

CHAPTER 22

INTRODUCTION TO NUMBERS 22

The children of Israel being come into the plains of Moab, put the king of Moab into a panic, who expressed his fears to the elders of Midian, (⁻⁰²²¹Numbers 22:1-4) and sent for Balaam the soothsayer to curse the people of Israel, but he, upon consulting the Lord refused to come, (⁻⁰²²⁵Numbers 22:5-14), on which the king of Moab sent to him a second time, making large promises of preferment to him, and who at this time got leave from the Lord to go with the messengers, (⁻⁰²²⁵Numbers 22:15-21), but was met with in the way by an angel of the Lord, who would have slain him had it not been for his ass, of which a very wonderful revelation is given, (⁻⁰²²²Numbers 22:22-35), and the chapter is closed with the interview between Balak king of Moab and Balaam, and an account of what passed between them, and what was done by them, (⁻⁰²²⁶Numbers 22:36-41).

Ver. 1. *And the children of Israel set forward*, etc.] From the country of Bashan, where we read of them last, after they had conquered Og the king of it, and also Sihon king of the Amorites, and settled some of their tribes in both kingdoms; the particular place from whence they came hither, according to the account of their journeys, were the mountains of Abarim, (⁻⁰³³⁸Numbers 33:48):

and pitched in the plains of Moab the part of them they encamped in reached from Bethjesimoth to Abelshittim, (⁻⁰³³⁹Numbers 33:49),

on this side Jordan by Jericho; or Jordan of Jericho, as the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan; a river that flowed near to Jericho, running between the plains of Moab and the plains of Jericho; according to Josephus ^{f329} it was sixty furlongs, or seven miles and a half from Jericho; but, according to Jerome ^{f330}, it was but five miles: or rather, as some versions render it, “over against Jericho” ^{f331}; for Jericho was on the other side of the river Jordan, and the plains of Moab, or that part of them where Israel now pitched, were right against that city; and so Josephus says ^{f332}.

Ver. 2. *And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.*] The word “Amorites” being particularly pointed, shows, as

Aben Ezra observes, that Sihon and Og are both meant, and that there were not among the kings of the land of Canaan any so great as they; wherefore when Balak, who was the present king of Moab, saw what Israel had done to them, that they had conquered them, and seized upon their kingdoms: he reasoned within himself, and said, as Jarchi represents him, that if they could not stand before Israel, much less could he and his people; and the rather, since those kings Israel had subdued were too powerful for the king of Moab, and had taken part of his country from him, and yet Israel was too strong for them.

Ver. 3. *And Moab was sore afraid of the people*, etc.] Lest they should enter into their country and do to them as they had done to Sihon and Og, and their countries; on this account the king of Moab, his nobles, and the people of the land, were in an exceeding great panic, which was a fulfilling of the prophecy of Moses in (⁴⁰⁵¹⁵Exodus 15:15):

because they were many the number of them taken a little after in this place, where they now were, in the plains of Moab, even after 24,000 had died of the plague, was 601,730, (⁴⁰⁵¹⁹Numbers 25:9 26:51):

and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel; though they had no reason for it, had they considered their relation to them, being the descendants of Abraham, the uncle of Lot, whose posterity they were; and that the Israelites had done them service in delivering them from such bad neighbours, who had taken much of their country from them, and were doubtless making continual encroachments on them; and especially had they known the orders the Israelites had from the Lord not to distress them, nor contend with them in battle, (⁴⁰⁵¹⁹Deuteronomy 2:9), but this they were ignorant of, and being of a different religion from the Israelites, had them in abhorrence, or loathed them, as the word signifies; though the meaning rather seems to be, that they had a nausea, a loathing in their stomachs, and could not eat their food, because of the dread of the Israelites that was upon them; or they were weary of their lives, as Jarchi interprets it, and as the word is used, (⁴⁰²⁷⁴Genesis 27:46).

Ver. 4. *And Moab said unto the elders of Midian*, etc.] Whom the king of Moab sent for to consult with what to do in the present case, for the good and safety of both people; for, according to the Targum of Jonathan, they were one people and one kingdom unto this time, at least had been confederates, by what is said (⁴⁰³⁵⁵Genesis 36:35) though Jarchi thinks there was always a mutual hatred of each other, and that Midian now came

against Moab to war, but for fear of Israel a peace was made between them, just as it was with Herod and Pontius Pilate in another case, (^{<0231>}Luke 23:12), however, they were friends as well as neighbours now; and by which it appears, that this Midian was not that where Jethro lived, which was on the Red sea, near Mount Sinai, in Arabia Felix; this was near the river Arnon, and the Moabites in Arabia Petraea; and though both the one and the other descended from Midian, the son of Abraham by Keturah, yet they had spread themselves, or the one was a colony from the other, and might be distinguished into southern and northern Midianites; the latter were those near Moab; and these elders of Midian, addressed by the king of Moab, being now at his court, whether sent for or not, are the same with the five kings or princes of Midian, as they are called, (^{<0308>}Numbers 31:8 ^{<0321>}Joshua 13:21) as Aben Ezra observes:

