

CHAPTER 24

INTRODUCTION TO NUMBERS 24

In this chapter we are told, that Balaam leaving his enchantments, the Spirit of God came on him, and he spake of the happiness of Israel, and prophesied of their future greatness and glory, (⁻⁰²⁴⁰Numbers 24:1-9) which so exasperated Balak, that he ordered him at once to depart from him, (⁻⁰²⁴⁰Numbers 24:10,11). Balaam justified himself in what he said and did, and suggested that before they parted, he had something to say in a prophetic manner, concerning what Israel should do to Moab in “future” times, (⁻⁰²⁴²Numbers 24:12-14) and then prophesies concerning the Messiah, and the destruction of Moab, and of some neighbouring nations, and even of some at a greater distance, as the Assyrians and Romans, (⁻⁰²⁴⁵Numbers 24:15-25).

Ver. 1. *And when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel*, etc.] That it was good in his sight, what he approved of, and was well-pleasing to him, and that it was his determined mind that Israel should be blessed, and not cursed, from which there was no turning him, by offering sacrifices to him, and much less by his sorceries and divinations:

he went not as at other times; or, “as at a time in a time”^{f372}, at two times, of which (see ⁻⁰²³⁸Numbers 23:3,15), he abode in the place where the sacrifices were offered, and did not depart to another at some distance, as he had twice before done:

to seek for enchantments; which it seems he used before, for he not only offered sacrifices to the true God, which yet were attended with superstitious rites, but he made use of his divining art also; and not only went to meet with God, and hear what he would say to him, but consulted the devil also, being willing to have two strings to his bow, and that, if possible, he might carry his point, and get what his covetous and ambitious mind was desirous of: the words may be literally rendered, “to meet enchantments”^{f373}; but what should be meant by the phrase is not easy to say; I should rather choose to render them, “to meet serpents”, and make use of them in his divinations, make observations on them, and predictions

from them: one sort of divination is called “ophiomancy”, or divining by serpents; so Calchas, on seeing a serpent devour eight sparrows with their dam, foretold the duration of the siege of Troy ^{f374}:

but he set his face towards the wilderness: where the people of Israel lay encamped, not with an intention to bless them, though he saw it pleased the Lord, but to take an opportunity, if he could, without his leave, to curse them; and therefore he did not go out as he did before, to know his will, but stood by the sacrifice, with his face to the wilderness, where the people were, to take any advantage that offered.

Ver. 2. *And Balaam lifted up his eyes*, etc.] Being on Mount Peor:

and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; in that exact order in which they were directed to encamp under four standards, and so many tribes under each standard, (~~4011~~Numbers 2:1-34)

and the Spirit of God came upon him; not in his grace but in his gifts; not as a spirit of sanctification, but as a spirit of prophecy, as the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan paraphrase it; and so sometimes the Spirit of God in this sense has come upon wicked men, as on Caiaphas and others, (~~4815~~John 11:51 ~~4072~~Matthew 7:22,23).

Ver. 3. *And he took up his parable*, etc.] His parable of prophecy, as the Targums, his prophetic speech, which, with a loud voice, he expressed in the hearing of Balak and his nobles:

and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said; the preface to his prophecy is pompous, and seems to be full of pride and vanity, and so the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem represent him;

“the man who is more excellent than his father hath said, to whom hidden secrets, even what was hidden from the prophets is revealed to him;”

and the Jews have a saying ^{f375} that he that has an evil eye, a haughty spirit, and a large soul, or is covetous, is one of the disciples of Balaam the wicked:

and the man whose eyes are open hath said; or, as some ^{f376} render it, whose eyes were shut, but now open; either the eyes of his body, which were shut when the angel met him, and the ass saw him and not he, but afterwards were open, and he saw him also; or the eyes of his

understanding blinded with ambition and covetousness, but were open to see his mistake, at least so far as to be sensible that he could never prevail upon God to allow him to curse Israel; or rather open, by the spirit of prophecy coming on him, whereby he saw and foretold things to come.

