

June 23, 2019 - Num 23:11 – 24:25 - Balaam Blesses Israel Again
Torah Reading: Numbers 23:10 – 24:25 - Balaam Blesses Israel Again
Psalm 105:1-6
Haftarah: Isaiah 49:23-25 + 50:4-10
Micah 7:19

Balaam's Second Attempt to Curse Israel

Numbers 23:13 - "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: and curse me them from thence."

The idea being that he would not be so struck by Israel's greatness if he only saw a part of them. After cursing that part, maybe he could go on and curse the next part. Balaam had mentioned the "fourth part of Israel" (vs. 10). Maybe he could curse them if he only saw one section of the camp.

Mt. Pisgah was one of the summits of Mt. Nebo where Moses viewed the Promised Land, and also where he died. (**Deuteronomy 3:27, Deuteronomy 34:1**)

Numbers 23:16 - "And the LORD met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, and said, Go again unto Balak, and say thus."

Rashi - the Holy One, blessed is He, put a bridle and a bit into his mouth, [so to speak,] as a man goads his beast with a bit to lead it wherever he wants. He [God] said to him, You shall return to Balak against your will. — [Mid. Tanchuma Balak 13, Num. Rabbah 20:20]

Balaam's Second Blessing of Israel

Numbers 23:18-20 - "And he took up his parable, and said, Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor: 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? Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it."

Rashi - He has already promised them to bring them to and give them possession of the land of the seven nations, and you expect to kill them in the desert?- [See Mid. Tanchuma Mass'ei 7, Num. Rabbah 23:8]

God is not a man, that he should lie

- "it is impossible for God to lie" (**Hebrews 6:18**).

- "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do...he is a liar and the father of it" (**John 8:44**).

- **Isaiah 14:24** - "The LORD of Hosts has sworn: "As I have planned, so will it be; as I have purposed, so will it stand."

- **Isaiah 46:10** - "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

Numbers 23:21 - "He hath not beheld iniquity (*aven*) 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."

iniquity = *aven* - self-exertion, iniquity

This is impersonal in the the Septuagint and the Targums, "one does not behold iniquity," but more likely it means God does not behold...

Rashi - He does not look at evil in Jacob: According to the Targum [Onkelos it means: I have looked. There are no idol worshippers in Jacob]. Another interpretation: Its literal meaning can be expounded beautifully. The Holy One, blessed is He, does not look at evil in Jacob. When they transgress His word, He does not deal punctiliously with them to scrutinize their wicked deeds and their iniquity in violation of His law. — [Mid. Tanchuma Balak 14, Num. Rabbah 20:20]

Recall the psalm of ascent - **Psalms 130:3** - "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"

God is said to forget Israel's sins, **Isaiah 43:25** and **Jeremiah 31:34**, and to cover them, **Psalms 32:1**, which keeps them out of sight, and so out of mind; and to blot them out, **Psalms 51:1,9**, and to cast them behind his back, **Isaiah 38:17**, or into the depth of the sea, **Micah 7:19** (one of the Haftarah readings for this passage).

"the shout of a king" = *teruah* - the same word occurs in **Leviticus 23:24**, and which is there rendered blowing of trumpets. (See **Joshua 6:5**; **Joshua 6:20**, where the same word is rendered "shout" as here.)

When the Lord is present with his people, and they acknowledge it with joy, past sins are obliterated.

Israel as a people were constantly murmuring and falling into sin. The reference here is to Christ - the Emmanuel, God with us, took sin upon Himself on the cross.

"Their sins are removed from them, and have been laid on Christ, and he has bore them, and made reconciliation for them, and made an end of them, and has redeemed and saved them from them" - *Gills Exposition*

- **Genesis 15:6** - "And he (Abram) believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness."

- **Romans 4:3** - "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."

- **Romans 8:1** - "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit"

- **Hebrews 10:2** - "For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins."

- **Zechariah 3:9** - "I shall remove the transgression of that land in one day."

Similar passages are

- **Isaiah 2:18**

- **Zechariah 13:2**

- **Isaiah 25:8**

- **Jeremiah 50:20** - "In those days and at that time, declares the LORD, a search will transpire for Israel's guilt, but there will be none, and for Judah's sins, but they will not be found; for I will forgive the remnant I spare."

