

NUMBERS 24:1-11 (BALAAM'S THIRD ORACLE)

The words of today's verses include lots of happy images of Israel's future exaltation. They are spoken by Balaam about Israel. Of this, there is no doubt, but if that was all the imagery there was to be seen in them, it wouldn't be a very happy passage.

Yes, Israel has had times of great prosperity, wealth, and blessing, but they have also had lots of the opposite as well. If the past times for Israel are all that are being spoken of, then the passage is unhappy at best.

And if the passage only speaks of things yet future to us now, then it really isn't happy for the rest of the world. They will devour their enemies and sit fat, dumb, and happy in their permanently exalted state! That doesn't really seem like a swell picture for anyone else but Israel.

But, if you follow the messianic cults in Israel, this is what they are hoping for, and this is their expectation. They kind of overlook the obvious similarities between Leviticus 26 where God promises to punish them for disobeying Him, and how things have come out for them over the past two thousand years in exactly the same way that He said they would in that passage.

It is as if that was some type of accidental occurrence, not worth looking into as to why those things came about. Only when passages like the one today are taken in light of the greater promises to Israel which point not merely to their exaltation as a nation, but to the exaltation of God in Christ, do the words really have any meaning.

But until they stop looking at the world as being subservient to them, and start looking at it as being subservient to Christ the Lord, they will never be

in the idyllic circumstances which Balaam's third oracle proclaims. Only then will such passages make sense.

Text Verse: "Concerning the gospel *they are* enemies for your sake, but concerning the election *they are* beloved for the sake of the fathers. ²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable. ³⁰ For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, ³¹ even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. ³² For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all."
Romans 11:28-32

God has wonderful promises in store for Israel, but they first and foremost are for Israel under Him, not simply Israel over the nations. It is Christ who is Lord of all and over all. In their rejection of Christ, they brought upon themselves terrible times, but God promises them mercy in due time.

And with mercy, they will receive pardon, purification, and exaltation. But their exaltation will be in accord with the Lord's glory, not despite it. When we bless Israel, we are – hopefully – doing it with the purpose of their being blessed as the people of God in a faithful, covenant relationship with Him.

Until they enter the New Covenant, this is not possible. And so when we bless them, let us do it with this in mind. We are to bless them for who they will be in Christ. He has promised them this, and it shall come to pass. Until it happens, let us keep proclaiming Jesus. Eventually, they will get it, and He will return to them when they do.

Such wonderful promises and truths are to be found in His superior word. And so let's turn to that precious word once again and... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. From the Top of Peor (verses 1 & 2)

The previous sermon ended with Balak having failed twice to get Balaam to curse Israel. The first attempt was at the high places of Baal. The second attempt was at the field of Zophim. At the end of the last sermon, the chapter closed with them at the top of Peor, overlooking the wasteland.

In this location, we have the completion of a marvelous pattern which has developed over these three locations where these three oracles are uttered – Baal, Zophim, and Peor.

The first, *bamoth baal*, or the high places of Baal, looks to the superintending lordship of the people. The word *ba'al* simply means owner, lord, or master. Thus, it was an attempt to curse the people, dissolving the spiritual authority over them.

The next location, *sadeh tsophim*, or the “field of the watchers,” then looks to an attempt to curse the people’s intellect. As a watchman looks out and discerns who is coming and what type of a threat they are, so that was an attempt to curse their ability to rightly discern what is correct.

The third place, now introduced, is *rosh ha’peor*, or the top of the Peor. This place signifies that which leads to yearning and even to lust. Thus, this is an attempt to curse Israel’s moral underpinnings.

Balak is not merely attempting to curse Israel arbitrarily, but he is methodically pursuing a path of attempting to find a weakness in Israel which he can exploit between them and their God. It is what the devil did to Jesus in Matthew 4.

