

Part Four: On The Plains of Moab (22:1—36:13)

I. THE STORY OF BALAAM (22:1-24:25)

A. SUMMONS OF BALAK (22:1-6)

TEXT

Chapter 22:1. And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan by Jericho.

2. And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. 3. And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they were many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel. 4. And Moab said unto the elders of Midian. Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time. 5. He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me: 6. Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land; for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou curest is cursed.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 22:1. Then the people of Israel set out, and they camped in the plains of Moab on the far side of the Jordan by Jericho.

2. And Balak, the son of Zippor, saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. 3. And Moab was very frightened by the people, because they were numerous; and Moab was overcome by fear because of the children of Israel. 4. And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, "This horde will now lick up everything around us, just as the ox licks up the grass of the field." Balak, the son of Zippor was king of Moab at that time. 5. So he sent messengers to Balaam, son of Beor, at Pethor, which is near the

River in the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, "Behold, there is a people come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the earth, and they are camping opposite me. 6. "Come now and curse this people for me, for they are too strong for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land; for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed."

### COMMENTARY

When the Israelites bypassed Moab on their journey toward Canaan, it must have relieved the Moabites greatly. Now, after they have delivered stunning defeats to the Amorites of Sihon and Og, and have taken residence in the near vicinity of Moab, fear enters the heart of Balak the king. Gilead and Bashan have fallen, and Moab would be a logical next step. Since the Israelites are a threat to more than the Moabites alone, and since they are so numerous, Balak appeals to Midian for help. More closely related to the Israelites than were the Moabites or the Ammonites, the Midianites lived to the east of Moab. They derived their livelihood from their herds and from the caravan trade, (Gen. 36:35), and were nomadic in life style. Although the threat to Moab was more immediate than that to Midian, it was real enough to give substance to Balak's appeal.

When the account introduces Balaam into the history of Israel, we are brought face to face with one of the most mysterious and intriguing people in all the Word of God. A native of Pethor, on the bank of the Euphrates in Mesopotamia, he was quite evidently a widely known soothsayer whose counsel was sought now by Balak. He appears suddenly upon the scene in the history of Israel, playing a role of no little importance. Like Melchisedec and Cyrus, he is one of a select few whom God chose from outside the Israelite nation for His good purposes. Everything we know of him is developed in this one circumstance, and in the later notice of his death (31:8, 16). His fame was evidently widespread, since his coming to Moab involved a trip of well over four hundred miles, if Pethor is properly identified as Pitru, near Carchemish.

Opinions regarding Balaam have generally divided into two camps. Some have considered him a wizard and false prophet, an idolator who was compelled to bless Israel against his personal will. Others have thought him a genuine prophet whose downfall was occasioned by greed and ambition. As a matter of fact, there may be some truth in both positions since he seems to undergo a shift of character as the account unfolds. His name suggests that he belonged to a family in which the magical arts was inherited; hence, he is properly thought of as a wizard. Furthermore, he is never spoken of by the common term for a prophet (*nabhi*). The term used for him in Joshua 13:22 is translated properly as "soothsayer", a term never used of a prophet of God. On the other hand, Balaam has a specific knowledge of Jehovah, and his words, at least at the outset, are exactly what Jehovah called upon him to speak. In the presence of Balak and his messengers, he would call upon the Name (22:8ff.). At some earlier time at least, he had used auguries in his work, (24:1), but when he speaks for Jehovah, these means are unnecessary. It is in his favor that he rejected the request of Balak consistently to condemn Israel; but his downfall came when he betrayed his own conscience. The consistent answer to the full character of this enigmatic man remains in large part a matter of conjecture.

Although it had been forty years since Israel departed from Egypt, Balak quite properly looks upon them as much more than a disorganized, nomadic people. He may remember the accounts of their miraculous delivery from the oppressing nation, as well as the record of divine provision of their needs in a bitter territory; more recently, the ease with which they have won victories over the northern neighbors has caused Balak to show due concern. Even though they had circumvented his land, they are now a greater threat, having cut off Moab from any assistance from the North: and Midian, to whom he makes his request, is a small, almost insignificant people. The king seems backed into a corner. His move to call Balaam is an act of desperation.

What people had Balaam cursed, and which had he blessed?

We have no way of answering. Had he, indeed, by some prior power granted of the Lord been called upon to act in His behalf toward another nation? We can only guess. It may be that Balak is indulging in flattery as he expresses his confidence in Balaam, or that he relies upon his own superstitious nature by trusting in one who has come from a family noted for their auguries. Whatever the actual situation may be, the messengers are charged to bring him back with them to curse Israel.

### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

407. If the Israelites had intended to attack Moab, why had they not done so before they marched around the land?
408. Upon what basis does Balak appeal to Midian for help against the Israelites?
409. How were the Midianites related to the Israelites, if at all? the Moabites?
410. Using a good Bible encyclopedia or other sources, tell of the many possible methods Balaam might have used in his conjuring.
411. How might Balaam have known anything about Jehovah?
412. What later facts are known about Balaam?
413. Why should Balak have sent so far away for a soothsayer?
414. How did he know of Balaam?
415. Discuss fully the varying opinions of Bible scholars about Balaam.
416. Why are the Israelites now a much greater threat than when they marched around Moab?

### B. GOD'S PROHIBITION vv. 7-14

#### TEXT

Chapter 22:7. And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand; and they came unto Balaam, and spake unto him the words of Balak. 8. And he said unto them, Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the Lord shall speak unto me: and

the princes of Moab abode with Balaam. 9. And God came unto Balaam, and said, What men are these with thee? 10. And Balaam said unto God, Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, hath sent unto me, saying, 11. Behold, there is a people come out of Egypt, which covereth the face of the earth: come now, curse me them; peradventure I shall be able to overcome them, and drive them out. 12. And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed. 13. And Balaam rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Balak, Get you into your land: for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you. 14. And the princes of Moab rose up, and they went unto Balak, and said, Balaam refuseth to come with us.