"When Israel stood before God for judgment, they said before Him: 'Master of the Universe, the heavens and earth testify against us regarding our sins... God replied: 'I shall remove them' [namely, God will disregard their testimony.] Israel responded: 'But still, our name is associated with disloyalty to You.' To which God answered: 'I will give you a new name.' Again. Israel said: 'But, You will remember!' God retorted: 'I will forget your earlier sins.' Israel answers: 'In Your heart, you will remember.' God responds: 'I will not take it to heart'. Israel responded [with the verse from the haftarah in Jeremiah 17:1]: 'But it is written before You, as it is written: The guilt of Judah is written with a stylus of iron.' God responds: 'Things that are written can also be erased and since I (God) wrote it, I can also erase it! As it is written: 'In those days and at that time, declared the Lord, the sins of Israel shall be sought and there shall be none.' (Jeremiah 50:20)" - adapted from Midrash Tanaim 32:1

But God doesn't change:

- **Malachi 3:6** - "I am God, I have not changed."

Sin has to be paid for, made right, even if it is passed over or transferred through ritual like sacrifice. God's justice requires judgment.

These passages look toward the Days of Messiah and Christ's final sacrifice on the cross "once for all."

And in fact the Targum of Jonathan says the "shout" refers to the shout of King Messiah. In the Pesikta in Ketoreth Hassamim in Numb. fol. 25. 4. it places these events in the days of Messiah.

Numbers 23:22 - "God brought them out of Egypt; he has as it were the strength of an unicorn."

unicorn = *reem* - wild ox. This probably refers to Israel and not to God here.

Rashi sees this as referring to flying or loftiness. Another interpretation: כְּתוֹעֵפֶת רֶאִים means the power of 're'emim' and our Rabbis say (Git. 68b) that this refers to demons.

Power over demons would feed into the next verse:

Numbers 23:23 - "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!"

Rashi takes this differently: "For there is no divination in Jacob": They are worthy of blessing since there are no diviners or soothsayers among them.

"in Jacob," is favored by the Septuagint and the Targums, but both interpretations are valid and important.

The NET translated it as "against Jacob" - In this context it is affirming that Balaam is unable to curse Israel because no enchantment is effective against them.

"What hath God wrought?" - i.e. God will plainly tell Israel what He is going to do so there is no need of soothsaying to discern the future.

Rashi - There will come another time like this, when the love [God has] for them will be revealed to all, for they will be seated before Him and learn Torah from His mouth. Their place will be further in [closer to the Divine Presence] than the ministering angels. They will ask them, "What has God wrought?" This is the meaning of what is stated, "your eyes shall behold your Teacher" (Isa. 30:20). Another interpretation: [The phrase] יֵאָמֵר לְיַעֲקֹב is not in the future tense ["it shall be said to Jacob"] but in the present tense. [Thus, the meaning is:] They have no need for a diviner or sorcerer, for any time it is necessary to tell Jacob and Israel what God has wrought and what decrees He enacted on high, they do not need diviners or soothsayers, but the decrees of the Omnipresent are transmitted to them through their prophets, or the Urim and Tummim inform them [Mid. Tanchuma Balak 14, Num. Rabbah 20:20]. Onkelos, however, does not render [it in] this manner. [Onkelos renders: For the diviners do not wish that good should be bestowed upon Jacob, nor do soothsayers desire the greatness of Israel. At this time, it will be told to Jacob what God has wrought.]

Numbers 23:24 - "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."

Rashi - When they awaken from their sleep in the morning they show the vigor of a lioness and a lion in grasping mitzvot, to don a '*tallith*' [prayer shawl], recite the *shema* and put on '*tefillin*' [phylacteries]. — [Mid. Tanchuma Balak 14, Num. Rabbah 20:20]

"It does not lie down": [i.e., a Jew does not lie down] on his bed at night until he consumes and destroys any harmful thing that comes to tear him. How so? He recites the *shema* on his bed and entrusts his spirit to the hand of the Omnipresent. Should an army or a troop come to harm them, the Holy One, blessed is He, protects them, fights their battles and strikes them [their attackers] down dead.[Mid. Tanchuma Balak 14, Num. Rabbah 20:20]

"drink the blood of the slain" - He prophesied that Moses would not die until he would strike down the Midianite kings dead, and he [Balaam] would be slain with them, as it says, "Balaam the son of Beor the soothsayer did the children of Israel slay with the sword with those that were slain by them" (Josh. 13:22). - [Mid. Tanchuma Balak 14, Num. Rabbah 20:20]

The sword metaphorically "drinks" the blood of the victim it kills.

Balaam's Third Attempt to Curse Israel

Numbers 23:28 - "And Balak brought Balaam unto the top of Peor, that looketh toward Jeshimon."

