

CHAPTER 23

INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS 23

This chapter gives an account of the sacrifices offered by Balak and Balaam, and how God met Balaam, and put a word into his mouth, which he delivered in the presence of the king of Moab and his princes, (⁻⁰²³¹Numbers 23:1-7), the substance of which are, the separate state and condition of Israel from other nations, their number, and the happiness of the righteous at death, (⁻⁰²³⁸Numbers 23:8-10), which made Balak uneasy, since instead of cursing he blessed Israel, and therefore he had him to another place to take a view of the people, (⁻⁰²³¹Numbers 23:11-13) where having offered sacrifices, another word was put into the mouth of Balaam, and which he also delivered before the king and his nobles, (⁻⁰²³⁴Numbers 23:14-18), in which were expressed the unchangeableness of God, the irreversibility of the blessing of Israel, the strength, safety, happiness, and glory of that people, (⁻⁰²³⁹Numbers 23:19-24) which made Balak more uneasy still; but willing to try him a third time, he carried him to another place, and there built altars, and offered sacrifices, the consequence of which is related in the next chapter, (⁻⁰²³⁵Numbers 23:25-30).

Ver. 1. *And Balaam said unto Balak*, etc.] When upon one of the high places of Baal, and after having taken a view of the people of Israel as they lay encamped:

build me here seven altars; this was purely Heathenish; for not only the Israelites after the law of Moses had but one altar, but the patriarchs before that never built but one altar at a time. Some have thought regard is had to the seven planets worshipped by Heathens; though no doubt Balaam pretended to sacrifice to Jehovah the true God, in order to gain him over to him to agree to it to curse Israel, and persuaded Balak, though an idolater, to join with him; and, the more easily to bring him to it, mixes Heathen rites and customs in sacrifice to him:

and prepare me here seven oxen, and seven rams; which were creatures offered in sacrifice according to the law of Moses, and before that was given, and by persons who were not under it; and even by seven of each

sort, and that by the express command of God, (³⁸¹⁸Job 42:8). It may be observed, that both in this, and the preceding clause, the word here is carefully expressed, namely, in one of the high places; there the altars were erected, and thither the oxen were brought to be sacrificed; so that both the place, and the number of the altars, savoured of Heathenish worship, in which he complied to induce the king to sacrifice to Jehovah.

Ver. 2. *And Balak did as Balaam had spoken*, etc.] Ordered seven altars to be built, and prepared seven bullocks and rams for sacrifice:

and Balak and Balsam offered on every altar a bullock and a ram; both seem to be concerned in offering the sacrifices; Balak, though a king, it being usual for kings to be priests also, as Melchizedek was, and Balaam as a prophet; and these sacrifices were offered to the true God, as seems clear from (⁰²⁰⁶Numbers 23:4) and to which Balak, at the direction of Balaam, agreed, in order to gain the Lord on his side, that he might prevail over the people of Israel.

Ver. 3. *And Balaam said unto Balak*, stand by thy burnt offering, etc.] By which it appears that the sacrifices offered were of this sort, and there might be one, which was more peculiarly the burnt offering of Balak; though he might be more or less with Balaam concerned in them all; at which he was directed to stand while it was burning, presenting that and himself to the Lord, that he would have respect to both:

and I will go; depart from thence, at some little distance, unto some private place:

peradventure the Lord will come to meet me; upon the offering of these sacrifices to him, though he could not be certain of it, he having lately shown some displeasure and resentment unto him; and this was also in the daytime, when it was in the night he usually came unto him:

and whatsoever he showeth me I will tell thee; the whole of it, truly as it is, whether agreeable or not:

and he went to an high place; but he was in one already, and therefore if this is the sense of the word, he must go to another, into a grove in one of the high places, where he might be retired, and so fit for a divine converse; and the Targum of Onkelos renders it alone: but rather the sense is, that he went into a plain, as De Dieu has shown from the use of the word in the Syriac language; he was upon a high place, and he went down from thence

into the plain, perhaps into a cave at the bottom of the hill, a retired place, where he hoped the Lord would meet him, as he did.