## PARAPHRASE

Chapter 22:7. And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian left with the fees of their divining in their hand; and they came to Balaam and gave him Balak's words. 8. And he said unto them, "Spend the night here, and I will bring back word to you according to the Lord's message to me"; and the princes of Moab lodged with Balaam. 9. And God came to Balaam and said "Who are these men with you?" 10. And Balaam said to God, "Balak, the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent unto me, saying, 11. 'Behold, a people has come from Egypt, and it covers the face of the earth. Come now and curse them for me; perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out.' " 12. And God said unto Balaam, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed." 13. So Balaam rose up in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, "Go to your own land; the Lord has refused to let me go with you." 14. So the princes of Moab rose and went to Balak and said, "Balaam refuses to come with us."

## COMMENTARY

Balaam's rejection of the messengers of Balak has been variously interpreted. *IB* jumps quickly to his defense, calling him " . . . a man of the deepest integrity . . . wholly committed

to be the mouthpiece of God," (p. 250). *KD*, on the other hand, properly shows that had Balaam been a true prophet he "would at once have sent the messengers away and refused their request, as he must then have known that God would not curse His chosen people," (p. 166). *RCP* suggests cryptically that "The Holy Spirit rested on Balaam only at night. So too with all other prophets of Gentile nations," (p. 164). The word of the Lord did, in fact, come to Balaam during the night.

Whatever the "rewards of divination" may have been, certain facts are obvious: Balak no doubt was willing to pay a high price for the soothsayer's services; here is one of the distinguishing factors between the prophet of God and false prophets—such rewards were almost without exception refused by God's men, and the few exceptions allowed him only an insignificant amount which was not to be thought of as payment for services, but a provision for the livelihood of the prophet (see II Sam. 4:10; I Sam. 9:8; I Kings 14:3; II Kings 8:8ff.); charging fees for their services was a practice strictly forbidden to the prophesying priests and prophets (see Micah 3:5, 11; Amos 7:12-15; Ezek. 13:19); Balaam doubtless would have kept the offered reward unless he was instructed by the Lord not to do so.

God did not need to ask Balaam the identity of his visitors for His own sake. The probable reason for this question is to call Balaam's attention to the type of men and their proposal, both of which he is entertaining. Their request is in direct contrast with what he knows to be the will of God; it should have been unnecessary for him to await further word. That he has delayed his answer is evidence that the temptation was strong.

The response of Balaam leaves us to infer that he hopes now to influence God and perhaps even to change His course of action. He is open about his answer to the degree that he does not misrepresent the essential facts of the situation. He certainly could not have fooled the Lord about this.

God replies in simple, unequivocal terms: His people are not

to be cursed, and Balaam must dispatch his guests without concession of any kind. It is done, and they return to Balak empty handed.

### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

417. Show what motives Balaam might have had in dismissing the men sent by Balak.
418. Under what conditions might a prophet of God accept any payment when he rendered a service in God's name? When could he not?
419. Why did God ask Balaam about the messengers and their mission?
420. What had been indicated by Balaam's asking the men to remain overnight?
421. On what basis might Balaam have hoped that God would allow him to go to Balak?

### C. BALAAM YIELDS TO BALAK vv. 15-41

#### TEXT

Chapter 22:15. And Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honorable than they. 16. And they came to Balaam, and said to him, Thus saith Balak the son of Zippor, let no thing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me: 17. For I will promote thee unto very great honor, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people. 18. And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more. 19. Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the Lord will say unto me more. 20. 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. 21. And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab.

22. And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the

angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him, Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him. 23. 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: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way. 24. 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, 25. 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. 26. 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. 27. And when the ass saw the angel of the Lord, she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff. 28. 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? 29. And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me; I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now I would kill thee. 30. 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. 31. Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in his way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face. 32. And the angel of the Lord said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? Behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me: 33. 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. 34. 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 displeases thee, I will get the princes of Balak.

36. And when Balak heard that Balaam was come, he went out to meet him unto a city of Moab, which is in the border of Arnon, which is in the utmost coast. 37. And Balak said unto Balaam, Did I not earnestly send unto thee to call thee?



wherefore camest thou not unto me? am I not able indeed to promote thee to honor? 38. And Balaam said unto Balak, Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say any thing? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak. 39. And Balaam went with Balak, and they came unto Kirjath-huzoth. 40. And Balak offered oxen and sheep, and sent to Balaam, and to the princes that were with him. 41. And it came to pass on the morrow, that Balak took Balaam, and brought him up into the high places of Baal, that thence he might see the utmost part of the people.

## PARAPHRASE

Chapter 22:15. Once more Balak sent princes, more and more honorable than they. 16. And they came to Balaam and said to him, "Thus says Balak, the son of Zippor: 'Let nothing prevent you from coming to me: 17. for I will promote you to a very high position, and I will do whatever you say to me; come and curse this people for me, I beg you.' " 18. But Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "Even if Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do more or less. 19. Please, now, stay here tonight also so that I may know what more the Lord will say to me." 20. And God came to Balaam at night and said unto him, "If the men come to call you, rise up, go with them. But say only what I tell you; that is what you are to do." 21. So Balaam rose up in the morning and saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab.