now shall this company lick up all [that are] round about us; consume us, and all our people, and all adjoining to us, and depending on us:

as the ox licketh up the grass of the field; as easily, and as soon, and as completely and entirely; nor are we any more able to oppose them than the grass of the field is to resist and hinder the ox from devouring it:

and Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time; according to the Targum of Jonathan, Midianites and Moabites reigned by turns so long a time; and that Balak was a Midianite, and so says Jarchi, and unfit for the kingdom, and was set over them through necessity for a time: but it seems rather that he was king in succession after his father Zippor; and the design of the expression is only to show, that he who was before mentioned, (^{<0232>}Numbers 22:2) was the then reigning prince when this affair happened.

Ver. 5. *He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor,* etc.] In consequence of the consultation held by the king of Moab with the elders of Midian; and very probably through a motion of theirs, and by advice they gave, Balak dispatched messengers of both people to the person here described by his name and parentage; but who he was is not easy to say: the Jews sometimes make him to be a magician in Pharaoh's court, at the time when Moses was born ^{f333}, which is not probable; and it is still more improbable that he should be Laban the Syrian, as the Targum of Jonathan here, and the Targum on (^{<0344>}1 Chronicles 1:44) though others say ^{f334} he was the son of Beor, the son of Laban, and so was the grandson of Laban; and with as little probability is he said to be Elihu, that answered

Job according to a tradition of the Jews, mentioned by Jerom ^{f335}; nor is there any reason to believe that he was ever a good man, and a true prophet of the Lord; he is expressly said to be a diviner or a soothsayer, (^(f332)Joshua 13:22), a sort of men abhorred of God, and not to be suffered to be among his people, (^(f330)Deuteronomy 18:10) but were of great credit and esteem among the Heathens, for their pretensions to foretell things to come, or to discover lost goods, and the like; and by their enchantments to drive away evils, or bring on curses, for which Balaam was famous: and therefore, by the advice of the Midianites, Balak sent for him

to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people; the land of his people, of his birth or habitation, was Aram or Syria, (^(f337)Numbers 23:7) that is, Aram Naharaim, which lay between the two rivers Tigris and Euphrates, or what is sometimes called Mesopotamia, as is clear from (^(f334)Deuteronomy 23:4), and the river of that land, which was eminently so called, is the river Euphrates, as the Targum of Jonathan expresses it here, and by that river was Pethor, where Balaam now lived; and is by some thought to be the same with the Pacoria of Ptolemy ^{f336}, which was by that river: the messengers were sent

to call him: to invite him to Balak's court:

saying, behold, there is a people come out from Egypt; Balak speaks of them, as if he knew not who they were, only that they were come from Egypt, and were seeking a new habitation to settle in, and so were in danger from them, lest they should invade his country, and settle there:

behold, they cover the face of the earth; not the face of the whole earth, unless an hyperbolical expression is supposed, to set forth the greatness of their numbers; but a large part of the earth, all within sight almost, even the plains of Moab:

and they abide over against me; were very near him, lay encamped before his country, and his metropolis, and so he thought himself in great danger, and threatened with an invasion, as the pitching of their tents so near made him surmise.

Ver. 6. *Come now, therefore, I pray thee,* etc.] To my country, city, and court:

curse me this people; by imprecations on them; and which being attended with various rites and ceremonies, brought calamities on persons, which men of Balaam's character were supposed to have power to do:

for they are too mighty for me; to oppose and subdue by force of arms; and therefore was obliged to have recourse to such arts and methods he was master of; suggesting, that he was able to do more by his divinations than could be effected by an army of men:

peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land; there is hope, by taking such measures, that they may be prevailed over and conquered; and that, together with your curses, and my army, we may be able to smite them, and destroy them; you with your tongue, and I and my people with the sword, and so drive them quite out of the land, and get a clear riddance of them:

for I wot that he whom thou blessest [is] blessed, and he whom thou cursest [is] cursed; so high an opinion had the king of Moab of this soothsayer and diviner, from the report he had had of the mighty feats done by him; as, that those for whom he asked for blessings from heaven had them, and those on whom he imprecated evils, they came upon them; and this was a prevailing custom among the Heathens in later times, and particularly the Romans; not only to endeavour to get the gods of the people from them they were at war with, and whose cities they besieged, praying that they would leave such places, cities, and their temples; but also wished evils to cities and armies, and prayed the gods to fill them with flight, fear, and terror, and that such evils might come upon them, which had on others^{f337}.