First, he came to tempt Him into making the stones into bread, thus he attempted to destroy the spiritual hierarchy which is found in God. He then tested Jesus' intellect by misusing Scripture, but which Christ corrected. And then he appealed to Jesus based on the lust of the flesh by showing him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. The devil, in essence, set about to curse these orders, but he failed.

This is what Balak intends now, and it is a prefiguring of the trials of Jesus by the devil in the wilderness. Will Balak succeed? Would the devil succeed? Not when Yehovah, the Lord, is in the equation! That begins to be evidenced in the first verse of this passage...

¹ Now when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel,

Twice, Balaam has gone forth, and both of those times, it is implied that he looked for a word from God in the use of sorcery. That will be seen in just a moment. In his previous attempts to curse Israel, he found that it would not be possible to do so. Rather, "it pleased the Lord to bless Israel."

The Hebrew literally reads, "that *it was* good in the eyes of Yehovah to bless Israel." What Balaam looked to see in the obtaining of a curse was exactly the opposite of what was pleasing in the Lord's eyes. For him to see what the Lord saw, he had to submit to what the Lord determined, and that was to bless. Now understanding this, it says...

¹ (con't) he did not go as at other times,

Here is a curious phrase that will be seen just five times between now and 1 Samuel 20, *k'paam b'paam*, or "as at a time, in a time." The means of obtaining his oracle from the Lord in the past was one way. Now, having seen that "as at a time, in a time" the Lord would not submit to cursing, he has clued in that this will not change. Because of this, there was no need...

1 (con't) to seek to use sorcery,

The word used, *nehashim*, was introduced in verse 23:23 and now this is its second and last use in Scripture. It is a verb indicating some sort of divination. It is debated exactly what type of divination was used, but it was certainly some type of augury.

One might find it surprising that the Lord would allow Himself to be sought out through, and to respond to, such things, but that would be to misunderstand what is happening. The Lord has a plan. That plan will not be thwarted.

If someone comes to the Lord through such a divination, and that divination will yield a result which would stand in the way of His plans, then He will intervene to ensure that what He intends comes out. A perfect example of this is found in Ezekiel 21.

The king of Babylon sought for a sign in order to determine which path he should take in order to engage one foe or another in battle. The result was to come against Jerusalem, as the Lord's plan determined –

“The word of the Lord came to me again, saying: ¹⁹ ‘And son of man, appoint for yourself two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to go; both of them shall go from the same land. Make a sign; put *it* at the head of the road to the city. ²⁰ Appoint a road for the sword to go to Rabbah of the Ammonites, and to Judah, into fortified Jerusalem. ²¹ For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the road, at the fork of the two roads, to use divination: he shakes the arrows, he consults the images, he looks at the liver. ²² In his right hand is the divination for Jerusalem: to set up battering rams, to call for a slaughter, to lift the voice with shouting, to set battering rams against the gates, to heap up a *siege* mound, and to build a wall. ²³ And it will be to them like a false divination in the eyes of those who have sworn

oaths with them; but he will bring their iniquity to remembrance, that they may be taken.” Ezekiel 21:18-23

Balaam has seen that seeking a divination against Israel is pointless, and so he no longer bothered to pursue this path...

¹ (con't) **but he set his face toward the wilderness.**

The question here is, “Does Balaam intend to bless Israel because it pleases the Lord, or does Balaam intend to curse Israel by forsaking the divination so that he, rather than the Lord, will control the outcome?”

The entire point of coming to Balak, and then going to the various places they have gone, was to curse Israel, not bless them. How one would answer that question would probably be based on whether they were a half-cup full or half-cup empty type.

I would go with the half-empty and say he desired still to curse Israel, and so he left behind the divination and set his face toward the wilderness, meaning the area where Israel sat encamped. Now, facing in that direction, it next says...