22. But God's anger burned because he went; and the angel of the Lord stood in the way as his adversary. Now Balaam was riding on the donkey, and his two servants were with him. 23. And the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the path, with his sword drawn in his hand; and the donkey turned aside out of the road, and went into the field. And Balaam struck the donkey, to turn her back to the road. 24. Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on each side. 25. And when the donkey saw the the angel of the Lord, she pushed against the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot

against the wall; so he struck her again. 26. Then the angel of the Lord went on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left. 27. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam. And Balaam's anger burned, and he struck the donkey with a rod. 28. Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you that you have struck me these three times?" 29. And Balaam said, "Because you mocked me, I wish I had a sword in my hand? then I would kill you." 33. And the donkey replied to Balaam. "Am I not your donkey, upon which you have ridden all your life until today? Have I ever been disposed to do this way to you?" And he said, "No." 31. Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the path, with drawn sword in hand; and he bowed his head, and fell on his face. 32. And the angel of the Lord said unto him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to confront you because your actions are against me; 33. and the donkey saw me, and turned aside before me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, I would surely have killed you now and let her live." 34. Then Balaam said unto the angel of the Lord, "I have sinned, because I did not know you stood in the path against me; therefore, if it displeases you now, I will go back again." 35. And the angel of the Lord said, to Balaam, "Go with the men; but you shall only speak the words which I speak unto you." So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

36. Now when Balak heard that Balaam had come, he went out to meet him at the city of Moab, on the boundary of Arnon, at the farthest border. 37. And Balak said unto Balaam, "Did I not send and call for you? Why did you not come to me? Am I unable to honor you?" 38. Balaam said to Balak, "Lo, I have come to you! Do I have any power to speak to you at all? The message God puts in my mouth is what I must speak." 39. Then Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kiriath-huzzoth. 40. And Balak sacrificed oxen and sheep and sent to Balaam and the princes who were with him. 41. And on the

next day Balak took Balaam and brought him up to Bamoth-baal; and from that point he could see the greatest number of the people.

### COMMENTARY

We may assume that Balak, unwilling to believe that Balaam would refuse his request entirely, has supposed the refusal is based upon his not offering a sufficient reward. He therefore sends a second set of messengers, of a higher station than the first, with a virtual "blank check" offer to do whatever Balaam may ask if he will curse Israel. To Balak, it is simply the second stage in the common Oriental process of haggling for a price. The use of flattery is as much a part of this process as is the increase of the price; and his using the "more honorable" princes is to the same purpose. To what honor could Balak have promoted Balaam? The offer is not specific, but it might have been the customary "unto one-half of my kingdom" such monarchs were wont to offer; or he might have had in mind a special place of well-paid service in the practice of his auguries. In any event, the request has not changed: he wants the Israelites cursed.

The reply of Balaam seems convincing enough. He will abide by the instructions of God, regardless of the offer. If his words were sincerely spoken, it is exceedingly difficult to understand the incidents which follow. His later actions are better understood if we adopt the analysis of *KD*: "His thirst for honour and wealth was not so overcome by the revelations of the true God, that he could bring himself to give up his soothsaying, and serve the living God with an undivided heart. Thus it came to pass, that through the appeal addressed to him by Balak, he was brought into a situation in which, although he did not venture to attempt anything in opposition to the will of Jehovah, his heart was never thoroughly changed; so that, whilst he refused the honours and rewards that were promised by Balak, and pronounced blessings upon Israel in the strength of the Spirit of God that came upon him, he was overcome immediately afterwards by the might of the sin of his own

unbroken heart, fell back into the old heathen spirit, and advised the Midianities to entice the Israelites to join in the licentious worship of Baal Peor (chapt. xxxi. 16),” pp. 162, 163.

For the second time, Balaam extends the hospitality of his home to the king’s legates. But what more could he expect God to say which had not already been said? Must God repeat His instructions again and again to confirm the details? Unless Balaam had been susceptible to coveting the reward, on the remote hope that God had changed His will, he would have needed no further word whatever. But on matters of this kind, it is totally inconceivable that God should have changed the message in any details whatever. To insure that His will is known to Balaam, He appears during the night. The instructions, while superficially different in allowing Balaam to go with the king’s messengers, yet retains the firm instructions that the seer is to speak nothing more nor less than he is told by Jehovah—hardly what the man had wanted.

It is inferred (*RCP* p. 167), that there is great significance in the fact that Balaam saddled his animal himself: he arose in great haste, eager to set forth on the journey, and still hoping for some consideration which would favor his own will. *PC* hypothesizes that Balaam was permitted to go with the men in order that he might eventually be punished for his covetousness and his longing to disobey God, (p. 292).

God’s use of the ass in the manner which follows should not surprise us unduly, however unnatural it might seem at first glance, we must confess its effectiveness. If the event is unique, this fact alone in no way mitigates against the account itself. The angel, invisible to Balaam, is observed by the ass. The seer’s eyes had been momentarily rendered incapable of seeing God’s messenger (see v. 31). Something of Balaam’s haste in the trip is indicated by his anger in beating the animal (v. 23). He would brook no delay; but the Lord had other plans. The impatience of Balaam is indicated again when he attempts to ride through the blocked path, much against the wish of the ass, whose

reaction results in crushing the foot of Balaam against the vineyard wall beside the road. In a final move to resist the angel, the ass balks, falling to the road. It is the final indignity, and God speaks through the mouth of the steed; Balaam engages it in conversation. This is not as strange as it might seem at first thought, since Balaam, as a prophet, had heard God speak in various means in the past; he may have used such a method himself, by some sort of trickery, to impress his clientele; and, being bitterly angry at the moment, he might have responded without any deep thought whatever to the astonishing circumstances (see *PC*, p. 293).

The appearance of the angel of God is made possible at this time when the eyes of Balaam are opened. Balaam does not need to ask his identity or, in fact, his mission. He has come, not to rebuke the seer for his cruelty to a dumb animal, but to chastise him for his perversity. Balaam is by no means flattered to learn that the ass has been more responsive to the manifestation of God's influence than has he. Now he learns that God is not displeased that he should go with the men of Balak. His intentions and his hope for evil gain are at the seat of his problem. Ideally, his conscience should have been awakened by the episode. Perhaps he struggled within himself whether or not to continue his trip; or, he may have so hoped to profit from his visit to Balak that his reaction was but momentary. With the stern warning of the angel that he is to speak nothing excepting what he is told, he is sent on his way.

