

# Numbers 23:1-24:14—Balaam's First Three Oracles

- Very Short Geography Review
  - Why is this the location where the Israelites are encamped?
    - Jericho... Beth-el / Jerusalem... Divide and Conquer Strategy
  - Balaam is “from Aram... from the eastern mountains” (Num. 23:7)
  - Cursing from the top of “Pisgah” (Num. 23:13-14)  
(cf. Num. 21:20 in the Transjordan itinerary)
- Deir 'Alla Inscription
  - Date: Eighth century BC (much later)
  - Location: Northern border of Moabite territory
  - Another case of the documentary hypothesis?
  - One of the few cases of a non-royal Biblical figure being named in external evidence. (There are *many* such cases for non-Israelite royal figures)
- Offering sacrifices
  - Typically associated with priestly service
  - Balaam is operating as a “prophet” and a “priest”
  - In neither case does this seem to be *initiated* by the LORD
- High elevation location
  - Often associated with “communion” with the gods
  - Deut. 12:2; 1 Ki. 14:23; 1 Ki. 22:43; 2 Ki. 16:4; 2 Ki. 17:11
- God's continued sovereignty over Balaam's word's
  - “The Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth and said, ‘Go back to Balak and give him this word.’” (Num. 23:5, cf. 23:16)
  - “Must I not speak what the Lord puts in my mouth?” (Num. 23:12)
- The First Oracle
  - The introduction is *about* Balak
  - God is also sovereign over the *reality* that He has blessed Israel (and Balaam is therefore not *able* to invoke a genuine curse against them)
  - Notice the *counting* motif. Is this meant to be ironic? What is the message here?
- The Second Oracle
  - Why does Balaam even bother going to a second location to “try again”? Does this tell us something about Balaam? (Cf. Deut. 23:5)
  - The introduction is *addressed to* Balak (with an implicit rebuke)
  - Note the “devour its prey” language
    - Does Israel do this to Moab? (Judges 3—Ehud; cf. 4th oracle next week)
    - Does Israel do this to Midian? (Judges 6—Gideon)
- The Third Oracle
  - “Now when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he did not resort to divination as at other times, but turned his face toward the wilderness.” (24:1)
    - What does this mean? What does it imply Balaam is attempting to do?
  - “...the Spirit of God came on him...” (24:2)
  - King Agag (24:7, cf. 1 Sam. 15:8-9)
  - Parallels to Balak's invitation *and* the Abrahamic blessing (Gen. 12:3)
- Balak's response to the oracles + and Balaam's response to Balak