

Numbers 22:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand; and they came unto Balaam, and spake unto him the words of Balak.

Analysis

The elders departing 'with the rewards of divination in their hand' shows the pagan assumption that spiritual power operates through commercial transaction. The Hebrew *qesamim* (divinations) indicates payment for occult practices. This mercenary approach to spiritual matters contrasts sharply with biblical prophecy, where true prophets spoke God's word freely (Isaiah 55:1). Balaam's willingness to consult God for profit reveals his syncretism—mixing Yahweh worship with pagan practices. Simon Magus later made the same error, thinking God's power could be purchased (Acts 8:18-20).

Historical Context

Divination for hire was common in the ancient Near East. Mesopotamian diviners read omens from various phenomena—animal livers, bird flights, dreams—for payment. Balaam's fame as a diviner who could successfully bless or curse made him valuable. The Bible consistently condemns divination as an abomination (Deuteronomy 18:10), distinguishing true prophecy from pagan manipulation.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does the desire to purchase spiritual power manifest in contemporary Christianity?
2. What distinguishes true prophetic ministry from mercenary religious practices?
3. How do we avoid treating God's gifts as commodities to be bought?

Interlinear Text

וַיֵּלֶכְוּ H1980	וְזִקְנֵי י H2205	מוֹאָב H4124	וְזִקְנֵי י H2205	מִדְיָן H4080
	And the elders	of Moab	And the elders	of Midian
	וְקִסְמֵי ים H7081	בְּיָדָם H3027	וַיָּבֹאוּ H935	אֶל H413
	with the rewards of divination	in their hand	and they came	unto Balaam
וַיִּדְבֹּר ו H1696	אֶל יו H413	דְּבַר י H1697	בָּלָק: H1111	
and spake	unto him	the words	of Balak	

Additional Cross-References

Micah 3:11 (Parallel theme): The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us.