When Balaam arrived in Moab, Balak might logically assume that he had come for one reason—to do as he was bidden. Balak hurried to meet his distinguished guest as soon as he reached the northern border at the River Arnon. He issued a mild rebuke that Balaam had not come at the first summons, but was pleased that he had come at all. Immediately Balaam repeated what he had been told to say: he would say nothing except the words God put in his mouth. Then together they proceeded to Kirjath-huzoth, where the king had large herds of animals slaughtered as a sacrifice in honor of Balaam and the honorable men, in anticipation of a favorable verdict from the seer. The

following day he was brought to look out upon all the people he had been asked to curse.

### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

422. Can you give any reason that Balak had not sent his most important princes to ask for Balaam's service the first time he made the contact?
423. Why might he expect Balaam to change his mind upon the second contact?
424. How does Balak's offer this time differ from the first?
425. The answer Balaam gives seems quite convincing. Compare it with his words to the first messengers.
426. Was it wrong for Balaam to extend an over-night invitation to the princes? why or why not?
427. Has God changed his mind about the message He will have delivered to Balak?
428. God appeared to Balaam during the night, and instructed him to return to Moab with his guests. Later He sent His angel to intervene on the trip. How can you reconcile these facts?
429. Why did Balaam not see the angel which appeared in the road.
430. How does the man show his impatience to resume his journey?
431. Explain how the ass was able to talk, and what was the gist of what it said?
432. Of what actions was Balaam guilty in bringing the Lord to confront him?
433. Balak's actions prove he was eager to meet Balaam and hear his prophecies. What did he do?
434. How resolute was the seer in claiming that he could speak nothing excepting what God revealed to him? Give proof.
435. Suggest the primary reason Balak might have wanted Balaam to see the multitude of the people in Moab.

## D. THE FIRST BLESSING OF BALAAM (23:1-12)

## TEXT

Chapter 23:1. And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven oxen and seven rams. 2. And Balak did as Balaam had spoken; and Balak and Balaam offered on every altar a bullock and a ram. 3. And Balaam said unto Balak, Stand by thy burnt offering, and I will go: peradventure the Lord will come to meet me; and whatsoever he showeth me I will tell thee. And he went to a high place. 4. And God met Balaam: and he said unto him, I have prepared seven altars, and I have offered upon every altar a bullock and a ram. 5. And the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth, and said, Return unto Balak, and thus thou shalt speak. 6. And he returned unto him, and, lo, he stood by his burnt sacrifice, he, and all the princes of Moab. 7. And he took up his parable, and said, Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the Mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel. 8. How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied? 9. For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. 10. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his! 11. And Balak said unto Balaam, What hast thou done unto me? I took thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast blessed them altogether. 12. And he answered and said, Must I not take heed to speak that which the Lord hath put in my mouth? 13. And Balak said unto him, Come, I pray thee, with me unto another place, from whence thou mayest see them: thou shalt see but the utmost part of them, and shalt not see them all: curse me them from thence.

## PARAPHRASE

Chapter 23:1. And Balaam said to Balak, "Build seven altars for me here, and supply me with seven bulls and seven rams." 2.

And Balak did as Balaam asked; and Balak and Balaam sacrificed upon each altar one bullock and one ram. 3. And Balaam said to Balak, "Stand beside your burnt offering, and I will go. Perhaps the Lord will come to meet me; and whatever he shows me, I will tell you." And he went to a steep place. 4. And God met Balaam. And Balaam said to him, "I have prepared the seven altars, and I have offered upon each altar a bull and a ram." 5. And the Lord put a message in Balaam's mouth and said, "Return to Balak, and this is what you shall speak." 6. And He returned to him, and behold, he stood by his burnt offering, he and all the princes of Moab. 7. And he began his message, and said, "Balak has brought me from Aram: the king of Moab from the eastern mountains. Come, curse Jacob for me, and come, denounce Israel. 8. How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? or how shall I defy whom the Lord has not defied? 9. For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him; lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. 10. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his!" 11. And Balak said unto Balaam, "What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, and behold, you have done nothing but bless them." 12. And he answered, "Must I not be careful to speak what the Lord has put in my mouth?"

### COMMENTARY

The first action of Balaam now is to order the construction of seven altars, upon each of which a bullock and a ram is sacrificed. Numerologists would have the number of great significance, based upon an ancient and almost universal belief to this effect. Among the Hebrews, it typified the seven days of creation, and was applied to those matters which pleased God. Such may have been the thought as Balaam specified the circumstances under which he would deliver his message. Since he has given the orders, it seems correct to assume that the sacrifices were given in the name of Jehovah. Balak made certain that the precise instructions were carried out: indeed,



he, not Balaam, seems to have presided at the sacrifices since the subject of the verb "offered" seems originally to have been singular, and Balak requests the king to stand beside the offering while he consults the Lord for His words.

Just what did Balaam now expect the Lord to tell him? Is there any reasonable ground upon which he might hope the situation will turn to his own advantage? We can hardly imagine what rationalizations he might have permitted in his mind; but he pledges to relate only what the Lord tells him. Is he playing both ends against the middle, ready now to convey God's message with an eye to some future moment when he will disregard the message if Balak makes it really worth while and the reward is sufficiently large? It would be an interesting ploy. The "high place" is literally a "bald height". Pagan prophets were wont to choose such sites among the barren mountain peaks, where they followed their auguries.

Immediately God informed Balaam of the words to be given Balak. They have not changed. When he spoke to the king, Balaam at first reviewed the situation, beginning with the request made of his services. He had been asked to curse Jacob (the Israelites), a request God disallowed altogether. These people had been especially blessed, and Balak had asked the impossible. When Balaam returned, he delivered the prophecies exactly as he received them. His words were a glowing tribute to the people the Lord loved and chose as His own; they could neither be cursed nor defied; they were unique among all the nations; they were special recipients of God's blessings and favor; they had become a vast multitude under His care; and, the prophet himself hoped for a fate as great as theirs.