² **And Balaam raised his eyes, and saw Israel encamped according to their tribes;**

From the top of Peor, Balaam could see the entire encampment of Israel. John Lange’s commentary places the spot where Balaam is to the east of Israel, with Edom on the south and the vast desert reaching to the river of Assyria behind him. With this view, looking west and down upon Israel, he views them, as it says “according to their tribes.

The layout, as seen in the Numbers 3:14-39 sermon, is that of a giant cross, extending out to the east, west, north, and south, and with the tabernacle directly in the center. Where Balaam was then, he would see the entire cross from the base – meaning east, and extending out from there directly in front of him. With this massive cross directly in his view, it then says...

² (con't) **and the Spirit of God came upon him.**

Unlike the previous two times where it says the Lord put a word in his mouth, this time, the *ruakh elohim*, or Spirit of God, came upon him. He is cast into an ecstatic state which opens his spiritual mind and leads him to utter his oracle, regardless as to what he purposed.

One might question, “How could it be that he wanted to curse Israel, but instead he was led to bless them?” The question would assume that Balaam was intending on speaking for God in a positive blessing all along and that God would not otherwise come upon a wicked person. This is incorrect thinking. First, Deuteronomy 23 clearly shows this was his intent –

“Nevertheless the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam, but the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you.” Deuteronomy 23:5

Secondly, Scripture in several instances, shows that those who may or may not be right with the Lord will still speak according to the Spirit. This will be seen in king Saul in 1 Samuel 19:23. He had lost favor with the Lord, and yet the same terminology is used there as it is here. The Spirit of God came upon him and he prophesied.

It also is the case that Caiaphas, the wicked high priest of Israel prophesied the word of the Lord, as is seen in John 11 –

“Now this he did not say on his own *authority*; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, ⁵² and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.” John 11:51, 52

In such instances, God will come upon even the wicked to effect His purposes. As John Gill rightly states, such as are “not in his grace but in his gifts; not as a spirit of sanctification, but as a spirit of prophecy.” In this state, and with the Lord in control of the events, it says (after a brief poetic interlude)...

*A sign to the world for all to see
It is set on high by God for fallen man
A torn body hanging on a tree
The sign determined before the world began
How terrible and yet lovely is the cross
Terrible because we caused our Lord to go there
But O so lovely too, no more sin nor loss
For Christ our Lord, our sin did bear
The Lion of Judah has prevailed
The cross was not the end of our beautiful Lord
Victory over death, the grave He has assailed
And to God through Him we have been restored
How beautiful is the cross that brought us back to You
How beautiful are You, O Lord, ever faithful and true*

II. Balaam's Oracle (verses 3-11)

³ Then he took up his oracle and said:

Here again Balaam is said to take up his *mashal*, or oracle. It is a proverb or parable, and thus it is a comparative saying where one thing in a clause is like another in the next. The words that are to be spoken are an allegory or a representation of the intent of the Lord as spoken through Balaam.

In other words, it is the word of the Lord in intent, but it is spoken from Balaam's perspective. In this, there will be a progression of speech from that which is individual and concrete to that which is more universal and general.

This *mashal*, or oracle, will be like those he has already spoken, which is in a highly poetic form and in standard meter.

^{3 (con't)} "The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor,

neum bil'am beno beor – "Utterance Balaam son of Beor." In these words, Balaam identifies himself by name and by heritage, Balaam the son of Beor. It is, therefore, words spoken by him, even if the Lord directed him. It is a way of indicating that his eyes were closed, just as the eyes of his father had been closed. Now, there is a change which he will explicitly state in a minute.

For now, he uses the word *neum*, or utterance. This is a word that is almost exclusively used when proclaimed by the Lord. There are only three exceptions to this where the word is attributed to a human bearer. This is the first. It will be used by David in 2 Samuel 23:1, and then by Agur in Proverbs 30:1.

In this case, it is the Lord's prophetic word being spoken through Balaam. He is speaking it as if it is from his own viewpoint, but it is the word of the Lord being revealed through him. This is more fully realized with the next words...

