

Numbers 22:40

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Balak offered oxen and sheep, and sent to Balaam, and to the princes that were with him.

Analysis

And Balak offered oxen and sheep, and sent to Balaam, and to the princes that were with him—Balak's sacrificial offerings (זָבַח zavach, to slaughter for sacrifice) attempted to curry divine favor for the cursing mission, treating Israel's God as manageable through ritual manipulation. The phrase **sent to Balaam** (שָׁלַח לְבִלְעָם shalach le-Bil'am) indicates portions were delivered as honor-gifts, binding the prophet through hospitality obligations.

This verse illustrates pagan misunderstanding of Yahweh—Balak assumed Israel's God operated like territorial deities who could be bribed or manipulated through sacrifices. The biblical response throughout Balaam's oracles consistently demonstrates that God cannot be bought, controlled, or turned against His covenant people. Paganism offers sacrifices to control gods; biblical faith offers sacrifices in submission to God's sovereign will.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern religion treated deities as negotiable powers manipulable through proper rituals and payments. Kings routinely hired prophets and diviners (like Balaam) to pronounce blessings or curses, viewing spiritual power as purchasable commodity. Israel's God consistently defied these assumptions.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How do contemporary Christians sometimes treat God like Balak did—attempting to manipulate blessing through religious performance?
2. What does Balak's assumption that sacrifices could buy God's cooperation teach about pagan versus biblical worship?
3. How can you examine your prayers and giving to ensure they reflect submission to God's will rather than attempts to control outcomes?

Interlinear Text

וְנִבְּחַ	בַּלָּק	בֶּקָר	וְצֹאֵן	וַיִּשְׁלַח	לְבָלָעַם	וּלְשָׂרֵי
offered	And Balak	oxen	and sheep	and sent	to Balaam	and to the princes
H2076	H1111	H1241	H6629	H7971	H1109	H8269
אֶתֹּ:	אֶשֶׁר					
H854	H834					

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 23:14 (Parallel theme): And he brought him into the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bullock and a ram on every altar.

Proverbs 1:16 (Parallel theme): For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood.

