

Numbers 23:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven oxen and seven rams.

Analysis

Balaam's instruction to Balak—"Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven oxen and seven rams"—establishes elaborate ritual preparation before attempting prophecy. The number seven signifies completeness in Hebrew thought. Balaam sought to create favorable conditions for receiving an oracle, mixing pagan divination techniques with Yahweh worship. This reveals his fundamental misunderstanding: God cannot be manipulated through ritual correctness. True prophecy comes from divine initiative, not human technique. The altars and sacrifices could not force God to curse His blessed people.

Historical Context

The seven altars, oxen, and rams would have been extraordinarily expensive, demonstrating Balak's desperation. Balaam's ritual parallels Mesopotamian divination practices where elaborate preparations preceded seeking omens. However, biblical prophecy never operates through manipulation of divine powers. The prophets received revelation sovereignly given by God, not conjured through ritual technique. Balaam's approach exposed his pagan syncretism.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How do we sometimes try to manipulate God through religious ritual or correct technique?
2. What distinguishes genuine prayer from attempts to manipulate God into responding as we wish?
3. How does God's sovereignty over revelation challenge human attempts to control spiritual outcomes?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר	בַּלְעָם	אֶל	בָּלָק	בְּנֵה	לִי	בָּזֶה	וְשִׁבְעָה
said	And Balaam	H413	unto Balak	Build	H0	H2088	and seven
H559	H1109		H1111	H1129			H7651
מִזְבְּחֹת	וְהִכֵּן	לִי	בָּזֶה	וְשִׁבְעָה	כֶּבֶד	וְשִׁבְעָה	אֵילִים:
altars	and prepare	H0	H2088	and seven	oxen	and seven	rams
H4196	H3559			H7651	H6499	H7651	H352

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 23:29 (Sacrifice): And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven bullocks and seven rams.