Ver. 4. *And God met Balaam*, etc.] Not in a kind and gracious manner; not out of any respect to him and his offerings; not to indulge him with any spiritual communion with him; nor to communicate his mind and will to him as a friend of his; not to gratify his desires, and grant the request of the king of Moab, or to smile upon and succeed the scheme that they had concerted; but for the sake of his people Israel, to counterwork the designs of their enemies; to blast and confound them, and turn their curses into blessings; and particularly to oblige Balaam to bless the people he was so desirous of cursing for the sake of gain:

and he said unto him; in a bragging boasting way, in order to gain his favour, and carry his point:

I have prepared seven altars, and I have offered upon every altar a bullock and a ram: that is, to him the Lord; for had they been offered to Baal, he could never have had the nerve to have spoken of them to God; and which he could never have proposed as a reason why he should be regarded by him, or expect on account of them any favour from him: and indeed these altars and sacrifices were not at his expense, though they were prepared and offered at a motion of his; nor were they offered in a right manner, nor with a right end, nor from a right principle, and were far from being acceptable unto God, yea, were abominable unto him; (see ^{<1027>}Proverbs 21:27).

Ver. 5. *And the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth* etc.] Not grace into his heart, nor the fear of God within him, but suggested to him what to say; impressed it strongly on him, that he could not forget it, and with such power and weight, that he was obliged to deliver it:

and said, return unto Balak, and thus shalt thou speak; that is, unto him, and what is expressed in (^{<1028>}Numbers 22:7-10).

Ver. 6. *And he returned unto him*, etc.] Immediately, as soon as he was told what to say:

and, lo, he stood by his burnt sacrifice; continued in his devotions, hoping for success, and waiting for Balaam's return:

he and all the princes of Moab; not only those that were sent to Balaam, but perhaps all the princes of the kingdom who were got together on this occasion, and by reason of the imminent danger they apprehended the nation was in account of Israel.

Ver. 7. *And he took up his parable, and said*, etc.] Pronounced the word, the prophetic word, which God had put into his mouth; so the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem call it, the parable of his prophecy; so called, because, in prophecies, often figurative and enigmatical expressions are used, and also sententious and weighty ones, either of which are sometimes called parables; (see ^{<978E>}Psalm 78:2 ^{<870E>}Job 27:1 29:1 ^{<1006E>}Proverbs 1:6),

Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram; or Syria, that is, from Mesopotamia, as the Septuagint translate it; and so the Targum of Jonathan, from Aram or Syria, which is by Euphrates:

out of the mountains of the east: it being the mountainous part of Mesopotamia or Chaldea, where Balaam dwelt, which lay to the east of the land of Moab:

saying, come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel; he owns that this was Balak's view in sending for him; nor does he deny that he himself came with such an intention, could he be able to execute it; even curse the people of Israel, with the utmost abhorrence and detestation of them, and in the most furious and wrathful manner, as the last word used signifies.

Ver. 8. *How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed?* etc.] The sense is, that it was impossible for him to curse those that God did not curse himself, or would not have cursed by others; not but that he had a good will to it, to get Balak's money and honour, but he knew not how to accomplish it; yea, he saw it was in vain to attempt it, it was a thing that could not possibly be done: God does not, nor will he curse his spiritual Israel; they are blessed by him in Christ, and they shall be blessed; nor is it in the power of their enemies to curse them, or do them any harm: the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem, instead of God and the Lord in this and the following clause, use the phrase,

“the Word of the Lord;”

the essential Word, the Son of God, who is so far from cursing his people, that he has delivered them from the curses of the law, being made a curse for them, that the blessings of the everlasting covenant of grace might

come upon them; and they are blessed of God in him, and for his sake, with all spiritual blessings:

or how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied? which is the same thing in other words, only this last word is expressive of more contempt and indignation.