Ver. 4. *He hath said, which heard the words of God,* etc.] God speaking to him, which he did several times, and with which he was greatly elated, (see ^{<402D>}Numbers 22:9,20 23:4,5,16):

which saw the vision of the Almighty; not that he had a sight of any similitude of God, though the angel that appeared to him, which was Christ the uncreated angel, might appear in an human form, for some visible form was seen both by the ass and him; but rather this respects the visions of God to him in the night; it may be in a dream, as has been already observed, and which the following words seem to confirm:

falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: or falling into a deep sleep, and yet the eyes of his body open, which sometimes is the case with persons asleep; or the eyes of his mind open, to receive the instructions given him in a dream or vision of the night; unless this is to be understood of his falling on his face, when he had his vision, as sometimes the prophets did, (see ^{<402S>}Ezekiel 1:28 ^{<402T>}Deuteronomy 8:17 ^{<402U>}Revelation 1:17), so the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem paraphrase it; and the latter says, he prophesied of himself, that he should fall by the sword; which is better than to interpret it of his falling when his ass lay down with him, as some do: so men may have a great deal of light and knowledge in their heads, and yet not have true grace in their hearts; great gifts, which puff up with pride and vanity, but not sanctifying grace, which is of an humbling nature, (^{<402V>}1 Corinthians 8:1,2 13:1,2,3), what he said under a spirit of prophecy follows.

Ver. 5. *How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob,* etc.] Not that the matter of which they were made was so rich, or their structure so admirable, but the order in which they were placed was so beautiful and agreeable:

and thy tabernacles, O Israel; which is the same thing in other words, and which may be applied figuratively to the church of God, which often goes by the names of Jacob and Israel; and agrees with particular congregations and assemblies of saints, where they dwell as in tents in a movable state, like pilgrims and sojourners; and which are the dwelling places of Father, Son, and Spirit, and of the people of God with one another; and are

goodly, pleasant, and delightful, because of the presence of God with them, and on account of the provisions there made for them, and the company they there enjoy; (see ^{
}Psalm 84:1,4,10).

Ver. 6. *As the valleys are they spread forth*, etc.] Long and broad, lying between several mountains, and reaching from hill to hill; so the armies of Israel lay encamped in the plains and villages of Moab, making a very considerable length and breadth; the camp of Israel is said to be twelve miles long, and twelve miles broad; so the Targum on (^{
}Numbers 2:3) and this may denote the lowness of the saints and people of God in their own eyes, and their largeness in themselves; and especially when the place of their tents shall be enlarged, and the curtains of their habitations be stretched forth in the latter day; and also their fruitfulness, meads, and valleys abounding with herbs and flowers, as the churches of God do with the fruits of the Spirit, grace, and righteousness, and with plants of the Lord's right hand planting. Some render it as brooks and torrents of water, so the Targum of Jonathan; which diffuse and spread themselves, and on the banks of which stand beautiful trees in goodly order:

as gardens by the river's side: laid out in a delightful manner, full of flowers, plants, and trees, and well watered; like to these, in several spots, were the people of Israel formed into several camps; and to these may the churches of God be compared, who are distinguished and enclosed by sovereign grace, full of trees of righteousness of the Lord's planting, watered by the river of divine love, and from Christ the fountain of gardens; (see ^{
}Song of Solomon 4:12-15 ^{
}Psalm 1:3):

as the trees of lign aloes, which the Lord hath planted: which are not planted and raised by the art and industry of man, but grow up without culture, as the mere produce of nature, under a divine providence; these are called lign wood or tree aloes, to distinguish them from another sort of aloes, which are no other than plants; but these are what the Indians call Calambra or Calembac, and, physicians Xyloaloes and Agallochium, and are of a very aromatic and fragrant scent. This tree is said to be about eight or ten feet high; at the head of it is a large bunch of leaves, which are thick and indented, broad at bottom, but growing narrower towards the point, and about four feet in length; the blossom of it is red, intermixed with yellow, and double like a pink; from this blossom comes fruit, round like a large pea, white and red; the juice of these leaves is drawn out by cutting them with a knife, and received into bottles; the smell of the wood is

