

Numbers 22:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed.

Analysis

God forbids Balaam to go with Balak's messengers or curse Israel, stating 'for they are blessed.' This divine prohibition establishes a crucial theological principle: what God has blessed cannot be cursed by human or demonic power. God's sovereign blessing on Israel stems from His covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, creating an irrevocable status that overrides human opposition. The phrase 'thou shalt not curse the people' uses Hebrew 'arar' (אַרַר, 'curse'), indicating powerful spiritual malediction that Balaam was renowned for wielding. However, God's prior blessing (Hebrew 'barak', בָּרַךְ) supersedes all cursing attempts. The principle applies to all believers—'If God be for us, who can be against us?' (Romans 8:31). No weapon formed against God's people ultimately prospers because we rest under divine blessing secured through Christ. Balaam's later tragic choices—despite knowing God's will, he sought ways to profit from Balak (Numbers 22:15-20, 31:16)—warn that knowing God's truth doesn't guarantee obedience if greed tempts us. This narrative demonstrates both God's sovereign protection of His people and the danger of spiritual compromise motivated by financial gain.

Historical Context

Balaam was a Mesopotamian diviner from Pethor on the Euphrates River, renowned for his curses' effectiveness. Balak king of Moab, terrified after watching Israel defeat the Amorites (Numbers 21:21-35), hired Balaam to curse Israel. The Moabites and Midianites sent messengers with divination fees to persuade Balaam

(Numbers 22:7). Ancient Near Eastern texts refer to similar professional diviners and curse-makers believed to wield spiritual power. The Deir Alla inscription (8th century BC) mentions 'Balaam son of Beor, the man who was a seer of the gods,' confirming Balaam's historical existence and reputation. Remarkably, this pagan diviner encountered the true God who commanded him not to curse Israel. Balaam's subsequent behavior showed mixed responses: he obeyed by refusing to curse Israel but later counseled Balak to seduce Israel into idolatry (Numbers 31:16; Revelation 2:14), showing that partial obedience combined with shrewd compromise earns biblical condemnation as the 'error of Balaam' and 'way of Balaam' (Jude 11; 2 Peter 2:15). He was eventually killed during Israel's war against Midian (Numbers 31:8).

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does God's statement 'they are blessed' demonstrate that His sovereign favor overrides all human or spiritual opposition?
2. What does Balaam's knowledge of God's will combined with persistent attempts to profit from Balak warn about spiritual compromise?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר	אֱלֹהִים	אֶל	בְּלָעַם	לֵא	תֵּלֶךְ	עִמָּהֶם	לֵא
said	And God	H413	unto Balaam	H3808	H1980	H5973	H3808
H559	H430		H1109				
תֹּארוּ	אֶת	הָעָם	כִּי	בָרְכוּ	הוּא:		
with them thou shalt not curse	H853	the people	H5971	for they are blessed	H1931		
H779				H1288			

Additional Cross-References

Ephesians 1:3 (Blessing): Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

Deuteronomy 23:5 (Blessing): Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee.

Romans 11:29 (References God): For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

Genesis 12:2 (Blessing): And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

Psalms 146:5 (References God): Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God:

Psalms 144:15 (References God): Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD.

Matthew 27:19 (Parallel theme): When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.

Deuteronomy 33:29 (Parallel theme): Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.

Numbers 23:23 (References God): Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!

Micah 6:5 (Parallel theme): O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the LORD.