Ver. 9. *For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him,* etc.] That is, Israel in their camps; Balaam being at this time on the top of a rock, or on an high hill, from whence he had a view of Israel, encamped in the plains of Moab below him:

lo, the people shall dwell alone; this certainly respects their dwelling in the land of Canaan, where they dwelt a separate people from all others, distinguished by their language, religion, laws, customs, and manner of living, being different both in their clothing, and in their food, from other people; nor had they dealings, nor did they company with those of other nations; (see ^{<1708>} Esther 3:8 ^{<404>} John 4:9 ^{<4108>} Acts 10:28) “or shall dwell safely” ^{f358}, or securely, not so much because of the situation of their country, but because of the protection of the Almighty; (see ^{<638>} Deuteronomy 33:28)

and shall not be reckoned among the nations; as belonging to them, shall not be made of any account by them, but be despised and reproached for their religion chiefly; nor reckon themselves of them, nor mix with them; so the Targum of Jerusalem, “they shall not be mixed;”

or, as Jonathan, “they shall not be led in the laws of the people;”

and though they are now scattered among the people and nations of the world, yet they are not mixed with them, nor reckoned to be a part of them; nor do they reckon themselves to be of them, but are a separate distinct people from them. Thus Israel, or the people of God in a spiritual sense, dwell alone; not solitarily, or without company, in every sense, for they have the company of Father, Son, and Spirit, of angels and saints; but they dwell in God, in Christ, in the house of God, and with one another, separately and distinctly from the world: they are a separate people in the love of God; in the choice of them in Christ; in the covenant of grace made with them in him; in redemption by him; in his intercession for them; in effectual calling; as they will be in the resurrection morn, and in heaven to all eternity: and they shall dwell safely, God being around them; Christ the rock and fortress of them; the Spirit in them being greater than he that is in

the world; angels their guardians, and they in a strong city, whose walls and bulwarks are salvation: nor are they reckoned among the nations; they are chosen, redeemed, and called out of them, and are not accounted of by them any other than the refuse and offscouring of all things; nor do they reckon themselves to be of the world, but as pilgrims and strangers in it. Baal Hatturim refers this prophecy to the days of the Messiah; (see ^{<4275>}Jeremiah 23:5,6).

Ver. 10. *Who can count, the dust of Jacob*, etc.] The people of Israel, their posterity so called, not because of their original, the dust of the earth, but because of their numbers, being as numerous as the dust of the earth, or sand of the sea, as it was promised they should be, (^{<0284>}Genesis 28:14) and which is here confirmed by the prophecy of Balaam:

and the number of the fourth part of Israel; one of the four camps of Israel, as the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan; for this people was divided into four camps, under so many standards, which were those of Judah, Reuben, Ephraim, and Dan, (see ^{<0411>}Numbers 2:1-34), and one of them is represented by Balaam as so numerous, as not to be counted, or should be so, (see ^{<3010>}Hosea 1:10,11). The spiritual Israel of God, though comparatively few, are in themselves, and will be when all together, a great number, which no man can number, (^{<6109>}Revelation 7:9):

let me die the death of the righteous; which are among them, as Jarchi, among the Israelites; for they were not all righteous, nor are any, of themselves, or by their own works, but by the righteousness of Christ: or the death of the upright ones ^{f359}; such as are upright in heart and life, who have right spirits renewed in them, and walk uprightly according to the rule of the divine word; such as are Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile; the word used is pretty near, in sound and signification, to Jeshurun, one of the names of Israel, (^{<6325>}Deuteronomy 32:15 33:5), the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem render it, ``the death of the true ones,’’

who are truly righteous and upright, truly gracious persons; who have the truth of grace, and the root of the matter in them: these die as well as others, yet their death is different from others, not in the thing itself, but in the concomitants and consequences of it; they die in the Lord, in union to him, in faith of him, in hope of eternal life by him, and their death is precious to him; and in consequence of this they are carried by angels to glory at death are immediately in heaven with Christ, and it will be well with them to all eternity. Balaam had some notion of this; and though he

did not care to live the life of such, he wished to die their death, or that he might be as happy at death as they; by which he bears a testimony to the immortality of the soul, to a future state after death, and to an eternal life and happiness to be enjoyed by good men:

and let my last end be like his; which is a phrase expressive of much the same thing as before: death is the end of a man in this world; and the end of a righteous man in it is peace, rest, salvation, and eternal life, or is what follows upon it, and he then enters into: some render it, “my reward”^{f360}, which comes to much the same sense, the above being the righteous man’s reward, not in a way of debt, but grace; others render the word, “my posterity”^{f361}; but it is not certain Balaam had any, and if he had, his concern seems to be more for himself than for them.