exquisite ^{f377}. P. Martyr ^{f378} speaks of a trunk of lign aloes, which being cut, a sweet savour proceeds from it. It may be observed what Isidore ^{f379} remarks, that it grows in Arabia, as well as in India, and so might be well known to Balaam. And to these the Israel of God may be compared for their fragrancy, being clothed with the righteousness of Christ, all whose garments smell of or like these aloes, (^{<498B>}Psalm 45:8) and having the graces of the Spirit of God in them, the smell of which is preferable to all spices, and they themselves are signified by the same, (^{<2040>}Song of Solomon 4:10,14):

and as cedar trees beside the waters; which are tall and high, large and spreading, durable lasting, to which the righteous are compared, (see Gill on "^{<492D>}Psalm 92:12").

Ver. 7. *He shall pour the water out of his buckets*, etc.] That is, God shall plentifully send down rain out of the clouds upon these valleys, gardens, and trees, and make them fruitful; and this may be a figure of the grace of God, with which his churches are watered, and become fruitful by means of the word and ordinances, which is conveyed through them out of the fulness which is in Christ:

and his seed [shall be] in many waters; the seed and offspring of Israel shall be in a place of many waters, in a land of brooks and waters, shall dwell in a well watered land, the land of Canaan, (^{<488E>}Deuteronomy 8:7) or shall be like seed sown near water, or in well watered places, which springs up and brings forth much fruit, (see ^{<232D>}Isaiah 32:20) or shall become, or be over many waters, to which people, kingdoms, and nations, are sometimes compared; and so may denote the multitude of Israel, and the large extent of their dominions, (see ^{<667E>}Revelation 17:1,15):

and his king shall be higher than Agag; who might be the then present king of Amalek, reckoned one of the greatest kings on earth; and this name, some think, was common to all the kings of Amalek, as Pharaoh to the kings of Egypt; and according to Jarchi and Aben Ezra, this is a prophecy of the first king of Israel, Saul, and of his conquering Agag king of Amalek, for there was one of this name in his time, (^{<495E>}1 Samuel 15:7,8):

and his kingdom shall be exalted; that is, the kingdom of the people of Israel, as it was more especially in the days of David and Solomon; and will be abundantly more in the days of the Messiah, when his kingdom shall be

from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth, and the kingdoms of this world shall become his, and he shall reign over all the earth; and so the Jerusalem Targum,

“and the kingdom of the King Messiah shall become very great;”

and so other Jewish writers ^{f380} refer this prophecy to the days of the Messiah.

Ver. 8. *God brought him forth out of Egypt, he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn,* etc.] Here he repeats what he had said in a former prophecy, (see Gill on “⁽⁰²⁷²⁾Numbers 23:22”): he shall eat up the nations his enemies: the seven nations of Canaan, which should be subdued by Israel, and that with as much ease as a lion devours its prey; nor would the Canaanites be able to make any more resistance to them than a creature in the paws of a lion; and the phrase denotes the utter destruction of them:

and shall break their bones; as the lion breaks the bones of such creatures that fall a prey to him; signifying that all their strength should be taken from them, their mighty men slain, and their fortified cities taken:

and pierce [them] through with his arrows: slay them utterly.

Ver. 9. *He couched,* etc.] Which may respect the posture of the armies of Israel in the plains of Moab:

he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion; as he would do, and did in the land of Canaan, when conquered by Israel; they took up their residence on it quietly, and dwelt in it securely, and in no more fear of their enemies than a lion, which lays itself down and sleeps without concern anywhere:

who shall stir him up? who dare do it? as it would be a very rash, bold, daring, and dangerous thing to rouse up a lion lying down; so it is suggested it would be alike to provoke Israel to war at some certain times, in the days of David more especially:

blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee; which are the very words in which Isaac blessed Jacob, the ancestor of these people, (⁽⁰²⁷²⁾Genesis 27:29) and which blessing is confirmed by Balaam against his will, and whereby he cursed himself instead of Israel; for though he could not curse him with words, he had cursed him in his heart, and would have done it verbally if he could ^{f381}.

