

NUMBERS

Chapter 24

Now when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not resort to sorcery as at other times, but turned his face toward the desert. ² When Balaam looked out and saw Israel encamped tribe by tribe, the Spirit of God came upon him ³ and he uttered his oracle: “The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of one whose eye sees clearly, ⁴ the oracle of one who hears the words of God, who sees a vision from the Almighty, who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are opened: ⁵ “How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel! ⁶

“Like valleys they spread out, like gardens beside a river, like aloes planted by the LORD, like cedars beside the waters. ⁷ Water will flow from their buckets; their seed will have abundant water. “Their king will be greater than Agag; their kingdom will be exalted. ⁸ “God brought them out of Egypt; they have the strength of a wild ox. They devour hostile nations and break their bones in pieces; with their arrows they pierce them. ⁹ Like a lion they crouch and lie down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse them? “May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed!” ¹⁰ Then Balak’s anger burned against Balaam. He struck his hands together and said to him, “I summoned you to curse my enemies, but you have blessed them these three times. ¹¹ Now leave at once and go home! I said I would reward you handsomely, but the LORD has kept you from being rewarded.” ¹² Balaam answered Balak, “Did I not tell the messengers you sent me, ¹³ ‘Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything of my own accord, good or bad, to go beyond the command of the LORD—and I must say only what the LORD says’? ¹⁴ Now I am going back to my people, but come, let me warn you of what this people will do to your people in days to come.”

24:1 *sorcery as at other times.* Balaam’s magic and sorcery are identified here (see notes on 22:40; 23:1). (CSB)

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 (see note on 22:31). (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)

greater 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 (see note on 25:1). (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 (see note on 23:10). (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 days to come. The distant (Messianic) future is usually indicated by this expression (see, e.g., Jer 48:47 and note). (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 Fourth Oracle

15 Then he uttered his oracle: “The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of one whose eye sees clearly, **16**the oracle of one who hears the words of God, who has knowledge from the Most High, who sees a vision from the Almighty, who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are opened: **17**“I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth.**18**Edom will be conquered; Seir, his enemy, will be conquered, but Israel will grow strong. **19**A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy the survivors of the city.”

24:15–16 As in the third oracle (see vv. 3–4), 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)

Balaam’s Final Oracles

20 Then Balaam saw Amalek and uttered his oracle: “Amalek was first among the nations, but he will come to ruin at last.” **21** Then he saw the Kenites and uttered his oracle: “Your dwelling place is secure, your nest is set in a rock; **22**yet you

Kenites will be destroyed when Asshur takes you captive.”²³ Then he uttered his oracle: “Ah, who can live when God does this?²⁴ Ships will come from the shores of Kittim; they will subdue Asshur and Eber, but they too will come to ruin.”²⁵ Then Balaam got up and returned home and Balak went his own way.

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 *Kenites.* 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). *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 subdue 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)