Ver. 7. *And the elders of Moab, and the elders of Midian, departed*, etc.] By which it appears that they were princes and nobles; for such the elders were, that were sent on this errand to Balaam; and that they were some of both people, Midian and Moab, that went upon it, (see ⁴⁰²⁴Numbers 22:14) which shows, that if they were not one people, under one king, which yet seems likely, nevertheless they made a common cause of it, and joined in this expedient to save their country:

with the rewards of divination in their hands; not that diviners were sent along with them to Balsam, as Aben Ezra interprets it, that he might not deceive them, and put them off, by saying it was not a fit and proper day or hour to go out and curse, which these men would be able to refute; but if

they were skilled in the art of divination as well as he, what need was there to send to him, when they had such at hand? nor instruments of divination, as Jarchi, which so famous a soothsayer could not be thought to be without; but, as we rightly render it, the rewards of divination, which were either fixed or left to the generosity of those that had recourse to such persons, and were presents which they brought them, in order to engage them to use the utmost of their art for them; and this sense is confirmed by the Apostles Peter and Jude, (see ^{¶125}2 Peter 2:15, ^{¶111}Jude 1:11):

and they came unto Balaam; at Pethor:

and spake unto him the words of Balak: told him the errand they were sent on to him by the king of Moab.

Ver. 8. *And he said unto them, lodge here this night,* etc.] Which shows that he was at once inclined to do their business for them, and would readily engage in it if he could be permitted; and it looks as if it was in the night season that he got knowledge of things, either in dreams, or by familiar spirits, or by consulting the stars, or other methods used by him at such seasons; or it may be, this was only said to get time before he gave them a peremptory answer, that he might, if he could, get leave to do what they desired, to which he showed a good inclination:

and I will bring you word again, as the Lord shall speak unto me; by which it appears he had some knowledge of the true God, and pretended great familiarity with him, thereby to make himself the more respectable; and indeed he was surprisingly favoured with some degree of intimacy with him, which, for the sake of Israel, he was now admitted to; whether at any other time, or on any other occasion, is not certain; however, he promised the princes he would let them know the next morning what was said to him, and so accordingly what he should or could do:

and the princes of Moab abode with Balaam; that is, that night, and so very probably the princes of Midian likewise; though some of the Jewish writers think ^{f338} they departed as soon as they heard Balaam say he would consult the Lord about this matter; from whence they concluded there was no room to hope for success, since he would never consent to destroy a nation so dear unto him, and for whose sake he had wrought so many miracles; but if this was the case, how came the princes of Moab to stay, with whom the same objection would have place? but the reason why they only are named may be what Aben Ezra gives an hint of, that these were

the principal persons in the embassy, in whom the rest were included, as Balak their king was the principal person that sent them.

Ver. 9. *And God came unto Balaam*, etc.] In a dream very probably, as he did to Abimelech and Laban, (⁰¹¹⁸Genesis 20:3 31:24):

and said, what men are these with thee? who lodged with him that night. This he said, not as ignorant who they were, or from whence they came, or what they came about; but in order to lead on to a discourse with Balaam, and to have from him the account of the men, and their business, and to try his fidelity in relating the affair.

Ver. 10. *And Balaam said unto God*, etc.] In answer to the question he put to him:

Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, hath sent unto me; these men, and a message by them:

saying; as follows.

Ver. 11. *Behold, there is a people come out of Egypt*, etc.] In this, and the following part of the verse, he faithfully and punctually relates the words of Balak to him by his messengers, as well knowing he could not deceive the omniscient God, or hide anything from him, though he could deceive men; and conceal the truth from them, to serve a purpose; (see Gill on ⁰²¹⁵Numbers 22:5”) (see Gill on ⁰²¹⁶Numbers 22:6”).

Ver. 12. *And God said unto Balaam, thou shalt not go with them*, etc.] Which is a denial of the first thing Balak requested, “come now, therefore”, etc. (⁰²¹⁶Numbers 22:6)

thou shalt not curse the people; which was the principal thing desired, and in order to which he was solicited to go with the messengers; but this is absolutely forbidden:

for they are blessed; by the Lord himself, with an irrevocable blessing, and therefore it would be vain and fruitless, as well as dangerous for him to attempt to curse them, (⁰¹¹⁸Genesis 12:3) this may have a special respect to the blessing of Jacob by Isaac, which could not be reversed by the solicitations of Esau, and which descended to Jacob’s posterity, the Israelites, (⁰²⁷³Genesis 27:33).

Ver. 13. *And Balaam rose up in the morning*, etc.] With the impression of the dream upon his mind, and of what had passed between God and him in it:

and said unto the princes of Balak; which shows what the elders were that were sent, of what honour and dignity, and may include both those of Moab and of Midian:

get you into your land; as soon as you can; set forward on your journey, it is to no purpose to stay here:

for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you; he only relates one part of the answer he had from the Lord, respecting his going with them, but says not a word of his being forbid to curse Israel, and of the reason given why he should not; had he reported this, in all probability it would have prevented any further application to him, and so any attempt to get this done, which Balaam seemed aware of; and therefore, by concealing this, hoped for fresh solicitations and entreaties, and that in time the Lord might be prevailed on to let him go and curse them; he having a covetous desire of riches, honour, and preferment, in Balak's court.