Ver. 10. *And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam*, etc.] He had bore much and long, but he could bear no longer, he was quite impatient, his last words more especially must exceedingly nettle him:

and he smote his hands together; as expressive of his indignation, vexation, and disappointment:

and Balak said unto Balaam, I called thee to curse my enemies; he had sent princes to him, one set of them after another, to invite him into his country, and to his court, with great promises of reward to curse Israel, whom he reckoned his enemies, and not to bless them:

and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times; done nothing else but bless them with blessing upon blessing, time after time; even everyone of the three times he opened his mouth, as Balak expected, to have cursed them.

Ver. 11. *Therefore now flee thou to thy place*, etc.] His own country, from whence Balak had sent for him, and he came; begone directly, make all haste away; he speaks as one so provoked, that he could not bear him in his presence, and as threatening him if he did not at once get out of his sight:

I thought to promote thee unto great honour; to bestow much wealth and riches upon him, and to prefer him in his court to high offices of honour and dignity; he had promised that he would, and he thought as he said, he was determined upon it, had he performed as he expected:

but, lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honour; the Lord thou hast so much talked of, and at whose beck and command thou hast been, and by whom thou hast been checked and controlled, he has hindered thee from riches and honour; see what thou hast got, or rather lost, by hearkening to him, and how he will pay thee for it.

Ver. 12. *And Balaam said unto Balak*, etc.] In order to mitigate his wrath, and bring him into a better temper:

spake I not also to thy messengers which thou sentest unto me: those that came to him a second time; for to the first he said nothing of what is after related, but to the last he did much the same as he had afterwards said to Balak himself: saying,

Ver. 13. *If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, etc.*] Which are the very words he said to the princes of Moab, (⁴²¹⁸Numbers 22:18),

I cannot go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do either good or bad; for though here it is the “commandment”, and there the “word” of the Lord, yet it is the same word in both places in the original text: indeed, here he omits the relation to the Lord he there claims, saying “my God”; and instead of “little or great”, here it is “good or bad”, but the sense is the same: and he adds, for explanation sake,

of mine own mind: or out of my heart, which was disposed well enough to serve Balak, but was laid under a restraint by the Lord:

but what the Lord said, that will I speak; and he had not only said this to the messengers, but to the king himself, and therefore he thought, that as he had openly and honestly told him this at first, he had no reason to be so angry with him; (see ⁴²³⁸Numbers 22:38).

Ver. 14. *And now, behold, I go unto my people, etc.*] According to thine order, I shall not stay to make thee uneasy with my company, only I crave thy patience to hear me a little before we part:

come therefore, and I will advertise thee; about some things that shall come to pass in future time, respecting this people, and thine, and other nations, both near and remote; and he hoped by this to bring him into a better temper, and part good friends: or “I will counsel thee”; what thou shall do, as the Targum of Onkelos, and so makes a sentence of this of itself, independent of, and distinct from what follows, beginning the next clause thus,

and I will show them what this people, etc. referring the former to the counsel Balaam gave to Balak, how to seduce the people into idolatry; and the Targum of Jonathan expresses it at large;

“come, I will counsel thee, go and prepare victualling houses, and place lewd women there to sell food and drink at a low price, and bring this people to eat, and drink, and be drunken; and let them lie with them, and deny their God, and they will be delivered into thine hands in a little time, and many of them will fall;”

which advice was followed, (^{<0251>}Numbers 25:1,2) and is referred to, (^{<0316>}Numbers 31:16 ^{<0124>}Revelation 2:14) but though Balaam did give him such advice before he left him, which is highly probable, yet it is not what is intended here, since what follows is closely connected with the above clause, and contains the thing he advertised or advised him of:

what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days; not what the Moabites should do to the Israelites now, as the Vulgate Latin version, quite contrary to the original text, but what the Israelites should do to the Moabites in future times; not only in the times of David, by whom they were subdued, (^{<0082>}2 Samuel 8:2) but in much later times, even in the times of Alexander, or King Jannaeus, who overcame them, as Josephus ^{f382} relates. Now this might be said to Balak to make him easy, that it would not be until the latter days, many hundreds of years hence, ere the people of Israel would fight with Moab, and subdue it; and therefore he need be under no concern about them, since he would meet with no trouble from them in his time, nor his people for years to come.

