

Numbers 23:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!

Analysis

Balaam declares: 'Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!' The promise to Abraham (descendants as numerous as dust, Gen 13:16) is acknowledged by pagan prophet. Balaam's wish to 'die the death of the righteous' revealed he knew Israel's blessed state but didn't share their covenant relationship. He wanted the righteous's end without their life. This is religious hypocrisy's essence - desiring heaven without holiness, reward without righteousness. Many want Christianity's benefits without Christ's lordship. Jesus warned about those claiming 'Lord, Lord' without doing the Father's will (Matt 7:21-23).

Historical Context

This oracle came after Balaam's first attempt to curse Israel from Bamoth-baal (v.14). The phrase 'fourth part of Israel' suggests he saw only one of Israel's four camp divisions (Num 2), yet even a quarter appeared innumerable. Balaam's wish proved ironic - he didn't die a righteous death but fell with Midian's kings in judgment for his evil counsel (Num 31:8, 16). His desire for righteous end without righteous life exemplifies those who love 'wages of unrighteousness' (2 Pet 2:15). The oracle unwillingly testified to Israel's blessing - even their enemy acknowledged God's favor on them. This foreshadows how God's enemies must ultimately acknowledge His people's blessedness in Christ.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. Do you desire righteousness's rewards while resisting the righteous life required to obtain them?
2. How does Balaam's hypocritical wish warn you against compartmentalizing faith - wanting heaven without surrender to Christ's lordship?

Interlinear Text

מִי	מִנֵּה	עֹפֹר	יַעֲקֹב	וּמִסְפָּר	אֶת	רִבְעָה
H4310	Who can count	the dust	of Jacob	and the number	H853	of the fourth
	H4487	H6083	H3290	H4557		H7255
יִשְׂרָאֵל	תָּמָת	נַפְשִׁי	מֹת	יֹשֵׁרִים	וְתָהּ	
part of Israel	Let me die	H5315	the death	of the righteous	H1961	
H3478	H4191		H4194	H3477		
אֲחֵרִיתִי	כְּמָהוּ:					
and let my last	H3644					
H319						

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 37:37 (Parallel theme): Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.

Psalms 116:15 (Parallel theme): Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.

Genesis 13:16 (Parallel theme): And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

Revelation 14:13 (Parallel theme): And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

2 Corinthians 5:1 (Parallel theme): For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Proverbs 14:32 (Righteousness): The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death.

Genesis 28:14 (Parallel theme): And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

Genesis 22:17 (Parallel theme): That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

Numbers 2:31 (Parallel theme): All they that were numbered in the camp of Dan were an hundred thousand and fifty and seven thousand and six hundred. They shall go hindmost with their standards.

Numbers 2:9 (Parallel theme): All that were numbered in the camp of Judah were an hundred thousand and fourscore thousand and six thousand and four hundred, throughout their armies. These shall first set forth.