Ver. 11. *And Balak said unto Balaam, what hast thou done unto me?* etc.] Or “for me”^{f362}; nothing at all, to answer his purpose, or his end in sending for him;

I took thee to curse mine enemies: so he calls the Israelites, though they had never done him any wrong; nor committed any acts of hostility against him, nor showed any intention to commit any; nay, were forbidden by the Lord their God to contend in battle with him and his people;

and, behold, thou hast blessed them altogether; or, “in blessing blessed”^{f363}, done nothing but bless them, and that with many blessings, or pronounced them blessed, and prophesied of their blessedness, for their number, their safety, and of their happiness, not only in life, but at and after death.

Ver. 12. *And he answered and said*, etc.] By reply to Balak:

must I not take heed to speak that which the Lord hath put in my mouth? pretending a great regard to the word of God, and to great carefulness to speak it, exactly and punctually as he received it, whereas he was forced to it, and could not do otherwise.

Ver. 13. *And Balak said unto him*, etc.] Seemingly satisfied with his answer, however, he could not help himself, and was willing to make the best of him he could, and try what he could do with him another time and elsewhere:

come, I pray thee, with me unto another place, from whence thou mayest see them; for he had a mighty notion that both the sight of the people, and the place from whence they were seen, would greatly contribute to answer the end he had in view, cursing the people:

thou shall see but the utmost part of them, and shalt not see them all; for he thought, either that he was so charmed with so glorious a sight as the regular encampment of such a body of people was, that he could not find in his heart to curse them; or that he was so terrified at the sight of such a vast number of people, that he dared not attempt it; and therefore Balak proposed to have him to a place where he could only see a part of them and not the whole:

and curse me them from thence: that part, hoping that when he had cursed them he would gradually go on till he had cursed them all: but there is this objection to our version, and the sense it directs to, that Balaam had been brought to a place already, where he had seen the utmost part of the people, (⁰²²¹Numbers 22:41) wherefore some read ^{f364} the middle clause in a parenthesis, and in the past tense “(for thou hast seen but the utmost part of them, and hast not seen them all)”; and therefore would have him come to a place where he might see them all, and curse them from thence.

Ver. 14. *And he brought him into the field of Zophim*, etc.] Or Sede Tzophim, as Hillerus ^{f365} reads it, so called from the watch tower, and watchmen in it: Jarchi says, it was a high place, where a watchman stood to observe if an army came against a city, and so a very proper place to take a view of the armies of Israel from:

to the top of Pisgah; a high hill in this place, where perhaps the watch tower was, or, however, the watchman stood: this looked towards Jeshimon or Bethjesimoth, in the plain of Moab, where Israel lay encamped, (see ⁰²²³Numbers 21:20 33:49): and built seven altars, and offered a bullock and a ram on every altar: as he had done before, (⁰²³²Numbers 23:2).

Ver. 15. *And he said unto Balak, stand here by thy burnt offering*, etc.] As he had before directed him, (⁰²³³Numbers 23:3)

while I meet the Lord yonder; pointing to some place at a little distance, where he expected to meet the Lord, and have some instructions from him, which he seemed confident of, having met with him once already.

Ver. 16. *And the Lord met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth,* etc.] As he did before, (⁴⁰²¹⁵Numbers 23:5).

and said, go again unto Balak, and say thus; the words which are expressed in (⁴⁰²³⁸Numbers 23:18-24).

Ver. 17. *And when he came to him, behold, he stood by his burnt offering,* etc.] As before; (⁴⁰²¹⁶Numbers 23:6) and the princes of Moab with him; Jarchi observes, that before it is said, all the princes of Moab, but not so here; for when they saw there was no hope of succeeding, some of them went away, and only some were left:

and Balak said unto him, what hath the Lord spoken? being in haste to know what it was, whether agreeable or not.

Ver. 18. *And he took up his parable,* etc.] Pronounced the word put into his mouth,

and said, rise up Balak, and hear; not from his seat, as Eglon a successor of his did, (⁴⁰⁰²¹Judges 3:20) for he was now standing by his burnt offering; but the sense is, that he would raise his attention, and stir up himself with all diligence to hear what he was about to say:

hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor; or to his word, as the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan, which follow.