Ver. 15. *And he took up his parable, and said*, etc.] In this and the following verse; the same preface, in the same words, is made to his prophecy as before, (see Gill on "^{<0243>}Numbers 24:3") (see Gill on "^{<0244>}Numbers 24:4"); only one clause is added, "and knew the knowledge of the Most High"; that Balaam had some knowledge of God is certain from the names by which he calls him, being such that he made himself known by to the patriarchs, and by which he is frequently called in the sacred writings; but then this knowledge of his was merely notional and speculative, and not spiritual and supernatural, and was such as men may have who are destitute of the grace of God: he was one that professed to know him in words, but in works denied him, (see ^{<0112>}1 Corinthians 13:2 ^{<0016>}Titus 1:16) and he also was admitted to much nearness to God, and converse with him, of which he boasted; but then this was not for his own sake, or as a mark of friendship to him, but for the sake of the people of Israel, and to prevent his doing them mischief. His prophecy follows.

Ver. 17. *I shall see him, but not now*, etc.] Meaning not Israel, for he now saw him encamped, and at no great distance; but one that should descend from him, a famous and excellent person, and who is no other than the Messiah, as appears by what follows; him he should see, not spiritually with an eye of faith, nor corporeally with his bodily eyes in his state of

incarnation, but at the day of judgment; and now, indeed, he saw him by a spirit of prophecy:

I shall behold him, but not nigh; signifying, that the coming of this illustrious Person, who should smite the borders of Moab, was not near, and therefore Balak had no reason to indulge any present fears; and that when he was come either into the world to save men, or to judgment, Balaam would have no nearness to him, nor interest in him; he would see him at the last day, but not for himself, as Job says he should, (~~18925~~ Job 19:25-27)

there shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel; which Aben Ezra interprets of David, though he says many interpret it of the Messiah; and there are some writers, both Jewish and Christian, that understand it partly of David, and partly of Christ, and chiefly of him, and of David as a type of him; the fulfilment of which was only in part in David, but principally and completely in Christ. Maimonides ^{f383} parts the prophecy between them: the whole undoubtedly agrees with Christ, and belongs unto him: the “star” and “sceptre” may be considered as names and titles of the Messiah; he is called the “morning star”, (~~6216~~ Revelation 22:16) for his glory, brightness, and splendour, and for the light that comes by him, and the influence of his grace, and the blessings of it on the sons of men; and hence a false Messiah took the name of Bar Cochab, the son of a star, to answer to this prophecy; and he may be called a “sceptre”, that is, a sceptre bearer, because of his royalty; he not only has the name of a king, but has a kingdom, both of nature, providence, and grace, and rules with a sceptre of grace, mercy, and righteousness; and as he was to spring from Jacob or Israel, so he did, being a son of Abraham, a descendant of Jacob, of the tribe of Judah, and family of David, (~~4001~~ Matthew 1:1 ~~4004~~ Romans 1:4 9:4,5), but I rather think that the star is to be considered as a sign and circumstance of his coming, and that the words may be rendered, “when a star steers its course from Jacob”, or “unto Jacob, then a sceptre”, or “sceptre bearer”,

shall rise out of Israel, or “rise up unto Israel”; for the particle **m** sometimes signifies “unto” ^{f384}; and that the appearance of a star in Israel was a sign of the Messiah’s coming is certain from (~~4001~~ Matthew 2:1,2) of which the Magi were informed by Zoroastres ^{f385} their founder, who, being of Jewish extract, had got it from this prophecy of Balaam; and it is as evident that the Jews expected the appearance of an extraordinary star at

the time of the Messiah's coming; for so they say more than once, in an ancient book of theirs ^{f386}, that when the