^{3 (con't)} The utterance of the man whose eyes are opened,

u-neum ha'geber shethum ha'ayin – “And utterance the man are opened the eyes.” Balaam again uses the word *neum*, or utterance, and then he says that it is his utterance – he is the man whose eyes are opened. Some translations will say, “The man whose eyes are shut.” His eyes were shut, but the intent is that they are now spiritually opened through the effect of the Spirit upon him.

The word is a new and rare one, *shatham*. It means “to unveil,” and it will only be seen here and in verse 15. Balaam's eyes were closed, but now they are unveiled. God has opened his spiritual insight to reveal through him words concerning His people, Israel.

⁴ The utterance of him who hears the words of God,

neum shomea imre el – “Utterance of him who hears words of God.” Here, he again uses the word *neum*, or utterance, but he says that it is the utterance of him who hears the words of God. Thus, he is implying that his utterance is in accord with those words. He is speaking out what he hears and what will be said is that which is directed by God. Further, he is one...

^{4 (con't)} Who sees the vision of the Almighty,

asher makhazeh shaddai yekhezeh – “Who a vision of the Almighty sees.” He now states that he sees a *makhazeh*, or vision. It is a very rare word,

used just four times, but two of them are in this chapter. It was used in Genesis 15:1 when it said that the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. That was a vision to a friend of God. Now it is a vision to one who has been a foe of God.

He further uses the term, *Shaddai*, or Almighty. This is not a mere god, but the all-powerful God. The words come from the Source of all power, and therefore what will be said are words which reflect that power. Nothing can thwart them. Despite his previous state of one who came to curse, he cannot. Instead, he is now one...

⁴ (con't) **Who falls down, with eyes wide open:**

nophel u-gelui enayim – “Who falls down and opens wide his eyes.” The idea of falling down is being overwhelmed by force of what has occurred. It is similar to what happened to Saul in 1 Samuel 19:23, 24. There it says –

“Then the Spirit of God was upon him also, and he went on and prophesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah. ²⁴ And he also stripped off his clothes and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Therefore they say, ‘Is Saul also among the prophets?’”

This then would be unlike the other true prophets, such as Daniel, Ezekiel, and John, who were overwhelmed by the vision of the splendor and glory of the Lord. Rather, like Saul, Balaam is overthrown by an opposing and greater force, casting him down and impelling him to speak contrary to what he originally intended.

In this, Keil notes that “upon men like Balaam, whose inner religious life was still very impure and undeveloped, the Spirit of God could only operate by closing their outward senses to impressions from the lower earthly world, and raising them up to visions of the higher and spiritual world.”

With that accomplished, his spiritual eyes were now open to what they had been completely closed to in the past. The words concerning his eyes being opened here are different than those used concerning them in the previous verse. With his spiritual eyes opened, and now gazing with his physical eyes upon this massive cross in the wilderness, he begins his words of blessing...

⁵ **“How lovely are your tents, O Jacob!**

mah tovu ohalekha yaaqov – “How pleasing *are* your tents Jacob.” This is certainly not referring to the individual tents. A tent is a tent. It is referring to their layout – the order, structure, and beauty of the cross which stood before him.

Rather than a group of people haphazardly jumbled around the valley, they were meticulously aligned around their central sanctuary. Outside of it would be the Levites, and then outside of them would be three individual camps branching out in each direction.

There was order, harmony, and design in the cross, just as out of the cross of Christ comes order, harmony, and design. There is a purposeful intent behind the structures because they form the very heart of God for the people of the world as revealed in redemptive history.

⁵ (con’t) **Your dwellings, O Israel!**

mishkanotekha yisrael – “Your tabernacles, Israel.” This clause is parallel to the previous one. The tent is the edifice which is seen, the *mishkan*, or tabernacle, is the place of dwelling itself. The words are almost used synonymously. It would be comparable to saying, “Your house is beautiful; the place where you reside.” From there, he describes how this is so...