Ver. 19. *God is not a man, that he should lie,* etc.] Man is a creature consisting of a body of flesh and blood, and of a soul, a created and finite spirit; but God, though he has the parts of an human body ascribed to him in a figurative sense, yet is not to be conceived of in a corporeal manner; and though he is a Spirit, yet eternal, immense, and infinite; and much less is as a sinful man, who goes astray from the womb speaking lies; no, let God be true, and every man a liar: he is God, that cannot lie; his counsels of old are faithfulness and truth; his promises yea and amen in Christ; the Scriptures inspired by him are true, and the prophecies of them are punctually accomplished, particularly what he foretold of the people of Israel, and promised unto them; that they should be happy, and inherit the land of Canaan; that he would be true and faithful to them, and there could be no hope, by any means whatever, to make him false and unfaithful to his word: neither the son of man, that he should repent; repentance is found in men, who repent for what they have done, or change their minds, as to what they intended to do or set about; perceiving it to be wrong to do it, or

that they are able to do it, some unforeseen thing turning up they were not aware of: but nothing of this kind belongs to God, or can befall him; he never changes his mind, alters his counsels, purposes, and decrees, and never varies in his affections to his people, nor makes void his choice of them, or covenant with them; and his calling of them by his grace, and his gifts of grace bestowed upon them, are without repentance: and particularly with respect to the people of Israel, there was no reason to hope or believe that God would change his purposes or promises respecting their outward happiness, and enjoyment of the land of Canaan; or that ever he would be prevailed upon to curse them, or admit them to be cursed, when he was determined, and had so peremptorily promised that he would bless them:

hath he said, and shall he not do it? or “hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” whether it be with regard to things temporal, spiritual, or eternal; for there is no variableness nor shadow of turning in his mind; he never forgets his word, he foresees all events, he is able to perform, and is true and faithful; and therefore whatever is gone out of his lips will never be altered, but will be most certainly fulfilled, (~~1884~~ Psalm 89:34) (~~2342~~ Isaiah 14:24,27).

Ver. 20. *Behold, I have received [commandment] to bless*, etc.] The people of Israel, to pronounce a blessing upon them, to declare them a happy people:

and he hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it; God has blessed them, has determined to bless them, has promised to bless them, has blessed them in the victories he has given them, and will complete the blessing of them, by bringing them into the land he has given them: so the blessings which God has designed for his spiritual Israel, and bestows upon them, are irreversible; they are blessings indeed, spiritual ones, and are for ever; he blesses them with himself, as their covenant; God, their portion here and hereafter, with Christ his Son, and all things with him, with righteousness, peace, and pardon, with his Spirit and the grace thereof, with sonship, heirship, and eternal life.

Ver. 21. *He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel*, etc.] Not that there was no sin in them, nor any observed by the Lord; yet not so as to mark it in strict justice, and punish for it; but he forgave it, hid his face from it, and did not impute it to them; all the three Targums restrain it to idolatry, that there were none among

them that worshipped idols, which was the reason why the Lord could not be prevailed upon to curse them: and Aben Ezra observes, that from hence Balak learnt to send women to the Israelites, to entice them to lewdness, and so to idolatry, that he might be able to carry his point: this is true of the spiritual Israel of God; for though there is sin in them, and which is continually done by them, yet their sins are removed from them, and have been laid on Christ, and he has bore them, and made reconciliation for them, and made an end of them, and has redeemed and saved them from them; and God, by imputing his righteousness to them, has justified them from all their sins, has forgiven all their iniquities, and blotted out all their transgressions, and has cast them behind his back, and into the depths of the sea, and has removed them as far from them as the east is from the west: and when God is said not to see or behold iniquity in his people, it is to be understood, not of his eye of Omniscience, with which he sees not only the sins of all men, but those of his own people also, and takes notice of them in a providential way, and chastises them for them; but of his eye of avenging justice, and purity regards the article of justification, which is a full discharge from all sin, and a perfect covering of it from the justice of God, (see ^{³⁶⁶ Jeremiah 50:20),}