“Messiah shall be revealed, a bright and shining star shall arise in the east;”

which expectation must be founded on this prophecy:

and shall smite the corners of Moab; not only the corners of their houses and cities, but the extreme parts and borders of the land, even all the sides, and the whole of it; or the princes and great men of the land, sometimes called “corners”, (see ^{<380E>}Zechariah 10:4) and so the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan,

and shall kill the princes of Moab or the mighty ones of Moab, as the Jerusalem Targum; this was literally fulfilled in David, (^{<408E>}2 Samuel 8:2) (^{<380E>}Psalms 60:1-12) and figuratively and mystically in Christ, by subduing his enemies, signified by Moabites, as being the enemies of Israel; either by reducing them through the power of his grace to obedience to him, or by smiting and breaking them in pieces with a rod of iron; and which will be more plainly and fully accomplished when he shall destroy those Moabites, the antichristian nations, (^{<660E>}Revelation 19:15-21)

and destroy all the children of Sheth; some take Sheth to be the name of some famous king among the Moabites, as Grotius; others, the name of some city of Moab, which David utterly destroyed, as R. Nathan ^{f387}; others suppose some particular nations are meant, as either the Edomites, so called because they put confidence in their foundations, and fortified places, so Vitringa ^{f388}; or the Egyptians, from Seth or Sethos, one of their kings, who was known by the name Egyptus, as a late learned writer ^{f389} of ours conjectures; but rather by the children of Seth are meant all nations, as Jarchi observes, for all come from Seth, the son of the first man; and so the words may be rendered, as they are by Onkelos,

“he shall rule over all the children of men;”

which will be fulfilled in Christ, when he shall have put down all rule and authority, and all will be subject to him, and his kingdom be from sea to sea, and his dominion from the river to the ends of the earth; unless rather by the children of Seth are meant the special people of God, in distinction from others, and in allusion to the distinction between the Sethites and Cainites, the one being the people of God, the other not; and so it may be

interpreted of Christ's gathering them to him, by clucking as it were for them, as a hen gathers her chickens; so the word is used in Jewish writings, and of God himself; for it is said ^{f390} the holy blessed God **rqrqm**, clucks over them, as hens do, which is the simile our Lord himself uses, (~~<4237>~~ Matthew 23:37) the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan interpret this prophecy of the Messiah by name; and so do many other Jewish writers, both ancient ^{f391} and modern ^{f392}.

Ver. 18. *And Edom shall be a possession*, etc.] Of the children of Israel, which was fulfilled in part when the Edomites became the servants of David, (~~<4084>~~ 2 Samuel 8:14) and when they were smitten and spoiled by Judas Maccabeus, them a great overthrow, and abated their courage, and took their spoils." (1 Maccabees 5:3)

and still more so when all the Edomites or the Idumaeans were subdued by Hyrcanus, and they became one people with the Jews, and conformed to their religious rites; which is not only related by Josephus ^{f393}, but by Strabo ^{f394}, an Heathen historian, who says, that they joined themselves to the Jews, and embraced their laws: but in a spiritual sense this has had a greater accomplishment in the calling of the Gentiles, and introducing them into the church of God; (see ~~<3092>~~ Amos 9:12) compared with (~~<4454>~~ Acts 15:14-17).

Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; which was a mount in the land of Edom where Esau formerly dwelt, and so signifies the same as before: and also that the most strong and fortified places of the land should fall into the hands of their enemies; (See Gill on "Obadiah 1:17-19")

Israel shall do valiantly; in fighting with and conquering the Edomites, or shall get much wealth and riches by the spoil of them, (see ~~<3909>~~ Psalm 60:9,12). This, and the following verse, are in some ancient writings of the Jews ^{f395} interpreted of the times of the Messiah.

Ver. 19. *Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion*, etc.] Meaning either David, or rather the Messiah; and so Jarchi interprets this of another ruler out of Jacob, even of the Messiah, of whom it is said, he shall have dominion from sea to sea; (~~<4978>~~ Psalm 72:8),

and shall destroy him, that remaineth of the city; chief city of Edom, or of any of the cities of it, signifying that there should be none left, (see Obidiah

1:18), this is also applied to the days of the Messiah, in the ancient writings of the Jews ^{f396}.