Ver. 14. *And the princes of Moab rose up*, etc.] And the princes of Midian also, immediately, without entering into a parley with him, to persuade him to go with them; perceiving by his answer that it would be to no purpose, and that he was determined to do as the Lord directed him:

and they went unto Balak, and said, Balaam refuseth to come with us; as Balaam told them less than what God had said to him, so they related less to Balak than what Balaam had said to them; saying nothing of the Lord's refusing to let him go with them, but represent it as a piece of pride and obstinacy in Balaam, and which Balak was left to understand; and it seems as if he did understand it as a piece of policy in Balaam, to get a larger offer of money or honour, or both, from him, and which the following account seems to confirm.

Ver. 15. *And Balak sent yet again princes more, and more honourable than they*.] More in number, and greater in quality, princes of the first rank in his court; supposing that Balaam thought he was not treated with respect enough, they being princes of the meaner sort, and but few, that were sent unto him before, which he imagined was the reason, at least one reason, why he refused to come with them; persons of Balaam's character in those days being highly revered.

Ver. 16. *And they came to Balaam*, etc.] Though men of such rank and dignity, they did not decline the embassy, being sent by their king; nor did they think it below them to wait upon this soothsayer:

and said unto him, thus saith Balak the son of Zippor; representing their master, and addressing the diviner in his name, as his ambassadors; at the same time doing honour to Balak that sent them, of whom they speak respectfully, and to Balaam, to whom they were sent:

let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me; no business, though ever so important, that might be upon his hands; nor any want of respect to him he might imagine; nor if the rewards offered were not thought sufficient; nor any persuasions of men to the contrary; and if it could be thought he knew anything of the prohibition of God, that may be included; so urgent was he upon his coming to him.

Ver. 17. *For I will promote thee unto very great honour*, etc.] In his court, by making him some great officer there, perhaps his prime minister; so that as before he laid a bait for his covetousness, sending him large presents, and rewards of divination; here, for his pride and ambition, promising him court preferment; though Aben Ezra interprets it of mammon or riches, of which he could give him an immense sum: “in honouring I will exceedingly honour thee”^{f339}; or load thee with wealth and riches; and so Balaam seems to understand it, since in his answer he says, “if Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold”; both civil honour and worldly wealth may be taken into the account, since they are both heavy and weighty things, and very desirable and ensnaring:

and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me; give him what money he should ask of him, put him into whatsoever place and office he should desire; and though he was a sovereign prince, would be at his beck and command, and do whatever he should direct him to do in his kingdom, as well as in what concerned the affair of cursing Israel; as we find he afterwards did, with respect to sacrifices and rites relative thereunto:

come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; renewing the request made in the first embassy with great importunity, (⁴⁰²¹⁶Numbers 22:6) but using here a different word for “cursing”; there, as Munster observes, the word signifies to curse lightly; here, to blaspheme and utterly devote to ruin; to which may be added, to curse expressly and by name, to pierce through and through, to deprive of all benefits, and to destroy utterly.

Ver. 18. *And Balaam answered, and said unto the servant's of Balak,* etc.] Who were not only princes of the land, but officers of state in the court of Balak:

if Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more; which is well spoken, had it been from his heart: he speaks very respectfully of God, calling him by his great and incommunicable name Jehovah, the Being of beings; representing him as the object of his worship and adoration, as he might be along with other gods, which was the practice of the Heathens in those times, particularly the Syrians, among whom Balaam lived; so did Laban and others before him: likewise he makes a profession of him, and claims an interest in him, which he might the rather do, to make himself look greater, as being the servant of the most high God; for the Gentiles in those times, and indeed in later times, had a notion of one supreme God, superior to all the rest; and this Jehovah Balaam claimed as his God: he speaks very well of the word of God, to which he pretended so strict a regard, that he would not transgress it in the least, for all that Balak could give him or more, no, not for all the money in the world; and yet his heart at the same time went after his covetousness, and he was eagerly desirous and greedy of getting the advantages into his hands that were offered him; for he hoped that God would change his mind, and alter his word, and give him leave to go and get the money, as appears by what follows.

Ver. 19. *Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night,* etc.] As the former messengers had; this shows his strong inclination to go along with them, and do what was desired of him, could he be permitted; otherwise he might and ought to have told the messengers at once that Balak needed not to have given himself and them so much trouble, since it was not in his power to do for him what he requested; nor would he attempt it, as being contrary to the will of God, and therefore it would be their best way to return as soon as they could; but instead of that, he desires them to stay that night, which must give them some hope of succeeding in their embassy:

that I may know what the Lord will say unto me more; he hoped he would change his mind, and say something to him different from, and contrary to what he had before declared unto him, which to suppose of God is great vileness and wickedness; to such a pitch did his greedy desire after riches

and honour work him up into; he ought to have been satisfied with the answer already given him, and not to have inquired more.