⁶ Like valleys that stretch out,

kinkhalim nitayu – “like valleys which extend.” The four branches which extended out from the sanctuary were like valleys. In the center is Life, and from that point the Life extended to the farthest reaches of Israel. So much so that they were...

^{6 (con't)} Like gardens by the riverside,

keganot ale nahar – “Like gardens by a river.” The words are parallel to the previous clause. The tents of Israel were so ordered and structured that together each branch appeared to be a garden all its own. When one plants a garden, they do so in rows, each with its own fruit, and each according to its most propitious place in regards to soil, sunlight, and space.

The camps of Israel were shorter at the far end, longer nearer to him, and of equal distance on each side, but each was vibrant and orderly, as if aligned along the side of a river. They were...

^{6 (con't)} Like aloes planted by the Lord,

ka-ahalim nata Yehovah – “As aloes planted by Yehovah.” This is speaking of the lignum or wood aloes. It is a tree eight to ten feet tall which has a sweet smell, and provides shade. It also provides the source for aromatic resins and incense. It is used when speaking of the Lord in the 45th Psalm –

“All Your garments *are scented* with myrrh and aloes *and* cassia,
Out of the ivory palaces, by which they have made You glad.” Psalm 45:8

The word itself is spelled the same as that of “tent,” and so it is somewhat of a pun saying that their tents are like these aloes. Both provide shade. As the aloes are planted by the Lord, they are orderly and beautiful, just as the tents of Israel are. They are also...

⁶ (con’t) **Like cedars beside the waters.**

ka-arazim ale mayim – “Like cedars by *the* waters.” This is now parallel to the previous clause again. Cedar is also an aromatic wood. And as the aloes were planted by the Lord, signifying order and beauty in their arrangement, these cedars are “besides the waters,” implying great health and beauty. The sentiment is later reflected in Psalm 104 –

“The trees of the Lord are full *of sap*,
The cedars of Lebanon which He planted.” Psalm 104:16

⁷ **He shall pour water from his buckets,**

yizal mayim midaleyav – “Will flow water from his buckets.” Here is a new and rare word, *deli*. It’s not a place to get sandwiches. Rather, it is a bucket. It will only be seen here and in Isaiah 40:15. There, in Isaiah, the nations are counted as drops in a bucket. However, here, there is the opposite thought.

The idea one gets is a man carrying two buckets which are so full that they overflow. Immediately, it is a picture of abundance and life. In a parched land, water is precious, but this looks to such an abundance that water in the buckets will freely flow out of them.

However, it is a prophecy of the Spirit flowing forth to such an extent from the buckets of Israel, meaning that found in Christ, that when carried by those who proclaim the gospel, it will overflow, watering all who are

provided from the abundance. Though the nations are but a drop in a bucket, the Spirit overflows in the greatest of abundance to God's people.

^{7 (con't)} **And his seed *shall be* in many waters.**

v'zaro b'mayim rabbim – “And seed in waters many.” It is parallel in thought to the previous clause. Immediately, one would think of seed for planting because of the abundant waters, and this is the thought Balak must have considered, but this is more especially speaking in a prophetic sense of descendants, which the word “seed” is used to refer to.

The idea of many waters is elsewhere equated to people groups. Thus, it is a prophecy of the seed of Israel going forth to many people groups. In its fullest sense, it looks to the peoples of the nations being brought into the commonwealth of Israel.

^{7 (con't)} **“His king shall be higher than Agag,**

v'yarom me-agag malkow - “And shall be higher than Agag, his king.” The name Agag is connected to the word *gag*, or roof. It thus signifies that which is the highest. This name is directly connected to the names Gog and Magog.

Magog goes back to Genesis 10:2 as a son of Japheth. Gog and Magog are found as the great enemies who will come against Israel as noted in Ezekiel 38 and Revelation 20. Agag, or the “Highest,” will be topped by the King of Israel. It is a prophecy of the coming of Messiah who will be above all other kings.

