

**Numbers 23:1** ¶ And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven oxen and seven rams.

**Numbers 23:2** And Balak did as Balaam had spoken; and Balak and Balaam offered on *every* altar a bullock and a ram.

**Numbers 23:3** And Balaam said unto Balak, Stand by thy burnt offering, and I will go: peradventure the LORD will come to meet me: and whatsoever he sheweth me I will tell thee. And he went to an high place.

The chapter breaks are really unfortunate since the narrative continues unbroken from the previous chapter.

Balak had taken Balaam up to one of the high places where Baal was worshipped. Still, Balaam doesn't hesitate to prepare sacrifices to offer the LORD in an attempt to change His mind. He tells Balak to build seven altars and prepare seven oxen and seven rams for sacrifice—one of each on each altar. He then left Balak to wait by the burnt offerings while he went to meet with the LORD. He is careful to tell Balak that he will only tell him what the LORD tells him to tell him.

It seems that Balaam went further up the mountain.

JFB offers some helpful insight: “Balaam blended his own superstitions with the divine worship. The heathen, both in ancient and modern times, attached a mysterious virtue to the number *seven*; and Balaam, in ordering the preparation of so many altars, designed to mystify and delude the king.”

**Numbers 23:4** And God met Balaam: and he said unto him, I have prepared seven altars, and I have offered upon *every* altar a bullock and a ram.

**Numbers 23:5** And the LORD put a word in Balaam's mouth, and said, Return unto Balak, and thus thou shalt speak.

**Numbers 23:6** And he returned unto him, and, lo, he stood by his burnt sacrifice, he, and all the princes of Moab.

God met Balaam according to His own purposes. Balaam told God (like He didn't know) that he had sacrificed seven oxen and rams upon seven altars.

The LORD put His word into Balaam's mouth and told him to go back and share that message with Balak. Balaam did so and stood by the burnt offerings to speak to Balak and the princes of Moab (who had probably accompanied them and helped with the sacrifices).

I couldn't help but chuckle at Guzik's observation on this section: “God spoke through a donkey in the previous chapter and now He spoke through a bigger donkey.”

**Numbers 23:7** And he took up his parable, and said, Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, *saying*, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel.

**Numbers 23:8** How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, *whom* the LORD hath not defied?

**Numbers 23:9 For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.**

**Numbers 23:10 Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!**

The word “parable” is a reference to God’s message. Balaam’s message (my paraphrase): Balak the king of Moab brought me from Aram in the mountains of the east to curse Jacob and rant against Israel. I cannot curse whom God has not cursed or defy whom He does not defy. As I look down upon their camp, I see a people that have been set apart as unique among the nations. They number so many that I can’t count them; in fact, I can’t even count the fourth part of them. (It seems that from his vantage point he could discern the four camps surrounding the tabernacle.) May I die before God as righteous and as blessed as Israel.

**Numbers 23:11 And Balak said unto Balaam, What hast thou done unto me? I took thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast blessed *them* altogether.**

**Numbers 23:12 And he answered and said, Must I not take heed to speak that which the LORD hath put in my mouth?**

Balaam’s message did not at all please Balak. He recognized the message as a threat to him since it blessed Israel. Balaam reminded Balak that he could only speak what the LORD put in his mouth.

**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.**

**Numbers 23:14 And he brought him into the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bullock and a ram on *every* altar.**

**Numbers 23:15 And he said unto Balak, Stand here by thy burnt offering, while I meet *the* LORD yonder.**

Balak is persistent. He decided it would be better to take Balaam to another place from which he could see the camp of Israel, but not all of them. I guess he reasoned he could better curse them if he weren’t so overwhelmed by their numbers.

So, he took him to the field of Zophim on the top of Pisgah. Again they built seven altars and offered an ox and ram on each of them. Again, Balaam has Balak wait by the burnt offerings while he goes to meet the LORD.

I liked Coffman’s application concerning Balak’s strategy: “This is still the strategy of the Devil. He challenges his Satanic followers not to look at the mighty hosts of true believers who receive and obey the truth, seeking to focus attention upon the ‘fringes’ of God’s kingdom, the weak, the failing, the backsliders, and the quitters.”

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

**Numbers 23:17** And when he came to him, behold, he stood by his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab with him. And Balak said unto him, What hath the LORD spoken?

Once again, in accordance with His own purposes the LORD meets with Balaam and puts a message in his mouth with instructions to go and deliver it to Balak.

**Numbers 23:18** And he took up his parable, and said, Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor:

**Numbers 23:19** 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?

**Numbers 23:20** Behold, I have received *commandment* to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it.

**Numbers 23:21** He hath not beheld iniquity 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.

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

**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!

**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.

My paraphrase of this message: Listen to me Balak. Men may lie, but God does not lie; neither does He change what He has purposed; He does not change....

*Malachi 3:6 "For I am the LORD, I change not...."*

...Whatever He promises to do, He does....

*Isaiah 14:24 "The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand:"*

...I have blessed Israel by the LORD's command, and I cannot reverse it. I see no trouble in Israel's future because they follow the LORD God as their king. God brought them out of Egypt using invincible strength. There is no magic or sorcery that can bring evil upon Israel. The nations will know it is through the power of God that they are victorious. The nation is like a great, strong lion that will not be satisfied until they have conquered all their enemies.

Coffman included an interesting historical note concerning the phrase "What hath God wrought"—"When S. F. B. Morse, having duly prepared for it, sent the first message by wireless telegraph from Washington, D.C., to Baltimore, MD, on

May 24,1844, these four words constituted the message.”

**Numbers 23:25 And Balak said unto Balaam, Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all.**

**Numbers 23:26 But Balaam answered and said unto Balak, Told not I thee, saying, All that the LORD speaketh, that I must do?**

Balak is beside himself. He basically told Balaam that if he couldn't curse Israel, don't say anything. Again, Balaam told Balak that he had to speak as the LORD directed him.

**Numbers 23:27 And Balak said unto Balaam, Come, I pray thee, I will bring thee unto another place; peradventure it will please God that thou mayest curse me them from thence.**

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

**Numbers 23:29 And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven bullocks and seven rams.**

**Numbers 23:30 And Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bullock and a ram on *every* altar.**

Amazingly, Balak doesn't give up. He decided to take Balaam to yet another place, hoping that "God" (not in reference to YHWH) would yet allow him to curse Israel. He took Balaam to the top of Peor, looking toward Jeshimon (a wilderness area to the south of the Dead Sea). Eerdman's Dictionary describes Peor as "the focal point for the worship of a local manifestation of Baal....somewhere near Mt. Nebo."

Once again Balaam told Balak to build yet seven more altars and sacrifice a bull and ram on each of the altars.