Upon hearing these words, Balak is distraught. They are far from his expectations, and quite a bitter disappointment. He protests vigorously, blaming Balaam, who reaffirms that he can do nothing other than what God has ordered him to do. Acting upon the concept that the gods had limited and prescribed areas of jurisdiction and power, Balak requests that the same ritual be performed at another place—in a more favored spot, where all the Israelites are not visible.

## QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

436. Explain the reason for erecting and sacrificing upon seven altars.
437. Why should Balak, rather than Balaam, have presided at the rituals of the sacrifices themselves?
438. How might Balaam have expected to turn the persistent words of the Lord to his own advantage?
439. Research references to the "high places" of pagan worship. Learn where they were located, and what elements of "worship" were involved.
440. Analyze God's words to Balaam, showing the elements of his personal history, those of the request of Balak, the message Balaam was to deliver, and the divine promises to Israel.
441. What advantage did Balak seek in ordering Balaam to another place, and why did he expect anything to be different in the second location?

## E. BALAAM'S SECOND BLESSING vv. 13-24

## TEXT

Chapter 23:13. And Balak said unto him, Come, I pray thee, with me to another place, from whence thou mayest see them, and shalt not see them all: and curse me them from thence.

14. And he brought him into the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bullock and a ram on every altar. 15. And he said unto Balak, Stand here by thy burnt offering, while I meet the Lord yonder. 16. And the Lord met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, and said, Go again unto Balak, and say thus. 17. And when he came to him, behold, he stood by his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab with him. And Balak said unto him, What hath the Lord spoken? 18. And he took up his parable, and said, Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor: 19. God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he

should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? 20. Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it. 21. He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. 22. God brought them out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of a unicorn. 23. Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought! 24. Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey and drink the blood of the slain.

## PARAPHRASE

Chapter 23:13. And Balak said to him, "Come, please, to another place, from which you may see them. You shall see only the nearest of them, not all of them: then curse them for me there."

14. And he took him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and build seven altars, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar. 15. And he said unto Balak, "Stand here beside your burnt offering, while I meet the Lord yonder." 16. And the Lord met Balaam and put a message in his mouth, and said, "Return to Balak, and speak to him so." 17. And he came to him, and behold, he was standing beside his burnt offering, along with the princes of Moab. And Balak said to him, "What has the Lord said?" 18. And Balam began his speech, and said, "Rise up, Balak, and hear; listen to me, you son of Zippor: 19. God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should repent. Has he spoken, and will he not perform it? or has he foretold, and will he not make it good? 20. Behold, I received a command to bless: he has blessed, and I cannot reverse it. 21. He has not beheld iniquity in Jacob, nor has he seen perverseness in Israel. The Lord their God is with them, and the trumpeting of a king is in their midst. 22. God is bringing out of Egypt; he has, as it were, the strength of a wild

ox. 23. Surely there is no enchantment in Jacob, nor any divination in Israel: in due time it shall be said of Jacob and Israel, What has God wrought! 24. Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he has eaten of the prey, and drunk the blood of the slain."

### COMMENTARY

The field of Zophim ("the watchers"), to which Balaam is now brought, permits a broad view of the surrounding country side, including the camp of the Israelites. The peak of Pisgah, from which Moses will later be allowed to inspect the Promised Land, rises sharply above the surrounding terrain. The exact meaning of the two phrases which refer to the sight before Balaam is not clear. The first seems to suggest that he is able to see the entire company, while the second says he sees only a portion of the camp. A reconciliation of the thoughts is probably found in the possibility that, while the outermost reaches of the camp of Israel are visible from the spot from which Balaam looks, some areas are not within sight, being obscured by projections of the mountain at a lower level, or by intervening peaks.

For the second time seven altars are erected and seven sacrifices offered. Just as had done the first time, Balaam leaves Balak beside the spot as he consults the Lord about the message for Balak. When the answer comes, it is by far the most complete and definitive of which we have record. There would be no way for Balaam to misconstrue God's words without deliberately lying. When Balaam returns to Balak, he quickly responds to the king's inquiry by taking up his "parable", or "oracle".

The premise upon which Balaam bases all he is now to tell Balak is the unchanging nature of God and the immutability of His will. He is no mere man, whose whimsies and fickle desires result in inconstant conduct. His decrees are unalterable, and they are to be executed precisely as they are given. Any terms

used to express such attributes are anthropomorphic, but the impact is only strengthened by use of this figure. The second oracle goes beyond the first in that it is more than a refusal to curse Israel; it is a strong declaration of blessing upon the nation.

Eight emphatic points are established in the poem: 1) God's blessing is irreversibly upon Israel; 2) the nation is found less iniquitous than others (certainly not perfect, and not without sin among the individual citizens, but relative to other nations, the people are not without virtue); 3) God is with them as their King, which is an occasion for their shouting; 4) the hand of God has already brought about some wonderful works, such as their delivery from slavery in Egypt, with a strength like that of the wild ox (the term "unicorn" is an unfortunate and inaccurate translation from the Septuagint here—the animal intended resembles a large bison); 5) no manner or number of auguries, enchantments, or other divination can prevail against the chosen people of God; 6) future generations will marvel at all the great and glorious things He has accomplished through His people; 7) the people will be much feared, as a hunting lion; and, 8) they will not stop their exploits until their enemies are fully subjugated. Balak could find nothing hopeful in this!

#### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

442. Using a good Bible gazette, review the area of Mt. Pisgah. Where might the Israelites have been encamped?
443. Why did Balak and Balaam go through the time-consuming process of building seven more altars and offering fourteen more animals?
444. Upon what firm basis are all of Balaam's words premised?
445. How is the figure of anthropomorphism used in the passage?
446. List the eight points emphasized in the message Balaam delivered.
447. Explain the appearance of the word "unicorn" in the text. What is actually intended?

448. What portions of the prophecy referred to the past, and what to the future of Israel?

## F. THE THIRD BLESSING vv. 25-30

### TEXT

Chapter 23:25. And Balak said unto Balaam, Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all. 26. But Balaam answered and said unto Balak, Told not I thee, saying, All that the Lord speaketh, that I must do?

And Balak said unto Balaam, Come, I pray thee, I will bring thee unto another place; peradventure it will please God that thou mayest curse me them from thence. 28. And Balak brought Balaam unto the top of Peor, that looketh toward Jeshimon. 29. And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven bullocks and seven rams. 30. And Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bullock and a ram on every altar.

### PARAPHRASE

Chapter 23:25. And Balak said to Balaam, "Neither curse them nor bless them at all!" 26. But Balaam replied, "Did I not tell you, 'All that the Lord says, I must do?'"

27. And Balak said to Balaam, "Come now; I will take you to another place. Perhaps it will please God for you to curse them for me there. 28. So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, which overlooks the desert." 29. And Balaam said to Balak, "Build seven altars here for me, and provide me with seven bulls and seven rams." 30. And Balak did as Balaam had asked, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

### COMMENTARY

Substantially, Balak's first reaction to the previous words of Balaam are, "If you can't say something bad about these people, don't say anything at all!" He has had no grounds for reassurance from anything yet spoken, and we can only be amazed that he should want to try again to gain a favorable

word from Balaam unless he had some reason to believe that the prophet was still susceptible to bribery, or that yet another change of location would bring a change of message. If this is true, Balaam may have given some slight hint, ever so subtle or even subconscious, which Balak detected.

Although the exact peak indicated here cannot be positively identified, it is in the Abarim range, which includes Pisgah. Nearby was the village of Beth-Peor, in which vicinity Moses would later be buried (Deut. 34:6). The area was across the Jordan from Jericho. From the site Balaam could see the entire camp of Israel spread out before him (24:2). Jeshimon, "the waste", is primarily the plains area at the east and northeast section of the Dead Sea—a barren, rarely-inhabited region which extended to the southern end of the Jordan valley.

#### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

439. How could Balak possibly hope now that Balaam would say anything different from what he had prophesied previously?
440. Do you believe Balaam was sincere and honest when he said he could not say anything other than what God revealed for him? Defend your answer.
441. Locate and describe the place to which Balaam was led for the third round of sacrifices and prophecies.
442. Identify "Jeshimon", and describe the terrain.

#### G. THE PROPHECY OF BALAAM (24:1-9)

##### TEXT

Chapter 24:1. And when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness. 2. And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the Spirit of God came upon him. 3. And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: 4. He

hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: 5. How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! 6. As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lignaloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. 7. He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. 8. God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of a unicorn: he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows. 9. He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee.

#### PARAPHRASE

Chapter 24:1. And when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he did not go to seek omens, as he had at other times, but he looked intently toward the wilderness. 2. And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. And the Spirit of God came upon him, 3. and he took up his speech and said, "The oracle of Balaam the son of Peor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, 4. the oracle of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, but having his eyes opened; 5. How fair are your tents, O Jacob, and your Tabernacles, O Israel! 6. Like valleys that stretch afar, like gardens beside a river, like aloes which the Lord has planted, like cedar trees beside the waters. 7. He shall pour the water out of his buckets, moistening his seed abundantly; and his kings shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. 8. God brought him out of Egypt: he has, as it were, the strength of a wild ox. He shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones in pieces, and shall pierce them through with his arrows. 9. He rested, he lay down like a lion, and like a lioness; who will rouse him up? Blessed be he who blesses you, and cursed be he who curses you."



## COMMENTARY

Now persuaded fully that God will not cure Israel, Balaam conducts himself differently. In the previous sacrifices he had resorted to auguries, which would have been omens or signs observed in the world of nature and interpreted for the situation at hand. The custom was soundly denounced to Israel (Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10), but was a very common practice among the heathen. As he looks out upon the spreading camp of God's people, he can no longer feign any type of cooperation with Balak, and is well prepared for the revelation which God's Spirit will bring him.

The message of God is specified as Balaam's "parable", or "utterance". While the term alone does not exclusively specify a message of divine origin, the circumstances would establish this fact. In stating that his eyes are now open, he speaks of one of the major manners by which God's communications were delivered—a heightened vision. He would be permitted to see what was hidden from normal human eyes, and for the purpose of relaying God's will to Balak. The message of God directly followed.

Essentially, the communication reinforced the previous prophecy. Once more Balaam pronounced a totally favorable word about Israel. The tents of Jacob would be like widespreading valleys, resembling riverside gardens of exotic trees. The aloe, for example, which grew no nearer than the Far East, would have been known only through importation of its rare fragrance; the cedars, on the other hand, were indigenous to northern Palestine and Lebanon, and were extensively used in building and decorative work. The two trees are mentioned together not because they are of a common source, but because they are symbolic of living and valuable blessings.

Together with the beautiful trees comes the figure of an abundance of water, carried to the irrigation field in buckets via long poles, or to the household for daily use. The thought suggests an abundance of this lifegiving element to a people who would deeply appreciate the fact, having for so long been

transients in a barren, near-waterless land.

