!), you’re going to have to throw out a good portion of the book of Numbers - not only the big numbers in Numbers 1 and 26, but also the entire account of Balak and Balaam.

What a blessing that quiet time was! Do all of you have a personal quiet time in the Word each day? **You never know how God may use your personal quiet time!**