

NUMBERS

Chapter 24

Balaam's Third Oracle

Then Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not go, as at other times, to look for omens, but set his face toward the wilderness. 2 And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. And the Spirit of God came upon him, 3 and he took up his discourse and said, “The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, 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 with his eyes uncovered: 5 How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel! 6 Like palm groves that stretch afar, like gardens beside a river, like aloes that the LORD has planted, like cedar trees beside the waters. 7 Water shall flow from his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters; his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. 8 God brings him out of Egypt and is for him like the horns of the wild ox; he shall eat up the nations, his adversaries, and shall break their bones in pieces and pierce them through with his arrows. 9 He crouched, he lay down like a lion and like a lioness; who will rouse him up? Blessed are those who bless you, and cursed are those who curse you.” 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 these three times. 11 Therefore now flee to your own 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 tell 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 of my own will. What the LORD speaks, that will I speak’? 14 And now, behold, I am going to my people. Come, I will let you know what this people will do to your people in the latter days.”

24:2 *the Spirit of God came upon him.* Not to be confused with the filling of the Spirit (Ac 2:1–4), or with the anointing of the Spirit (Isa 61:1). This unexpected language prepares the reader for the heightened revelation that is about to come from the unwitting messenger. (CSB)

Balaam is directed like a true prophet, though he acts only out of personal interest. God also caused the donkey to speak for Him. (TLSB)

24:3–4 The extensive introduction of this oracle describes Balaam’s experience in the Lord’s presence. Now Balaam’s eyes were opened. (CSB)

24:3 *opened.* Hbr word occurs only here and in v 15. If it is derived from a root meaning “to close,” then Balaam had been blind to “the vision of the Almighty” (v 4) until “the Spirit of God came upon him” (v 2) and opened his eyes. (TLSB)

24:4 *falling down.* Overwhelmed with awe. (TLSB)

24:5–6 Israel’s organized encampments look like a garden thriving in the wilderness. (TLSB)

24:6–7 Balaam speaks here in general, but luxuriant, terms of the blessings that will come to the Israelites as they settle in their new land. The lushness of their blessing from the Lord is reminiscent of Eden. (CSB)

24:7 *his king ... kingdom.* Anticipates Israel's ascendancy and coming king. (TLSB)

higher than Agag. Possibly a specific future prophecy concerning the opponent of King Saul (1Sa 15:32–33)—setting the stage for the even more remarkable words of the fourth oracle (vv. 15–19). But it may be that Agag was a common name among Amalekite kings and that the allusion here is to the Amalekites who attacked Israel when she came out of Egypt (see Ex 17:8–13) and again when she first approached Canaan (see 14:45). (CSB)

An Amalekite king bearing this name or title was defeated by Saul and slain by Samuel (1Sm 15). (TLSB)

24:8 *God brought them out of Egypt.* These central words about Israel's salvation are recited by one who was a hostile outsider. (CSB)

24:9 *May those who bless you be blessed ... cursed!* The theology of blessing and cursing in the promises made to Abraham (Ge 12:2–3) is now a part of this oracle of blessing. Perhaps here Balaam was reasserting his desire to be a part of Israel's blessing. (CSB)

24:11 *flee.* Implying imminent punishment if Balaam will. (TLSB)

the LORD has kept you from being rewarded. In his disgust with Balaam's failure to curse Israel, Balak now dismisses him without pay—the ultimate insult to his greed (see 2Pe 2:15). (CSB)

24:14 *I will let you know.* Balaam's discourses will end in a grand finale of prophetic utterances. He mentions specific nations, whose opposition to the covenant people will be shattered. He envisions the course of actions that God will pursue so that finally salvation comes through Israel (cf Jn 4:22). (TLSB)

latter days. The NT era. (TLSB)

in the latter days. The distant (Messianic) future is usually indicated by this expression. (CSB)

24:1–14 God will not allow Balaam to curse the Israelites. Instead, Balaam blesses them and recites God's litany of love. Previous accounts in Numbers reveal Israel's rebellious nature. Despite this, God loves them because of His promised Savior. Today, despite all your sins, the Lord treasures you continuously and calls you to repentance and faith. • Father, the extent of Your love is beyond measure. Bless us and keep us in Christ, our Savior. Amen. (TLSB)