Ver. 20. *And the Lord came unto Balaam at night*, etc.] As before, (^(022B)Numbers 22:9) it may be in a dream; the Targum of Jonathan is as there,

“a word came from the Lord:”

and said unto him, if the men come and call thee, rise up, and go with them; this was said, as some think, not seriously, but sarcastically, or rather in an angry manner, bidding him go, if he would; so giving him up to his own heart’s lusts, or, at most; only permitting him to go with them, but not to curse Israel; and this permission to go seems to be on this condition, if the princes first called him, and were urgent on him to go with them: this was a trial of Balaam, whether he would be eager and forward to go, or patiently wait until he should be called; or the words may be rendered, “seeing”, or because ^{f340},

they are come to call thee: but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shall thou do; whether he would or not, he should be forced to do it, as Jarchi; and therefore go not with any intention to curse Israel, which shall never be done; wherefore to go would be vain and fruitless, since he would never be able to answer the design of Balak: but still Balaam hoped, it not being so fully and clearly expressed as before, that he should not curse Israel; that God would say something else unto him, though he had no reason at all for it, but all the reverse; so blinded was he with a greedy desire of riches and honour.

Ver. 21. *And Balaam rose up in the morning*, etc.] Early, not waiting for the call of the princes, which showed how eager he was to be gone, and how intent upon the journey:

and saddled his ass; which, if he did himself, as Jarchi suggests, this is a further proof of the haste he was in; though, as he had two servants with him, it is more likely that they did it by his order: the same is said of Abraham, (^(022B)Genesis 22:3), it was usual for persons of note and figure, in those times and countries, to ride on asses, (⁽⁰¹⁵⁰⁾Judges 5:10) and went with the princes of Moab; in company with them, and with as good a will as they, his heart and theirs being alike, as Jarchi notes; though it seems by what follows that by some means or another they soon parted company;

for when the affair of the ass happened, Balaam was alone, only attended by his two servants.

Ver. 22. *And God's anger was kindled because he went*, etc.] Though he had given him leave to go; but then it was upon condition that the princes called him to go with them, whereas he went without their call, and did not wait for it; and besides, he did not acquaint them, as he did not the messengers before, of what God had said, that he should not curse Israel, nor say anything contrary to this his will, which, had he told them, they would not have taken him with them; moreover, he went with an intention, with a good will to curse Israel, which must be displeasing to God, who knew his heart; so the Targum of Jonathan,

“and the anger of the Lord was strong, because he went to curse them;”

likewise, though he had a permission to go, it was in an angry manner, and was not agreeable to the Lord he should go, and therefore should not have gone notwithstanding; or, at least, he might expect some marks of the divine displeasure; so Jarchi observes, he saw that the thing was evil in the eyes of the Lord, or displeasing to him, and yet he desired it; just as the people of Israel, when the Lord bid them go up and possess the land, which case Aben Ezra instances in; they desired persons might be sent before hand to spy out the land, which, though permitted, they smarted for it: for not whatsoever God permits is well pleasing to him; besides, the words may be rendered ^{f341}, “when he went”, or, “as he was going”; and so not a reason of the Lord's anger, but expresses when it was kindled or broke forth:

and the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him; that this was not a created angel, one of the ministering spirits, but the eternal one, the angel of Jehovah's presence, appears from (⁴⁰²⁵ Numbers 22:35) that went before the people of Israel in the wilderness, not only to guide but to guard and protect them; and who was an adversary to their adversaries, and at all times stood up for their help and assistance against all those that hated and opposed them: Jarchi calls him an angel of mercy, who would have restrained Balaam from sinning, that he might not sin and perish, and so was rather a friend than an adversary, had he attended to him:

now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him; who, the Targum of Jonathan says, were Jannes and Jambres, the magicians of Egypt, of whom (see ^{<518>}2 Timothy 3:8) these only were with him, the princes of Midian on some account or another being separated from him.

Ver. 23. *And the ass saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way*, etc.] Which Balaam did not; his eyes being held from seeing him by the power and providence of God, that he might be reprov'd and rebuk'd by his ass, to whom God gave power to see, more than to him, as Jarchi notes, so that he had little reason to boast of his visions and revelations, and that he was the man whose eyes were open: the angel stood in the very pathway on which the ass was carrying Balaam: and his sword drawn in his hand; as threatening to destroy him, and as if he was just about to push at him, and signifying hereby not only that he deserved to die, but what death he should die of, namely, by the sword, as he did, (^{<618>}Numbers 31:8 ^{<1216>}1 Chronicles 21:16)

and the ass turned aside out of the way; out of the common road, to save its master and itself, from a natural principle of self-preservation: and went into the field; adjoining to, and that lay along the road side:

and Balaam smote the ass to turn her into the way; with his staff, as in (^{<427>}Numbers 22:27) to bring her into the common road again.