Again, seven altars are built, a bullock and a ram offered on each one.

Balaam changes his usual procedure:

Numbers 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."

Rashi says Balak sensed that Israel was destined to be smitten through Peor somehow, but he did not know in what way. He said, "Perhaps the curse will take effect on them from there."

Rashi - As the Targum paraphrases ["He directed his face toward the desert, where the Israelites had made the golden calf," or "He directed his face toward the golden calf, which the Israelites had made in the desert." See Ramban, Midrash Aggadah, Mechokekei Yehudah (Minchath Yehudah, fn. 1)]. He said, "Whether He wishes to curse them or not, I will mention their sins so that on the mention of their sins the curse can take effect." - [Mid. Aggadah]

Numbers 24:2 - "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."

Rashi - He sought to cast an evil eye upon them, so here you have his three attributes: an evil eye, a haughty spirit, and greed mentioned above (22:13, 18). - [Avoth 5:19, Mid. Tanchuma Balak 6, Num. Rabbah 20:10]

Numbers 24:3 - "And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said:"

All other prophets begin "The word of the Lord came to me saying..." or "Thus sayeth the Lord..." Balaam begins by touting his own insight, even though God is revealing he vision to him.

Numbers 24:5-6 - "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the LORD hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters."

Although facing the wilderness, Balaam's blessing speaks of a luxuriant garden which the Lord planted "like in the Garden of Eden" according to Rashi.

It's also a picture of the Bride of Christ:

Song of Solomon 4:12 - "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed."

"aloes" - **Psalms 45:8** - "All your garments are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces of ivory the harps make you glad."

"cedar trees" - **Psalms 92:12** - "The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon."

Numbers 24:7 - "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."

The Targum Onkelos interprets it, "the king anointed from his sons shall be great." The Septuagint agrees: "A man shall come out of his seed."

"his seed shall be in many waters" - his seed shall have abundant water: This expression denotes prosperity, like seed [which flourishes when] planted close to water.

"his king shall be higher than Agag" - Their first king [Saul] will capture Agag, king of Amalek — [Mid. Aggadah]

"His kingdom shall be exalted" - The Jerusalem Targum has: "and the kingdom of the King Messiah shall become very great." Other Jewish writers refer this prophecy to the days of the Messiah: Pesikta in Ketoreth Hassamim, fol. 27. 2. Vid. Philo. de Praemiis, p. 925. Sept. vers. & Targum Jon. in loc.

Numbers 24:8-9 - "God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn: he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows. 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."

Balaam expands on his previous vision using some of the same metaphors.

- **Genesis 12:3** - "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

- **Galatians 3:8** - "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and foretold the gospel to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.'"

Numbers 24:14 - "And now, behold, I go unto my people: come therefore, and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days."

i.e. in order to make up for the fact that I was unable to curse Israel, I will counsel you about what action to take in view of what I have seen that this people will do you in the future.

Rashi - What is that counsel? "The God of these [people] hates immorality [thus, entice them to sin with your women...] as it is related in [the chapter of] Cheilek (Sanh. 106a). The proof that Balaam offered this counsel to cause them to stumble through immorality is that it says, "They were the ones who were involved with the children of Israel on Balaam's advice" (31:16).

- **Numbers 31:16** says that the Midianite women "were the cause of the Israelites' unfaithfulness to God "at the bidding of Balaam."

Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C. – 50 A.D.) explains what Balaam's advice was:

O king! the women of the country surpass all other women in beauty, and there are no means by which a man is more easily subdued than by the beauty of a woman; therefore, if you enjoin the most beautiful of them to grant their favors to them and to prostitute themselves to them, they will allure and overcome the youth of your enemies. But you must warn them not to surrender their beauty to those who desire them with too great facility and too speedily, for resistance and coyness will stimulate the passions and excite them more, and will kindle a more impetuous desire; and so, being wholly subdued by their appetites, they will endure to do and to suffer anything.

And let any damsel who is thus prepared for the sport resist, and say, wantonly, to a lover who is thus influenced, "It is not fitting for you to enjoy my society till you have first abandoned your native habits, and have changed, and learnt to honor the same practices that I do. And I must have a conspicuous proof of your real change, which I can only have by your consenting to join me in the same sacrifices and libations which I use, and which we may then offer together at the same images and statues, and other

erections in honor of my gods.” And the lover being, as it were, taken in the net of her manifold and multiform snares, not being able to resist her beauty and seductive conversation, will become wholly subdued in his reason, and, like a miserable man, will obey all the commands which she lays upon him, and will be enrolled as the slave of passion.

