

## Numbers Chapter 23-24 – The Error of Balaam

**Read Jude 10-13.** The connection between Balaam and Cain and Korah is that all are apostates, demonstrating the error of teaching false doctrine for reward, and abusing certain gifts to lead God's people astray into idolatry.

### **Read Numbers 22:36-41**

In the biblical worldview, a curse or a blessing can have a real effect. Remember the blessings and curses of Isaac on Jacob and Esau? Balak has paid Balaam for his "prophecy," and takes him to a high place overlooking the Israelite camp. Notice that Balaam receives meat offered to idols and that the mount is the location of an altar to Baal. Do you think Balak is expecting Balaam to deliver an oracle in accordance with God's will, or in accordance with Balak's will?

### **Read Numbers 23:1-5**

Notice the altars and offerings, and the way Balaam goes away to meet the Lord alone. The Lord told him what to say, and Balaam returned to deliver the oracle to Balak and the elders. This pattern is followed for the first two oracles.

### **Read Numbers 23:7-12**

#### *Balaam's First Oracle*

Blessings instead of curses. Compare with Genesis 12:2-3; Deuteronomy 7:6; Genesis 13:16. Balak was not satisfied, but did not give up hope. He took Balaam to another height to try again.

### **Read Numbers 23:13-18**

Balak took Balaam to Mt. Pisgah, in the hope that because Balaam would see only a portion of Israel, he would curse them. The same pattern of seven altars and Balaam departing to speak with God is followed.

### **Read Numbers 23:19-24**

#### *Balaam's Second Oracle*

Greater blessings. What does the second oracle prophecy for Israel? Vs. 21's "shout of a king" is a reference to God himself, who was king over Israel and whose festivals were filled with shouts and trumpet blasts. What does this oracle say about power? God's power to go before, Balak's power to curse Israel, and Israel's power against God's enemies?

The "divination" here refers to Balaam's activity in trying to curse Israel, and being compelled to bless instead. Later scripture confirms that Balaam practiced divination. Joshua 13:22.

Notice vs. 21. Has Israel not been sinful and perverse? But God has forgiven them and their sins are forgotten. Read Romans 8:31-34.

### **Read Numbers 23:25-30**

Notice the difference in Balak's hope now. He no longer hopes Balaam will come through, but that perhaps God will relent. Does this give a clue as to why God would speak through a Gentile prophet-for-hire?

### **Read Numbers 24:1-9**

#### *Balaam's Third Oracle*

This time, Balaam does not attempt enchantments, but simply leaves himself open to God's word. Under what power does Balaam give this prophecy? The poetry of the blessing confirms many of the previous blessings. The blessings given here became a source of hope for Israel for generations. Isaiah 54:17

Balak becomes angry, and sends Balaam away, empty handed, Numbers 24:10-14, but Balaam has one more prophecy.

### **Read Numbers 24:15-19**

#### *Balaam's Fourth Oracle*

The power of the Holy Spirit is still upon Balaam, and he cannot be silenced by Balak. Notice vs. 17. Have you ever wondered how the wise men from the East knew to look for a king when they saw a star? Balaam was a prophet from the east, in Syria, and there were many witnesses to this prophecy. When we add to this the prophecies of Daniel, who also prophesied in the east (during captivity in Babylon), who explained the approximate time of the Messiah, it is understandable why the wise men travelled to Jerusalem.

### **Read Numbers 24:25**

"Went to his place." Only one other person has been described this way. Read Acts 1:25; Num 31:8.