Balaam's Final Oracle

15 And he took up his discourse and said, “The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, **16** the oracle of him who hears the words of God, and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down with his eyes uncovered: **17** I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth. **18** Edom shall be dispossessed; Seir also, his enemies, shall be dispossessed. Israel is doing valiantly. **19** And one from Jacob shall exercise dominion and destroy the survivors of cities!” **20** Then he looked on Amalek and took up his discourse and said, “Amalek was the first among the nations, but its end is utter destruction.” **21** And he looked on the Kenite, and took up his discourse and said, “Enduring is your dwelling place, and your nest is set in the rock. **22** Nevertheless, Kain shall be burned when Asshur takes you away captive.” **23** And he took up his discourse and said,

“Alas, who shall live when God does this? 24 But ships shall come from Kittim and shall afflict Asshur and Eber; and he too shall come to utter destruction.” 25 Then Balaam rose and went back to his place. And Balak also went his way.

24:15-16 As in the third oracle, the introduction to the fourth oracle is lengthy, helping to prepare the reader for the startling words of the prophecy. (CSB)

24:17 *star ... scepter.* Perhaps fulfilled initially in David, but ultimately in the coming Messianic ruler. Israel’s future Deliverer will be like a star (cf. Rev 22:16) and scepter in his royalty and will bring victory over the enemies of his people (see v. 19). (CSB)

Symbol of royalty inasmuch as the king is invested with authority from heaven to reign. (TLSB)

scepter. Symbol of royal power and authority. May also denote a comet or a constellation in the form of a staff that will light up the skies of Israel’s future. It arose over Israel’s horizon in David’s glorious reign. But it reached its full brightness in the messianic King, whom the Wise Men found under the star of Bethlehem. Just: “That He should arise like a star from the seed of Abraham, Moses showed before hand.... Accordingly, when a star rose in heaven at the time of His birth, as is recorded in the memoirs of His apostles, the Magi from Arabia, recognizing the sign by this, came and worshipped Him” (ANF 1:252). Ephr: “The Virgin this day brought forth Immanuel in Bethlehem.... Lo! from Jacob shone the Star, and from Israel rose the Head. The prophecy that Balaam spoke had its interpreting today!” (NPNF 2 13:223). (TLSB)

Sheth. Possibly the early inhabitants of Moab known as the Shutu people in ancient Egyptian documents. (CSB)

Moab. (TLSB)

24:18 *Edom.* David vanquished both Edom and Moab (cf 2Sm 8:2). (TLSB)

24:20 *Amalek was first.* The first to attack Israel and oppose the Lord’s purpose with his people (see Ex 17:8–13). (CSB)

The first enemy defeated by the Israelites (Ex 17:8–13) will come to destruction (1Sm 30; 1Ch 4:41–43). (TLSB)

24:21 *Kenite.* The name suggests a tribe of metal workers. In other passages the Kenites are allied with Israel (see, e.g., Jdg 1:16; 4:11; 1Sa 15:6). Since Moses’ father-in-law was a Kenite but also associated with Midian (see Ex 2:16), it may be that Balaam’s reference is to Midianites (see 22:4, 7). (CVSB)

nest. Hebrew *qen*, a wordplay on the word for Kenites (Hebrew *qeni*). (CSB)

Kenites were associated with the Midianites (10:29; Jgs 1:16; 4:11; 1Sm 27:10; 30:29). (TLSB)

24:22 *Kain.* May be a Kenite tribal name or designate a locality that “shall be burned.” (TLSB)

Asshur. Assyria. (CSB)

Hbr word for Assyria. Some commentators believe that here it denotes some other unknown tribe. In v 24, it is linked with Eber, also an unidentified people. (TLSB)

24:24 *Kittim*. Probably ancient Kition in Cyprus. (CSB)

Sea Peoples from Cyprus and the eastern Mediterranean coast who will destroy Asshur and Eber. Israel alone will survive. (TLSB)

they will afflict Asshur and Eber, but ... ruin. One nation will rise and supplant another, only to face its own doom. By contrast, there is the implied ongoing blessing on Israel, and their sure promise of a future deliverer who will have the final victory (vv. 17–19). (CSB)

24:25 *to his place*. His home, unknown. (TLSB)

24:15–25 The fourth and final oracle occurs immediately after Balaam's encounter with Balak and has to do with future events: a messianic prophecy of a star coming out of Jacob. God uses Balaam to disclose His will 1,500 years in the future. The future belongs to God. Rebellion, sin, or sinister means will not deter His plan of salvation through Christ. • Lord, we thank You for Your faithfulness fulfilled in Christ. Rule us by Your beloved Word. Amen. (TLSB)