Like the names "Pharoah" and "Abimelech", "Agag" is not the name of a single individual, but the title applied to the kings of the Amalekites. The present prophecy was uttered in an area where these kings would have been well known. But the king of Israel would attain a stature high above that of Agag—a thought usually understood to refer to more than any one Israelite king, and conceivably a prophecy of the Messiah. At the peak of the Kingdom of Israel, all of the land promised to Abraham—the territory lying between the Arabian Desert and the Mediterranean, and stretching from the Wilderness of Paran to the great bend of the Euphrates north of Syria—a total of about 60,000 square miles—was under the dominion of David and Solomon. Neither Agag nor Balak nor any of the other kings encountered by the followers of Moses ever attained to such a kingdom. And all possible comparisons fade into insignificance when the passage is viewed symbolically with its Messianic import. The exaltation of His kingdom was twofold: it brought man into a saved relationship with God, and elevated him into an eternal state of bliss. Nothing remotely comparable could be found in any earthly kingdom of any age; hence, the words spoken through Balaam stand without possible contradiction.

The words continued, expressing divine leadership and delivery from Egypt, followed by a constant strengthening and continuing victories to His favored people. Enemies were, by inference, weaker, since Israel's strength is compared to that of the wild ox; they were to be devoured as by a conquering lion. The broken bones and arrow-piercing wounds suggest total mastery and defeat of the national enemies. Following his victories, the lion lies complacent at his lair, unafraid of any about him. None dare antagonize him, since his power is unmatched and fearsome. The very choice blessings of God must come upon all who show this nation favor, but divine vengeance falls upon any who subject it to oppression and shame. All this constitutes a remarkable oracle. Its message must be heeded, or the consequences are formidable.

## QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

443. What is different about Balaam's conduct as he approaches this third prophecy?
444. How is it possible that the Spirit of God could come upon a man who was not of the people of Israel?
445. Explain the term "parable" or "oracle" as used of Balaam's message.
446. Show the points on which the prophecies of Balaam were fulfilled literally in later years.
447. Why is the kingdom in Israel's future compared to that of Agag's?
448. Discuss the two aspects of the prophesied kingdom.
449. Show the validity of comparing this kingdom to a hunting, relaxing lion.

## H. FINAL BLESSING, AND PROPHECY vv. 10-25

## TEXT

Chapter 24:10. And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together: and Balak said unto Balaam, I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times. 11. Therefore now flee thou to thy place: I thought to promote thee unto great honor; but, lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honor. 12. And Balaam said unto Balak, Spake I not also to thy messengers which thou sentest unto me, saying, 13. If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do either good or bad of mine own mind; but what the Lord saith, that will I speak? 14. And now, I go unto my people: come therefore, and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days.

15. And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: 16. He hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High, which saw the vision of the

Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: 17. I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh; there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. 18. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly. 19. Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city.

20. And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable, and said, Amalek was the first of the nations; but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever. 21. And he looked on the Kenites, and took up his parable, and said, Strong is thy dwelling place, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock. 22. Nevertheless the Kenite shall be wasted, until Asshur shall carry thee away captive. 23. And he took up his parable, and said, Alas, who shall live when God doeth this! 24. And ships shall come from the coast of Chittim, and shall afflict Asshur, and shall afflict Eber, and he also shall perish for ever. 25. And Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place: and Balak also went his way.

#### PARAPHRASE

Chapter 24:10. And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he struck his hands together. And Balak said to Balaam, "I called you to curse my enemies, and behold, you have blessed them fully these three times. 11. Therefore, flee to your place; I said, 'I will certainly honor you, but the Lord has held you back from honor.' " 12. And Balaam said to Balak, "Did I not speak to your messengers, whom you sent to me, 13. 'If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I would not be able to go beyond the word of the Lord, to do either good or bad by my own will; what the Lord speaks, that will I speak?' 14. And now, behold, I am going to my people. Come, I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the latter days."

15. And he began his speech, saying, "The oracle of Balaam the son of Peor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened. 16.

the oracle of him who hears the word of God, and knows the wisdom of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, and having his eyes uncovered. 17. I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the corners of Moab, and break down the children of Sheth. 18. And Edom shall be dispossessed, Seir also, his enemies, shall be captured; and Israel shall act bravely. 19. Out of Jacob shall come a ruler, and he shall destroy him that remains in the city." 20. And when he looked upon Amalek, he continued his message, "Amalek was the first of the nations, but in the end he shall come to destruction." 21. And he looked at the Kenites and continued his speech, "Your dwelling place is strong, and your nest is set in a rock; 22. nevertheless, the Kenite shall be wasted. Where shall Asshur carry you away?" 23. And he continued his message, saying, "Alas, who shall live when God does this? 24. But ships shall come from Chittim, and shall afflict Asshur and Eber, and he also shall come to destruction." 25. Then Balaam arose and went back to his place; and Balak also went his way.

### COMMENTARY

Infuriated, Balak now claps his hands together as a token of his rage (see Job 27:23), an action which might also express horror or contempt (see Lam. 2:15). Once more his attempt to gain a favorable prophecy from Balaam has brought forth exactly the opposite: the anticipated cursing has issued forth as a blessing upon the sojourners visible before them in the valley of the Abarim. Perhaps in desperation the king now blames Jehovah for preventing Balaam's elevation. Strong irony marks the statement, and it is not wasted on the prophet. But what honor could the king offer comparable to the good will of the One in whom he spoke?

It was necessary for Balaam to refer again to his original preface: he could speak nothing excepting those matters God told him to say. For whatever motives he may have acted previously, Balaam had at least been consistent in affirming the

point. A fact which Balak could not have recognized at the time is that Balaam's refusal to pronounce a malediction upon Israel was a great favor to the king. Had he done so, the circumstances would not have changed, but Balak, believing Balaam's curse to be effective, would have plunged into a most foolish confrontation with God's people. However unfavorable the prophet's words were at the moment, they were exactly what the king needed to hear, and God's will was strongly pronounced in Moab.