the Lord his God is with him and which is his protection and defence, and in vain it is for any to be against him, or seek to hurt him; nothing is a greater happiness, or can be a greater safety, than to have the presence of God; it is this makes ordinances pleasant and delightful; by this saints are assisted in duty, and supported under trials; it is an instance of distinguishing and amazing goodness, and is what will make heaven be the happy place and state it is: all the three Targums interpret it of the Word of the Lord that is with them, and for their help; who is the Angel of God's presence, Immanuel, God with us; and who has promised to be with his churches and ministers to the end of the world, and will be with them through life, at death, and to all eternity:

and the shout of a king is among them; of God their King, the Shechinah of their King, as the Targum of Onkelos; his glorious Majesty, to whom they make their joyful acclamations, upon his appearing among them, and on the account of the victories he gives them over their enemies: or of the King Messiah, as the Targum of Jonathan, the King of kings, the Lord of lords; and so, in an ancient writing of the Jews ^{f366}, this passage is referred to the days of the Messiah: and this shout may respect the joyful sound of the Gospel, one part of which is, that Zion's King reigns, and which

proclaims him to be King, and speaks of the things concerning his kingdom, both the kingdom of grace, and the kingdom of glory; some respect may be had to the sounding of the silver trumpets by the priests on various occasions in Israel; (see ^{<0400>}Numbers 10:1-11).

Ver. 22. *God brought them out of Egypt*, etc.] With a mighty hand and stretched out arm, and he will conduct them through the wilderness, and bring them safe to Canaan's land; he that brought them from thence will not suffer them to perish by any means; it is in vain to attempt to curse a people that is in such hands, and for whom he has done such great things: Jarchi thinks this stands opposed to what Balak had said, (^{<0215>}Numbers 22:5), thou sayest, "lo, a people is come out of Egypt";

"they did not come out of themselves, but God brought them:"

he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn; that is, not God, but the people he brought out of Egypt, being a mighty people, able to push their enemies and subdue them, being numerous and strong, especially as strengthened by the mighty God of Jacob; and therefore their strength is expressed by the strength of this creature; for be it what it will, whether the rhinoceros or the wild ox, or one kind of goats, as Bochart ^{f367} thinks; whatever is meant by the term here must be a strong creature, (see ^{<0537>}Deuteronomy 33:17 ^{<0390>}Job 39:10,11) and great is the strength of the spiritual Israel of God, which they have from him to exercise grace, perform duty, withstand and overcome all their spiritual enemies, sin, Satan, and the world.

Ver. 23. *Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel*, etc.] Balaam here owns, that all his enchantments and divinations signified nothing, and would never prevail to bring a curse upon Israel; it was a vain thing for him to use them, and as vain for Balak to expect anything from them; neither he nor any other enchanter and soothsayer, using all the arts they are masters of, could ever do any hurt to such a people, who were the peculiar care of God, and were his church, against which the gates of hell could not prevail: or "in Jacob" and "in Israel" ^{f368}; and this is the sense of all the Targums, that there are no enchantments nor enchanters, no divinations nor diviners in Israel; these were not agreeable to them, nor suffered among them, and therefore they were acceptable and well pleasing in the sight of God and indeed this sense agrees both with the literal version of the words, and is the sense Jarchi gives of them; that these people were fit for the blessing, because there

were no enchanters and diviners among them; though he mentions another, and that is, that Israel had no need of enchanters and diviners, and of their enchantments and divinations, because they had the prophets to inform them, and the Urim and Thummim to declare things unto them:

according to this time it shall be said of Jacob, and of Israel, what hath God wrought! as with respect to this time as well as to time past, and with respect to time to come, even with respect to all times; it shall be said with wonder and amazement, what great things has God done for this people! as bringing them out of the land of Egypt, leading them through the Red sea, feeding and supplying them in the wilderness, protecting them from their enemies there, expelling the inhabitants of the land of Canaan, and setting them there in their stead; and wonderful things has God done for his spiritual Israel, in the redemption of them by Christ, in the beginning and carrying on the work of grace upon their hearts, by his Spirit; and at last he will bring them all to the heavenly Canaan of rest and happiness, and where this will be matter of admiration with them to all eternity, what has God done for us!