^{7 (con't)} **And his kingdom shall be exalted.**

v'tinase malkuto – “And shall be exalted his kingdom.” The kingdom of Israel was exalted for a period under David and Solomon, but those were short lived. This is speaking of something beyond that. Balaam’s spiritual eyes were opened to the kingdom of God in Christ which will cover the world, and to which all kingdoms will be subservient.

⁸ “God brings him out of Egypt;

el motsio mimitsrayim – “God brought him out of Egypt.” The words of this and the next clause are almost identical to Numbers 23:22. The only difference is it said “them” there, and it says “him” here. In those verses, it was speaking of Israel the people. Here it appears to be immediately speaking of Israel the collective, but it is prophetically speaking of Messiah.

Egypt is the place of bondage. Christ was born under the law, a yoke of bondage, but God in Christ brought Him out of that. Only in that, could He then bring us out of that bondage.

^{8 (con't)} He has strength like a wild ox;

ketoaphot reem lo – “Like strength, a wild ox.” This is parallel to the previous clause. Bringing one out of Egypt implies great strength. Here, that strength is described as a *reem*, or wild ox. It looks forward to the strength of God, in Christ. It is what Paul refers to in Romans 1:3, 4 –

“...concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, ⁴ and declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”

The strength of God in Christ is untameable and matchless.

8 (con't) He shall consume the nations, his enemies;

yokal goyim tsarav – “He eats up *the* nations, his enemies.” In the immediate sense, this is speaking of Israel, entering Canaan and destroying the nations which currently occupied the land, but this looks forward, again, to Messiah who will subdue all nations. They will either come to him in peace, or be consumed by Him in pieces.

8 (con't) He shall break their bones

v'atsmotehem yegarem – “And their bones, he makes bare.” Another rare word, *garam*, is seen, it gives the sense of denuding. Thus, the clause is parallel to the previous one. As He eats up the nations, so He shall devour them, making bare their bones. It signifies that all of their strength will be consumed by Him.

8 (con't) And pierce *them* with his arrows.

v'khitsav yimkhats – “And with arrows, he shall shatter.” It is another new word, *makhats*, meaning to shatter, wound, pierce-through, etc. It is a complicated clause because of the structure of the Hebrew. But what it appears to be saying is that after His victory, He will break His own arrows because they will no longer be needed. It would then follow along with the words of Isaiah –

“He shall judge between the nations,
And rebuke many people;
They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war anymore.” Isaiah 2:4

When the Lord destroys His enemies He will destroy His weapons of war, and the nations shall follow suit.

⁹ ‘He bows down, he lies down as a lion;

kara shakav kaari – “He crouched, he lay down, as a lion.” Here the words are similar to those of 23:24, but they have richer significance. In 23:24, it said –

“Look, a people rises like a lioness,
And lifts itself up like a lion;
It shall not lie down until it devours the prey,
And drinks the blood of the slain.”

There, the lion rises and goes forth to devour. Here, the lion crouches and lies down in victory, having devoured. This reflects, again, both Israel and Messiah. Israel went forth as a lion, but only in Christ is the victory won. Israel’s battles were earthly, Christ’s battles are spiritual. In His victory over the law, sin, death, and the devil, He then found His rest.

^{9 (con’t)} And as a lion, who shall rouse him?’

u-kelavi mu yeqimenu – “And as a lioness who shall stir him up?” Who would dare consider it? The lioness at rest is not to be disturbed. Likewise, who would consider provoking the Lord from His place of rest. Here, as throughout the utterance, the words speak immediately of Israel, but they find their ultimate fulfillment in the One Israel anticipated. And so like Israel...