Ver. 24. *But the angel of the Lord stood in a path of the vineyard*, etc.]. Which were in the field into which the ass went, and before Balaam could turn her back she got into a narrow path, between the vineyards, as the Targum of Jonathan; a footpath which lay between them, or a footpath where foxes ran and had their holes, who used to lie near vineyards and among them, (see ^{<2114>}Song of Solomon 1:14) however, it was a very narrow path, and here the angel placed himself, so that there was no passage for Balaam and his ass, at least not without great difficulty and danger;

a wall [being] on this side, and a wall on that side; and therefore there was no going out into the field, as before, to avoid the difficulty and danger; this being, as Jarchi observes, a stone wall that was on each side.

Ver. 25. *And when the ass saw the angel of the Lord*, etc.] In the same position as before, with a drawn sword in his hand, and being frightened again, and in a narrow path, and no way to turn aside:

she thrust herself unto the wall; to one of the walls, as close as she could, in order to get by the angel:

and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; running up so very closely to it:

and he smote her again; having done it once before, (⁴⁰²²³Numbers 22:23) the times of smiting are observed, for the sake of what the ass after said, and for the confirmation of it.

Ver. 26. *And the angel of the Lord went further, and stood in a narrow place*, etc.] More narrow than the other, at a further distance:

where was no way to turn, either to the right hand or to the left; it was so strait and close a place that the angel filled the whole breadth of it, that there was no passing him; so that there was no getting forward nor backward; not forward, because the angel filled up the way, and there was no slipping by him; nor backward, because it could not turn itself to the right or left.

Ver. 27. *And when the ass saw the angel of the Lord*, etc.] The third time; for it seems that he was not always in sight, but disappeared as he removed from place to place, and at every new place where he stood the ass saw him, though her master did not:

she fell down under Balaam; upon her knees on the ground, not being able to go backwards nor forwards, nor to turn out of the way to the right or left:

and Balaam's anger was kindled; he was displeased and out of humour before, when it turned into the field, and when it squeezed his foot against the wall, and therefore he smote it; but now falling down with him, he was in a fume and fury, quite enraged:

and he smote the ass with a staff; which he rode with, perhaps his divining staff, (see ³⁹¹²Hosea 4:12), it is not said what he smote it with before but probably with the same: Aben Ezra says, at the first and second time he smote it with a small stick, or with a thong.

Ver. 28. *And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam*, etc.] This was a very extraordinary and miraculous affair, and effected by a supernatural power, that a dumb creature, which had not organs endued with speech, should speak so plainly and distinctly, as is

after expressed; and yet it should not be thought incredible, for what is it that Omnipotence cannot do? wherefore there is no need to say, as some Jewish writers ^{f342}, that this was all done in a visionary way, and not really and literally performed; nor can Heathens well object to the verity of it, if they believe what they themselves report concerning one of the asses which carried Bacchus over a river, to which, for reward, he gave the power of speaking with an human voice ^{f343}; though it is very probable the fable was framed from this story, and frequently do their writers speak of other brute creatures endued with speech; so Homer ^{f344} represents Xanthus, the horse of Achilles, having the faculty of speech given it by Juno: Pliny says ^{f345}, it is commonly reported among the wonderful things of the ancients, that an ox spoke; and Livy ^{f346} frequently makes mention of an ox spoke speaking in divers places, and of one particularly that said,

“Rome, take heed to thyself;”

not to take notice of a lamb in Egypt in the times of Bocchoris that spoke, related by Aelianus ^{f347} and others; nor of the ram of Phrixus, or the dog at Ariminum, and the elephant of Porus in India, with others Bochart ^{f348} has collected together: the words spoken by the ass were as follow:

what have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? and just so many times she had been smitten by him, (^{<0223>}Numbers 22:23-27).

Ver. 29. *And Balaam said unto the ass, because thou hast mocked me,* etc.] Or rather “defiled me”, as the word is rendered in (^{<18165>}Job 16:15) by running with him against a wall, and by lying down with him in the dust and dirt, and so the Arabic version renders it, “because thou hast rolled me in the dirt;”

the sense of mocking is not easy to be understood, unless it be that it exposed him to be mocked and laughed at by others, by turning aside, and lying down, and being so unruly; but then there were only his servants with him, to whom only he could be exposed in such a manner, which one would think would not have given him so much concern, and put him into such a passion: the word sometimes is used for seeking occasion, and such a sense it may have here, as that it sought an opportunity or occasion to throw him, and so to kill him, or at least to do him harm, (see ^{<2704>}Daniel 6:4)

I would there were a sword in my hand, for now would I kill thee: so enraged was he, and his passion was so great, that he was not at all frightened and amazed to hear the ass speak, though Josephus^{f349} represents him as disturbed and astonished at it; but some think, he being used to converse with spirits in the shapes of various creatures, it was no surprise to him to hear it speak.