Ver. 20. *And when he looked on Amalek*, etc.] The country of Amalek, which lay to the south of the land of Canaan, (^{<0413>}Numbers 13:29) and which Balaam had a view of from the mountain of Peor, where he now was:

and he took up his parable, and said; the parable of his prophecy, as the Targum of Jonathan, and pronounced it aloud:

Amalek was the first of the nations; not the first nation in the world, nor the chief and principal for numbers, riches, or strength, but the first that made war with Israel, as all the three Targums paraphrase it, as they did, (see ^{<0278>}Exodus 17:8),

but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever; this was threatened to them by the Lord upon that battle, and is confirmed by this prophecy of Balaam: and after this, orders were given to Israel to blot out their remembrance, (^{<0259>}Deuteronomy 25:19), and which, in a good measure, though not completely, was done in the times of Saul, (^{<0158>}1 Samuel 15:8,9) and after that they were distressed by David, (^{<0270>}1 Samuel 27:9 30:17,18 ^{<0182>}2 Samuel 8:12) and the rest of them were smitten by the sons of Simeon, in the days of Hezekiah, (^{<0344>}1 Chronicles 4:41-43), after which we hear of them no more: Amalek may be considered as a type of antichrist, the son of perdition, who shall go into it, shall come to his end, and there shall be none to help him; which will be true of all the antichristian party, the enemies of Christ, who will be destroyed by him, and perish eternally; (see ^{<0145>}Daniel 11:45 ^{<0678>}Revelation 17:8).

Ver. 21. *And he looked on the Kenites*, etc.] Not the family and posterity of Jethro, as Aben Ezra, Jarchi, and Abendana; for they were not a people by themselves, but were now encamped with Israel, and went with them into the land of Canaan, and were not carried captive with the ten tribes, though some might that dwelt in Naphtali, (^{<0104>}Judges 9:4,11,17), for they after that remained with Judah under the name of Rechabites, (^{<048D>}Jeremiah 35:2) and returned with the two tribes, being carried captive with them, (^{<0125>}1 Chronicles 2:55) but they were a people, though of the same original and family Jethro descended from, which dwelt near, and afterwards among the Amalekites, and therefore were seen by Balaam, and taken

notice of at the same time they were; (see ^{<0956>}1 Samuel 15:6). Abarbinel takes them to be the same with those in (^{<0159>}Genesis 15:19)

and took up his parable; or prophecy concerning them, and delivered it:

and said, strong is thy dwelling place, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock, they dwelling in craggy rocky places, where they thought themselves secure and out of danger; and this their habitation he calls “Ken”, a nest, in allusion to their name Kenites.

Ver. 22. *Nevertheless the Kenite shall be wasted,* etc.] Though they were so strongly fortified, and closely immured and surrounded with rocks and mountains, yet they should gradually waste away, as they were but few in Saul’s time, (^{<0956>}1 Samuel 15:6)

until Ashur shall carry thee away captive; Tiglathpileser, king of Assyria, when he carried captive the people of Syria, took these with them, (^{<1269>}2 Kings 16:9), though Jarchi thinks they were carried captives with the ten tribes, that is, by Shalmaneser, king of Assyria; and the Targum of Jonathan, by Sennacherib, king of Assyria; and others think by Nebuchadnezzar, who was sometimes reckoned a king of Assyria; taking them to be the same with the Amalekites, who were carried captives and returned with the two tribes.

Ver. 23. *And he took up his parable, and said,* etc.] Or delivered another prophecy, having made some little pause:

alas, who shall live when God doeth this? referring not to what goes before, but to what follows; though Jarchi and Aben Ezra think it refers to the Assyria conquering and carrying captive, not only the Kenites, but all the nations of the world, so that there was no living comfortably in it on his account; but this is said after Balaam had taken up his parable again, and so respects what follows, as the destruction of the Persian empire by Alexander, in which Ashur or the Assyrians were included; and the destruction of the Jews by the Romans more especially; which was such as had not been the like from the beginning of the world, (^{<1221>}Matthew 24:21,22), and perhaps may have a further respect to the affliction of the witnesses and church of Christ by antichrist; (see ^{<1211>}Daniel 12:1).