⁹ (con't) **"Blessed is he who blesses you,
And cursed is he who curses you."**

mevarakhekha varukh - "Is he who blesses you blessed."

v'orerekha arur - "And is he who curses you cursed" The words of these clauses go back to Genesis 27:29 where Isaac pronounced his blessing upon Jacob -

"Let peoples serve you,
And nations bow down to you.
Be master over your brethren,
And let your mother's sons bow down to you.
Cursed *be* everyone who curses you,
And blessed *be* those who bless you!"

The blessing was upon Jacob, who is Israel, but it pointed to the coming of Messiah. In Messiah, Israel is blessed. Apart from Him, they are cursed. This isn't a secret or something hidden. Rather it is the reality of the situation. In cursing Christ Jesus, they have only brought a curse upon themselves. When they bless Him, so will they be blessed.

And such is true with all peoples and nations. Those who bless God's Anointed will be blessed. For Balak, it is a warning to cease his attempts to curse Israel. For Balaam, who will later attempt to curse Israel in a different way, it will be a death sentence. For all, it is a warning to come to Christ while there is time. Those who curse Him are cursed. So ends the third oracle of Balaam.

¹⁰ **Then Balak's anger was aroused against Balaam, and he struck his hands together;**

Again we see the descriptive term *v'yikhar aph balaq*, or "And burned the nostril of Balak." By this point, he is fuming mad, and so it says that he *saphaq*, or struck, his hands together. It is a new word which means to clap, strike, slap, etc. But it comes with the sense of grief or indignation. The same gesture is not uncommon in much of the Mideast today. The sentiment is well reflected in Lamentations when speaking of the ruined state of Jerusalem after the Lord's judgment fell upon it –

All who pass by **clap** *their* hands at you;
They hiss and shake their heads
At the daughter of Jerusalem:
"Is this the city that is called
'The perfection of beauty,
The joy of the whole earth?'" Lamentations 2:15

Balak has spent great time and effort to get Balaam to do just a simple thing for him, not realizing that Balaam is wholly incapable of following through with the request, even though he wanted to. Therefore, in his anger...

^{10 (con't)} **and Balak said to Balaam, "I called you to curse my enemies, and look, you have bountifully blessed *them* these three times!**

If you think about it, Balak isn't just a dolt, but he is a sub-dolt. He was told when he sent his first emissaries that the Lord had refused him permission to go. He then told him that he could only speak the word the Lord put in his mouth. He then blessed Israel, instead of cursing them – three times.

The fact that someone traveled as far and as long as Balaam did just to do the opposite of what he was being paid for, demonstrates either an idiot, or someone who is compelled, apart from his will, to take the course he has taken. Balak however, accuses Balaam of being in the wrong in this particular matter. And so he continues...

¹¹ Now therefore, flee to your place.

The words don't really catch the emotion that was surely welled up inside of Balak. Something more close in thought would be, "Now beat it. Get back to where you belong!"

He had his fill of Balaam, and all he could think of was putting him on his donkey and giving her a good swat on the rear to get her moving along. But before that, he finishes the passage with one more thought...

***¹¹ (fin) I said I would greatly honor you, but in fact, the Lord has kept you back from honor."**

The words, whether he actually believes the Lord spoke through Balaam or not, are loaded with irony. Balak promised great honors to Balaam, and yet – one way or the other – it was the Lord who kept him from that honor.

From this, it is surmised by some that Balaam felt justified in himself and that he was blessed along with Israel for having blessed Israel. However, this is not the case. Nor will it be the case after he finishes his final oracle.

Balaam turned not to bless Israel, but to curse them. It was only because the Lord thwarted his attempt that he instead blessed them. That is certain from the surrounding events. Because of this, he could not feel that he was entitled to the blessing.

Further, if he really accepted that the words he uttered were true, he would have ridden his donkey to the camp of Israel, not in the opposite direction. Rather than aligning himself with the people of God, like Rahab the harlot did, he will go back to his old practices.

It is a fatal mistake for any who turned from Israel because it was Israel through whom God sent His Son. And in sending Jesus, it was a fatal mistake for many generations of His own people who ignored the very warnings of God spoken through Balaam.