Ver. 30. *And the ass said unto Balaam,* etc.] Made a reply to him, as if it understood what he said, and had the faculty of reasoning and discoursing, as well as of speaking, which is very amazing:

am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? or rather, “ever since thou wast”; not ever since he was in being, but ever since he could ride, so Aben Ezra; according to which, it seems that this was the first he rode upon, and which he had always been used to; hence the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem paraphrase it,

“upon which thou hast rode from thy youth unto this day;”

and be it that Balaam was a man pretty well advanced in years, an ass is a creature that lives a long time: Pliny says^{f350} it lives thirty years; and an Arabic writer^{f351} makes mention of an ass that the owner of it rode on forty years:

was I ever wont to do so unto thee? to start out of the way, or lie down with him, could anyone instance be given of it? suggesting that she was a sure footed creature, and had always carefully and safely carried him, for which it appeals to him:

and he said, nay; she had never been used to serve him in such a manner as she had now, and therefore he might have concluded that something more than ordinary was the matter; and it is much his conscience had not accused him that he was wrong in coming with the princes, taking the alarm from these circumstances, had he not been an hardened creature, or, at least, had he not been so eagerly bent on riches and honour.

Ver. 31. *Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam,* etc.] Who either was struck with blindness, as the men of Sodom were, so some think, or rather his eyes were held, that he could not see the angel; he could see other objects, as his ass, but he could not see that; as Elisha’s servant could see the host that compassed the city, but not the chariots and horses of fire about Elisha, till his eyes were opened, (^{2}2 Kings 6:15,17) and so it was

with Balaam until the Lord uncovered his eyes, or rolled away the vail over them, or took that off which by his power and providence hindered his sight:

and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand; in the same position as in (⁴⁰²²³Numbers 22:23)

and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face; from off his ass upon the ground, in reverence of the illustrious object before him, and through fear of being slain by his sword in his hand.

Ver. 32. *And the angel of the Lord said unto him,* etc.] When risen up, and standing before him:

wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? the brute creatures are not to be beaten without cause, nor to be misused and abused by men, even their owners:

behold, I went out to withstand thee; the ass was not to be blamed, nor to be beaten for turning aside, or lying down, it was I that stood in the way, and hindered its going forward, and this was done by me on purpose to oppose and stop thee:

because thy way is perverse before me; the journey he took was not with his good liking and approbation, and especially seeing he went with an intention, if possible, to serve Balak, and curse Israel; the way of his heart was bad, which the Lord knew; it was not directed according to his will, but swerved from it; the Targum of Jonathan is,

“it is manifest before me that thou seekest to go and curse the people, and the thing is not agreeable to me.”

Ver. 33. *And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times,* etc.] The ass saw the angel when Balaam did not, and that was the reason of its turning aside; and it was well for him it did, and therefore he should not have smote it:

unless she had turned from me; if she had pushed on, endeavouring to make her way:

surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive; had certainly and only slain him, and not the ass; and from hence the Jewish writers^{f352}

gather, that the ass was now slain, lest it should be said, this is the ass that spoke, and so be made an idol of.

Ver. 34. *And Balaam said unto the angel of the Lord, I have sinned,* etc.] That is, in beating the ass; not that he was sensible of his sin of covetousness, and of the evil disposition of his mind, and of his wicked intention in going along with the princes to curse Israel, if possible, and get Balak's presents and preferments:

for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me; signifying, that if he had known it, he should not have smitten the ass, but submitted himself to the will of the angel:

now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again; which he spoke very coldly and faintly, not caring heartily to go back, unless forced to it; for seeing a drawn sword in his hand, he might be afraid of his life should he persist in his journey, and therefore feigns a readiness to go back, quitting it on condition that his going forwards was displeasing; whereas he knew it was, especially his going with an evil mind to hurt Israel if possible.

Ver. 35. *And the angel of the Lord said unto Balaam, go with the men,* etc.] Which was not a command, but a concession, or rather a permission, leaving him to go if he would, suffering him to follow his own heart's lusts, and giving him up to them to his own destruction; and besides, it was not his going barely that was displeasing to God, but his going with such a bad intention:

but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak; which expresses not only what he ought to do, but what he should be obliged to do, even to bless the people against his will, when his mind was to curse them, it being for his worldly interest; and therefore it is suggested he had better not go at all, since he never would be able to carry his point, yea, would be brought to shame and confusion before Balak and his nobles: the angel speaking in the same language as God did before to Balaam, (⁽⁴⁰²²⁾Numbers 22:20) shows that not a created angel, but a divine Person, is here meant:

so Balaam went with the princes of Balak; whom after this he quickly overtook, or they him, or they met together at some appointed place, and proceeded on in their journey.