The description of Balaam’s advice to Balak in the Talmud - b. Sanhedrin 106a - offers more details:

“The God of these people hates lasciviousness, and the people desire linen clothes. Come, I will offer you advice. Make curtains for them and seat prostitutes in them—an old one on the outside and a young one inside. They will sell [the Israelites] linen clothes.”

So, he made curtains for them . . . and he sat prostitutes in them—an old one on the outside and a young one inside. When the Israelites ate, drank, and rejoiced, and went shopping in the market, the old prostitute would say, “Aren’t you looking for linen garments?” The old one quoted him a price at its true value, and the young one quoted him for less. This happened two or three times.

Then she would say to [the Israelite], “you are like a member of our house! Sit and pick out what you want.” A pitcher of Ammonite wine rested near her, . . . and she said, “don’t you want to drink a cup of wine?” When he drank, [a passion] burned in him.

He said to her, “Surrender to me!” She took out her idol from her bosom and said to him, “Worship this!” He said to her, “But I am a Jew!” She said to him, “What do you care? You merely have to defecate on it.” He did not know that this was how they worshipped it. More than this, she said, “I will not give you rest until you deny the Torah of Moses, your teacher!”

After Balaam gives his advice to Balak, he falls back into another vision - another blessing of Israel:

Balaam's Parable

Numbers 24:17 - "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 Seth."

The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan interpret this prophecy of the Messiah.

"sceptre" = *shebet* - tribe, rod, staff, sceptre

"star" - *kowkab* - star, figuratively used to refer to a prince

Possibly referring to Joseph's dream in **Genesis 37:9** - "Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

Also, reference to the prophecies contained in the constellations God showed Abraham:

- **Genesis 15:5** - "And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be."

The star is probably to be considered as a sign and circumstance of His coming - i.e. the star of Bethlehem. (**Matthew 2:1**)

The Magi were informed by Zoroaster their founder, who, being of Jewish extract, had got it from this prophecy of Balaam; and it is as evident that the Jews expected the appearance of an extraordinary star at the time of the Messiah's coming; for so they say more than once, in the Zohar (Zohar in Exod. fol. 3. 3, 4. & in Numb fol. 85. 4. & 86. 1.), that when the "Messiah shall be revealed, a bright and shining star shall arise in the east" - *Gills Exposition*

- **Genesis 49:10** - "The sceptre (*shebet*) shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."

Rashi - "destroy all the sons of Seth": All the nations, for they are all descended from Seth, the son of Adam [lit., the first man]. The Targum Onkelos agrees: "all the children of men"

Numbers 24:19 - "Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city."

Rashi - He says this regarding the King Messiah, of whom it says, "and may he reign from sea to sea," (Ps. 72:8), "and the house of Esau shall have no survivors" (Obad. 1:18). - [Mid. Aggadah]

"The city" - possibly Babylon as in Revelation 18

Numbers 24:20 - "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.

"the first of the nations" - The first to make war on Israel

- **Exodus 17:16** - "the LORD hath sworn that the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

- **Deuteronomy 25:19** - "thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it."

Numbers 24:21-22 - "And he looked on the Kenites, and took up his parable, and said, Strong is thy dwellingplace, and thou puttest thy nest (*qinnecha*) in a rock. Nevertheless

the Kenite shall be wasted, until Asshur shall carry thee away captive."

"the Kenite" = Cain - Cain was thought to be the ancestor of the Kenites.

Numbers 24:23-24 - "And he took up his parable, and said, Alas, who shall live when God doeth this! And ships shall come from the coast of Chittim, and shall afflict Asshur, and shall afflict Eber, and he also shall perish for ever."

"Chittim" - Macedonia is called Chittim in 1 Maccabees 1:1 so possibly Alexander is referenced here.

Eber is the Hebrews

Rashi - Who can save himself from the One who designates these things, so that the One who decrees [namely, God] should not put these things [into effect] against him? [And what are these terrible things?] That Sennacherib will arise and confuse all the nations, and furthermore, "ships will come from the Kittites" - the Kittites, who are the Romans, shall go forth in huge warships against Assyria.

The Targum of Jonathan says whoever these nations refer to, they will fall by the hand of the King Messiah, and they shall perish for ever.

The stone cut out of the mountain without hands is said to break in pieces all these kingdoms, **Daniel 2:44**