Ver. 24. *Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion,* etc.] Or rather, “as the lioness” ^{f369}, which, as Aelianus says ^{f370}, is the strongest and most warlike beast, the most fierce and furious, as is believed both by Greeks and Barbarians; and he mentions the heroism of Perdiccas the Macedonian, and Semiramis the Assyrian, in engaging with and killing, not the lion or leopard, but lioness:

and shall lift up himself as a young lion; both phrases denoting the courage and strength of the people of Israel, in attacking their enemies and engaging them:

he shall not lie down; being once roused up and engaged in war:

until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain; as the lion does when it has seized on a creature, tears it to pieces, eats its flesh and drinks its blood: this may refer to the slaughter of the Midianites that would be quickly made, and among the slain of whom Balaam himself was, (^{-QEB07}Numbers 31:7,8), and to the slaughter and conquest of the Canaanites under Joshua, and taking their spoils.

Ver. 25. *And Balak said unto Balaam, neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all.*] Signifying that it would be as well or better to do nothing at all, than to do what he did; but the sense is not, that he would not have him

curse them, that he could never say, since he had pressed it both before and after this; wherefore the words should be rendered, as they are by some ^{f371}, “if in cursing thou dost not curse”, or will not curse, “neither in blessing bless”, or, however, do not bless: if he could not or would not curse Israel, he would not have him bless them on any account; if he could do him and his people no good in ridding them of their enemies, yet he desires him by no means to do them any harm by discouraging them and encouraging Israel.

Ver. 26. *But Balaam answered and said unto Balak, told not I thee*, etc.] He appeals to him for his honesty and faithfulness, for honest and faithful he would be thought to be, both to God and man; that when he first met him, he plainly told him what he must expect: from him:

saying, all that the Lord speaketh, that I must do; which was very true, he was obliged to do as he had bid him, and speak what he had said unto him, though it was sore against his will; he would fain both have spoken and done otherwise, if he might have been permitted.

Ver. 27. *And Balak said unto Balaam, come, I pray thee*, etc.] Come along with me: I will bring thee unto another place: if not better for the view of the people, yet a more religious place, on which account the king hoped for success:

peradventure it will please God that thou mayest curse me them from thence; it may be God will give thee leave to curse the people from that place, being devoted to sacred service: this is the first time that Balak makes mention of the name of God; and he now seems to be satisfied that it was not Balaam’s fault that he did not curse Israel, but that he was hindered by God, who would not suffer him to do it.

Ver. 28. *And Balak brought Balaam to the top of Peor*, etc.] The name of an high mountain in Moab, so called from a gap or opening in it; here the idol Baal was worshipped, and from hence had the name of Baalpeor, (^{<0253>}Numbers 25:3) and here, very probably, was a temple built to the honour of him, called Bethpeor, the house or temple of Baalpeor, (^{<0346>}Deuteronomy 34:6),

that looketh towards Jeshimon; as Pisgah also did, and very likely it was not far from it, since from thence they came hither, (^{<0234>}Numbers 23:14 21:20). Jeshimon is the same with Bethjesimoth, and so the Targum of Jonathan here calls it, a part of the plains of Moab, where Israel lay

encamped, (^{<039>}Numbers 33:49) so that from hence Balaam could have a full view of them.

Ver. 29. *And Balaam said unto Balak*, etc.] Being willing to try again what could be done, and to gratify the king, and especially to get the wages of unrighteousness, if possible, which he dearly loved, as the apostle says, (^{<015>}2 Peter 2:15)

build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven bullocks and seven rams; which had been done in two places before, (^{<021>}Numbers 23:1,14) the same sort of creatures, and the same number here as there, and these only clean creatures, such as were used in sacrifice by the true worshippers of God, and which, no doubt, Balaam had knowledge of, and therefore judged that those would be most acceptable to the Lord.

Ver. 30. *And Balak did as Balaam had said*, etc.] Though the sacrifices were expensive, he did not grudge them; he spared no cost to gain his point, though he now could have but little hope of it: and offered a bullock and a ram on every altar; as he had done before, (^{<022>}Numbers 23:2,14).