Ver. 36. *And when Balak heard that Balaam was come*, etc.] Messengers being sent to acquaint him with it, either by Balaam, or by the princes:

he went out to meet him; overjoyed at the news that his princes had succeeded, and to show him respect, and do him honour, and all to encourage him to do his utmost for him:

unto a city of Moab, which is in the border of Arnon, which is in the utmost coast; by the situation of it, being on the border of the river Arnon, which river was in the extreme parts of Moab, and divided between the Moabites and Amorites, it is generally thought to be the city Ar, called “Ar of Moab”, (see ^{<0013>}Numbers 21:13,28), and the king coming to meet Balaam so far as the uttermost border of his dominions showed the greater respect to him.

Ver. 37. *And Balak said unto Balaam*, etc.] Upon their meeting together:

did I not earnestly send unto thee to call thee? or “in sending send” ^{f353}; the first messengers in a very pressing manner, with great importunity, to give thee an invitation to come to me, and those men of rank and quality, with rewards of divination in their hands, and yet the invitation was rejected; and after them other messengers, more in number and greater in dignity, with larger offers and promises; and now indeed thou art come, but with much ado, what is the meaning of all this?

wherefore camest thou not unto me? at first, without showing so much indifference and reluctance, and which obliged me to send another message to thee:

am I not able to promote thee to honour? to give thee wealth and riches, and put thee into high places of honour and profit? hadst thou any doubt in thy mind about it, either concerning my ability or will to do it?

Ver. 38. *And Balaam said unto Balak, lo, I am come unto thee*, etc.] And therefore let nothing more be said of what is past: and as for future things,

have I now any power at all to say anything? that would be agreeable to the king, and answer his purpose in sending for him, namely, to curse the people of Israel; he suggests that he had not, he was under the powerful restraint of God; he could not say what he himself was inclined to say, and what the king would have him say, and he expected he should; he could not say as some in (^{<0113>}Psalm 12:4): the word

that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak; whether agreeable to Balak's will and design or not, and whether for or against Israel: however, it being expressed in such indefinite terms might leave room for Balak to hope it might answer his expectations and wishes.

Ver. 39. *And Balaam went with Balak*, etc.] From Ar of Moab, or, however, from the place where they met, to the royal city where Balak had his palace, and seems to be the place following:

and they came to Kirjathhuzoth; which Jarchi interprets a city full of streets, a populous place, having a multitude of men, women, and children in the streets of it; and the same writer suggests as if Balak's view in this was to move the pity of Balaam, that such a number of people might not be rooted out and destroyed.

Ver. 40. *And Balak offered oxen and sheep*, etc.] Or "slew"^{f354} them, either for sacrifice; and if so Balak was the sacrificer, as it was common for kings to be priests; and then Balaam, who was sent for, was the prophet, that was to observe and explain any omen at the time of sacrificing, as Calchas did, when the chiefs of Greece sacrificed^{f355}; or rather for a feast, as the following words seem to show; though it might be for both, it being usual, when sacrifices were offered to idols, to eat part of them in a festival way, in imitation of the peace offerings of the Jews, (see ^{<0212>}Numbers 25:2):

and sent to Balaam, and to the princes that were with him; either part of it to them, or he sent for them to come, and partake of the feast, he and the princes of Moab and Midian, that had been to fetch him, and still attended him; and this the king did in a way of rejoicing, being glad that Balaam was come, and as expressing his well pleasedness with the conduct of the princes, and their success, as well as to keep Balaam in high spirits, hoping to have his end answered by him.

Ver. 41. *And it came to pass on the morrow*, etc.] The day after the arrival of Balaam at Balak's royal seat, and after the entertainment given him, and the princes, "on the morning"^{f356} of that day, as the word signifies; and perhaps early in the morning, the king eager to be about business, and get the people of Israel cursed if possible as soon as could be:

that Balak took Balaam and brought him up into the high places of Baal; where groves were planted, and altars erected to that "idol" and which the Targum of Jonathan calls the idol Peor, the same with Baalpeor,

(^{-025B}Numbers 25:3) which might be their god Chemosh, the same with Bacchus or Priapus:

that thence he might see the utmost part of the people; the whole host of Israel, even to the extreme part of it; the camp of Dan, as the Targum of Jonathan, which brought up the rear; he had him to those high places, both that he might have a better view of the whole body of the people, and know how they lay, and to direct his curses at them, and that success might attend the undertaking, these being places of religious worship. Josephus says ^{f357} those high places were sixty furlongs or seven and one half miles from the camp of Israel.