Israel means “He strives with God.” He either strives with God, for God, or he strives with God, against God. But either way, Israel strives with God. The forty years of punishment in the wilderness are behind them as they sit encamped at Moab. And the two thousand years of punishment among the nations is coming to its own close as they slowly regather from among the nations.

Balaam’s final oracle will speak of the destruction of the nations around Israel by Israel. Later in Scripture, the destruction of the nations is again prophesied, and that final judgment is summed up in the words of Jesus in how the nations treated His brethren, meaning Israel, as recorded in Matthew 25.

At that time, He will separate the nations according to the blessing which rests upon Israel. For now, our passage is complete and it calls out for us to consider how we will respond to the Messiah. Though Israel is the immediate subject of the verses, it is the One who came from Israel who is the ultimate Subject. One cannot escape making a decision in regards to Christ Jesus.

You can either choose to receive and bless Him, or you – by default – curse Him. Whether actively or passively, it makes no difference. To fail to choose Christ is to reject Christ. He is the Subject of this marvelous word God has given us, and it is laid out so that we don’t miss that fact. Be sure to call on Jesus and be reconciled to God through this marvelous Gift.

Closing Verse: “Now therefore, be wise, O kings;
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.

¹¹ Serve the Lord with fear,
And rejoice with trembling.
¹² Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,
And you perish *in* the way,
When His wrath is kindled but a little.
Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him.” Psalm 2:10-12

Next Week: Numbers 24:12-25 *It is future, but it is also historical...*
(Balaam’s Fourth Oracle) (48th Numbers Sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you. He has a good plan and purpose for you. It may seem at times as if you are lost in a desert, wandering aimlessly. But the Lord is there, carefully leading you to the Land of Promise. So follow Him and trust Him and He will do marvelous things for you and through you.

Balaam’s Third Oracle

Now when Balaam saw
That it pleased the Lord to Israel bless
He did not go as at other times, to seek to use sorcery
But he set his face toward the wilderness

And Balaam raised his eyes
And saw Israel encamped, and he was awed
Laid out according to their tribes
And came upon him the Spirit of God
Then he took up his oracle and said:
These are the words by which he was led

“The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor,
The utterance of the man whose eyes are opened,
The utterance of him who hears the words of God,
Who sees the vision of the Almighty,
Who falls down, with eyes wide open:

“How lovely are your tents, O Jacob!
Your dwellings, O Israel!
Like valleys that stretch out,
Like gardens by the riverside,
Like aloes planted by the Lord,
Like cedars beside the waters.
He shall pour water from his buckets,
And his seed shall be in many waters.

“His king shall be higher than Agag,
And his kingdom shall be exalted.

“God brings him out of Egypt;
He has strength like a wild ox;
He shall consume the nations, his enemies;
He shall break their bones
And pierce them with his arrows.
‘He bows down, he lies down as a lion;
And as a lion, who shall rouse him?’

“Blessed is he who blesses you,
And cursed is he who curses you.”

Then Balak’s anger was aroused against Balaam

And he struck his hands together as things had gotten worse

And Balak said to Balaam

“I called you my enemies to curse

And look, you have bountifully blessed them these three times!
Now therefore, flee to your place; heed my word
I said I would greatly honor you
But in fact, has kept you back from honor the Lord
Lord God, we are even now in a wilderness
And we are wanting to be led by You
Without You to direct, our lives would be a mess
And so be our guide, O God; You who are faithful and true

We long for the water in this barren land
May it flow forth from the Rock, our souls to satisfy
Give us this refreshing, spiritual hand
And may we take it, and to our lives daily it apply

And we shall be content and satisfied in You alone
We will follow You as we sing our songs of praise
Hallelujah to You; to us Your path You have shown
Hallelujah we shall sing to you for all of our days

Hallelujah and Amen...