

Balak and Balaam, Part 3

Numbers 24

Group ¹	C	V	Description
The Prophecy from Peor	24	1-9	Balaam's prophecy concerning Israel
		10-14	Balak's anger reaches a boiling point but Balaam reminds him of his promise to only speak what God told him
		15-19	Balaam further prophesies about Israel
		20	Balaam's prophecy concerning Amalek
		21-22	Balaam's prophecy concerning the Kenites
		23-24	Balaam's prophecy concerning ships from Kittim
		25	Balaam returns home and Balak does as well

Themes in the Chapter²	Discipleship, God, History, Outreach, Prophecy, Salvation, Sin
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Reflections

This third time Balak has brought Balaam to a place where he could curse the Israelites for him and thereby ensure a victory in battle. But Balaam doesn't do what he was asked to do but speaks only what the Lord shows him, which displeases Balak.

Questions

1. What was different about how Balaam went about seeking God's message for Balak concerning Israel this time? V1-2
2. How does Balaam describe himself in his prophecy? V3-4
3. What does Balaam describe the camp of Israel and what illustrations does he use to describe the nature of their dwelling places? V5-6
4. What does Balaam say about Israel's king? V7
5. What does Balaam say about God's actions regarding Israel? V8
6. How does Balaam describe Israel in relation to those who would oppose them? V9
7. What was Balak's reaction? V10-11
8. What is Balaam's response? V12-14
9. How does Balaam begin this fourth prophecy and what does he say concerning the future king of Israel? V15-19
10. What does Balaam then prophesy about some of the other nations who have and will oppose Israel? V20-24
11. How did this episode in Israel's history come to an end? v25

Conclusion

- 1 (NASB) "Group" column from the headings in the NASB text.
- 2 (Full Color Bible) Theme suggestions without references to allow the reader to discover them in their reading.

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Whether Balaam knew of the covenant God made with Abraham is unknown but we do know this, God was surely working in this instance. Why? Clearly Balaam had a reputation of prophesying what his benefactor wanted to hear, which is what Balak hired him to do, but in this instance he decided to only prophesy what God would instruct him to say. Now, in this third prophetic message, Balaam dispensed with all the rituals he used prior to this to determine the “message” he was to give and spoke, being directed by the Spirit of God, as one who had his eyes and ears opened and falling down in worship.

So three times Balaam blesses Israel and does not curse them. However, this is not the last time we will read of Balaam in connection with Israel.

There and Then: Here and Now

Answer the questions below as you reflect on your own life and this part of our study³: *my LOG vs others SPECK. Here are some possible responses I've identified from the text that might apply to anyone.*

S - Are there *sins* for me to avoid or confess?

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P - Are there *promises* from God for me to claim?

•

E - Are there *examples* for me to follow or avoid?

•

C - Are there *commands* for me to obey?

•

K - How has this passage increased my *knowledge* about God / Jesus / Holy Spirit?

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3 *Navigator Bible Study Handbook* (The Navigators), with additions & Matthew 7:1-5.

Response to Questions

1. Balaam's usual practice was to seek omens but this time he set his face on the wilderness and looked upon Israel's camp. It was then that the Spirit of God came upon him and he prophesied.
2. Balaam describes himself as having his eyes opened, having heard the words of God, and seeing the vision of the Almighty. Most commentators seem to think that Balaam was describing how he fell into a trance-like state during which he received this message from God.⁴ While others offer an opposing view that Balaam was prostrated in worship while receiving his vision.⁵
3. "How fair are your tents..." this is followed by a series of similes describing size of the camp and how the Lord has made provisions for their flourishing.
4. The king will be greater than all the kings of the region and the reference to the abundant water was an indication that they would be prosperous.⁶
5. It is God who brought them out of Egypt and who fights their enemies for them.
6. Israel is like a lion at rest, which no one dares disturb. Balaam also quotes a portion of the covenant God made with Abraham—those who bless them will be blessed and those that curse them will be cursed (see Genesis 12:1-3). Surely God's Spirit led Balaam to include this in his message to Balak.
7. Upon hearing Balaam third blessing of Israel, he struck his hands together, not in celebration but in anger, and complained to Balak about his continual blessing rather than cursing of Israel. Then Balak sends Balaam home without any payment for his work.
8. Balaam reminds Balak that he told his messengers and himself repeatedly that he could only speak what God commanded him to speak, regardless of whatever payment he would receive. So he will return to his homeland, but before he leaves, Balaam wants to speak more about Israel and what they will do.
9. Balaam begins this fourth prophecy like the third, himself as a man who has had his eyes opened by the Lord, and that the nation of Israel will have a king in the future who will rise to power so great that it will overwhelm the surrounding nations.
10. Balaam then addresses Amalek (a descendant of Esau, Gen 36:16, and the first group to oppose Israel while coming up out of Egypt, Exo 17:8-16) and describes their end being destruction. Next the Kenites, part of the Midianite people and some were related to Moses by marriage, were to have a secure dwelling place. Kain was a city in the region that would be granted to the tribe of Judah. (Compare this to the protection that Moses promised to his brother-in-law in Num 10:29-32.) Asshur is believed to be a reference to Assyria ("a Greek name formed from Asshur⁷) who would eventually invade Israel and Judah 700 years in the future. The ships of Kittim could refer to the island of Cyprus and the "Western Mediterranean maritime powers"⁸, like Rome, who would eventually dominate the region. Eber is an ancient name which refers to

4 (Henry; Blaikie; Ellicott; Keil and Delitzsch; Philip; Spence and Exell, M.A.)

5 (Clarke; Barnes; Gill; Perowne)

6 (Walvoord and Zuck)

7 (Orr "Assyria")

8 (Walvoord and Zuck)

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the Hebrew people through one of the descendants of Shem.⁹

11. At this point Balaam got up and departed for his homeland in Mesopotamia, in the region that would become Asshur or Assyria, and Balak did the same.

Key Words: Old Testament, Torah/Pentateuch, Numbers, Balaam, Balak, Prophecy, Israel, Moab



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9 (Orr "Eber")