Ver. 24. *And ships [shall come] from the coast of Chittim,* etc.] Kittim was the son of Javan, (^{<0104>}Genesis 10:4) and so designs some part of Greece: Josephus^{f397} says that Kittim possessed the island now called

Cyprus, in which was a city now called Citium, after his name; Macedonia, a considerable part of Greece, is called the land of Cittim,

“And it happened, after that Alexander son of Philip, the Macedonian, who came out of the land of Chettiim, had smitten Darius king of the Persians and Medes, that he reigned in his stead, the first over Greece,” (1 Maccabees 1:1)

“Beside this, how they had discomfited in battle Philip, and Perseus, king of the Citims, with others that lifted up themselves against them, and had overcome them:” (1 Maccabees 8:5)

but the Targum of Jonathan interprets it, of the country of Italy; the Jerusalem Targum, of the Roman legions; and perhaps both Greeks and Romans are intended, and so ships from Cittim, in (²⁷¹³Daniel 11:30), design Romans in Grecian ships; for in such were the Roman ambassadors carried, who distressed Antiochus, king of Syria, (see Gill on “²⁷¹³Daniel 11:30”); and both may be intended here: it is affirmed ^{f398} that Noah with his son Japheth, came into the country now called Italy, and built a city, and gave it the name of Cethim, since called Volterra, and was the metropolis of Etruria, and gave name to all Italy; and that in the year two hundred and twenty from the building of that city, Cethim the son of Javan, and grandson of Noah, took two colonies with him, and sailed to an island which he called after his own name Cethim, now Cyprus:

and shall afflict Ashur; which being a part of the Persian empire, was afflicted, conquered, and subdued by Alexander the Macedonian, who is said to come out of the land of Cittim,

“And it happened, after that Alexander son of Philip, the Macedonian, who came out of the land of Chettiim, had smitten Darius king of the Persians and Medes, that he reigned in his stead, the first over Greece,” (1 Maccabees 1:1)

and shall afflict Eber; or the Hebrews, as the Septuagint version; not that the Grecians or Macedonians should do this, for they under Alexander did not afflict the Jews; unless this is to be understood of the Seleucidae, the kings of Syria, the successors of Alexander, who did distress the Jews; but rather this respects the Romans under Pompey, and especially under Titus Vespasian, who destroyed their city, and carried them captive, and who ever since have been dispersed among the nations:

and he also shall perish for ever: not Eber, but those that afflicted him, even the Romans; and indeed both monarchies, Grecian and Roman, are prophesied of as what should be destroyed, and that by a son of Eber, the Messiah; the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, said to break in pieces all these kingdoms, (^{<27B4>}Daniel 2:44,45) and not Rome Pagan only, but Rome Papal also, antichrist and all the antichristian powers, (^{<31B>}2 Thessalonians 2:8). and so the Targum of Jonathan says, that the end both of the one and the other, that is, that shall afflict Eber, shall be, to fall by the hand of the King Messiah, and they shall perish for ever.

Ver. 25. *And Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place*, etc.] The country from whence he came, that is, he went from Balak, according to his command, in order to return to his own land; for he seems not to have reached it, but stayed by the way among the Moabites and Midianites, and was slain in a battle between Israel and them, (^{<61B>}Numbers 31:8), or if he did reach Mesopotamia, he returned again, as Chaskuni says; and either before he left Balak, or in his journey homewards, or when he returned, he gave that advice, to seduce the Israelites first to whoredom, and by that to idolatry, the effects of which are observed in the following chapter, *see Gill* "^{<61B>}*Numbers 24:14*" and Balak also went his way; to his royal city, court, and family, attended, very probably, by the princes of Moab, who had been with him all this while; though how long these things were transacting is not certain.