Now Balaam speaks most forcefully by the Spirit of the Lord. He launches into a magnificent unconditional prophecy which looks well into the future and establishes Israel's unquestioned superiority over the familiar nations of the day. The entire text of this prophecy is futuristic, exalting God's people and foretelling the downfall of their enemies. It is an altogether glorious word—for Israel: and, it is as accurate as it is glorious. As a preface to the actual message, he relates the manner in which the revelation has come: his "eye is opened"; also, he hears the words of God . . . sees the vision of the Almighty . . .," and has "his eyes uncovered." All these expressions suggest modes with which the Bible student is familiar. The process of divine inspiration heightens the vision of the prophet to enable him to see what the ordinary senses cannot detect, and his ears are attuned to a wave-length denied ordinary hearing. By no means could Balaam have guessed at the facts he spoke: they are far too complex, and extend well into the distant future. God used him as the vehicle through whom His design would be traced in the unfolding future.

Signifying that the message in bulk is to be understood as futuristic is the repeated thought that the events are seen, "but not now," and beheld, "but not nigh." Two symbols are used to express the kingdom of which Balaam speaks: the star and the scepter. The star signified more than royalty alone in later Hebrew thought: it came to have a Messianic connotation, and fits beautifully with the sign given the Eastern magi at Christ's birth (Matt. 2:2-10). The scepter is an even more obvious symbol. In the oracle it is assigned to Israel, thus forecasting a

kingdom which would not exist for approximately four hundred years.

The first named victim of the coming star and scepter is Moab, also called the "children of Sheth." Moab is to be caught in an assault from both sides, or "corners." The thought may mean the land is to be struck at both temples of the head, like a man suffering a fatal wound. It is a blow from which there can be no recovery. In the parallel thought, the "children of Sheth" may mean the "children of pride," an identification not unfamiliar in reference to Moab (see Isaiah 16:6).

The second sentence is pronounced against Edom, symbolized by Seir, a name referring both to the country itself and to the extensive mountain plateau forming the eastern side of the central valley of the land. The Edomites will be dispossessed. Although God ordered Israel to take no action against Edom when they were denied passage through the land (20:21), and to leave them alone in their territory (Deut. 2:4, 5), the future would see this relationship bitterly strained. Ultimately, David would take the land (II Sam. 8:14), but the conquest was only temporary. Trouble flared between the nations on numerous occasions until at last, about 129 B.C., the Edomites were decisively defeated by John Hyrcanus. They were compelled to undergo circumcision, were brought into league with the Judeans, and, by a series of political intrigues ruled the land through the Herodian family. At this apparent zenith in their history, the Edomites, now known as the Idumeans, drop completely from the pages of the record at the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. As a companion to Moses' words, we must consider the prophecy of Isaiah (34:5, 6 and 63:1)—Edom was the only neighboring nation to whom God promised no mercy whatsoever.

The second section of the prophecy is related to the Amalekites. When Amalek is called "the first of the nations," the thought certainly cannot refer to political stature, since the Amalekites never were a prominent people. The commonly proposed theory that Amalek is "first" because the tribe moved

against the Israelites shortly after they left Egypt (Ex. 17:8, ff.), cannot be acceptable; it is a strained thought. Much more satisfactory is the hypothesis that the Amalikites were extremely boastful, and that this reputation was a Bedouin trait (see *PC* p. 317). Of Amalek, the testimony is damning. He will perish forever. Made successively subservient by Saul and David, they were finally exterminated in the day of Hezekiah (see I Chron. 4:43).

The third people who receive attention in Balaam's prophecy, the Kenites, another of the tribes inhabiting the land of Canaan from the time of Abraham (Gen. 15:19). They originally held a portion of the Negeb, although some of their number settled far to the north (see Judges 4:17; 5:24). They are not to be confused with the descendants of Hobab, who were friendly to Israel. These people, of the lineage of Cain, were connected with the Amalekites; and, we may infer their hostility toward Israel. Their fate is dire: they will be deported to Assyria. Taken from their apparently inaccessible "nest in a rock", they will be destroyed.

In a final summation Balaam strongly affirms the prevailing will of God on earth over the strongest nations, even such rampaging people as the Assyrians. They, like the smaller nations whose fates have already been foretold, must fall to the ships from Chittim, or Cyprus, which seems only to be an intermediate port on the route of the conquerors, not their origin. It is hypothesized that the prophecy refers to the conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great, in which case Asshur becomes a symbol of that conquered people.

Eber, also subjected to affliction in the prophecy, cannot refer to the Hebrews, as the *LXX* has suggested. Almost certainly *IB* is correct in the position that the word itself, which means "the region beyond", is another symbolic reference to the country beyond the Euphrates. It may then be a redundant reference to Assyria, which seems unlikely because of the manner in which two names are coordinated; or, it may be used of another country in a similar location, such as Babylon.



Having said this, Balaam then quickly states that the conquering nation will itself come to destruction, perishing forever. It is the closing note in the oracle. As he finished, Balaam left the scene of his utterance, as did Balak.

### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

450. What was the visible symbol of Balak's anger against Balaam, and what other sentiments might it have expressed?
451. Show the final tactic used by Balak as he attempts to influence the prophecy.
452. In what sense was Balaam doing a favor to the king when he refused to curse Israel?
453. Since Balak is only concerned about his own circumstances and his own day, why would these numerous futuristic prophecies interest him?
454. Describe the methods named by Balaam to explain by what contacts God made His revelations to the prophet.
455. Why would it have been impossible for Balaam to have guessed at the facts contained in his prophecies?
456. Identify the two symbols of Balaam by which he refers to the coming Messianic kingdom.
457. Name the countries and people included in Balaam's words and relate what is said of each of them. What historical details are available to us to confirm the words of these prophecies.
458. What primary lessons should Balak have learned from all of these messages? Did he take advantage of these insights?

## II. IN MOAB (25:1-27:23)

### A. GRAVE SINS WITH THE MOABITES (25:1-9)

#### TEXT

Chapter 25:1. And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people