

Numbers 23:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

Analysis

God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent. Balaam declares God's unchangeable nature in contrast to human fickleness. This profound theological statement establishes God's absolute truthfulness—He cannot lie because deception contradicts His essential nature. Unlike humans who speak falsely out of weakness, ignorance, or malice, God's word perfectly corresponds to reality and His character guarantees its fulfillment.

The phrase "neither the son of man, that he should repent" uses "repent" (nacham, נָחַם) meaning to change one's mind or feel regret. God doesn't change His mind like humans who make decisions based on incomplete knowledge and must reverse course when circumstances change. God's perfect knowledge means He never needs to revise His plans or regret His decisions. His purposes stand firm (Psalm 33:11, Isaiah 46:10).

The rhetorical questions "hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" emphasize God's faithfulness to fulfill His word. What God promises, He performs; what He speaks, He accomplishes. This immutability provides assurance that God's blessing on Israel (which Balaam was hired to curse) cannot be reversed. It also grounds Christian confidence in God's promises—His word is utterly reliable because He cannot lie or change His mind (Hebrews 6:18, Titus 1:2).

Historical Context

This passage from **Balaam's First and Second Oracles** must be understood within its ancient Near Eastern context. The wilderness period (approximately 1446-1406 BCE using early Exodus chronology, or 1290-1250 BCE using late chronology) represents a formative period in Israel's national and spiritual development. Archaeological discoveries from Egypt, Canaan, and Mesopotamia provide important background for understanding Israel's experiences.

The Plains of Moab, located northeast of the Dead Sea, provided a staging area for Israel's entry into Canaan. Archaeological surveys reveal this region was inhabited during the Late Bronze Age, with the kingdoms of Moab, Ammon, and the Amorite kingdoms of Sihon and Og controlling various territories. Israel's victories over Sihon and Og demonstrated God's power and gave them control of the Transjordan region.

The Balaam incident reflects ancient Near Eastern divination practices. Mesopotamian texts describe diviners and prophets like Balaam who were hired by kings to curse enemies or bless military campaigns. However, Numbers presents Balaam as ultimately subject to Israel's God, unable to curse whom God has blessed—demonstrating YHWH's supremacy over pagan spiritual powers. The regulations for land division and inheritance reflect standard ancient property law while being adapted to Israel's tribal system and theological commitments.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does this passage's emphasis on irrevocable blessing deepen your understanding of God's character and His work in His people's lives?

2. In what specific ways can you apply the principles of cannot curse to your current life circumstances and spiritual journey?
3. What does this passage teach about the consequences of sin and the necessity of atonement, and how does this point to Christ's ultimate sacrifice?

Interlinear Text

ל א	א יֵשׁ	אל	יִכְזֹב	וְבֵן	אֶדָּם
H3808	is not a man	God	that he should lie	neither the son	of man
	H376	H410	H3576	H1121	H120
	וַיִּתְּנָם	הָהוּא	אָמַר	וְלֹא	יַעֲשֶׂה
	that he should repent	H1931	hath he said	H3808	and shall he not do
	H5162		H559		H6213
	וְדָבָר	וְלֹא	יִקְרָא:		
	it or hath he spoken	H3808	and shall he not make it good		
	H1696		H6965		

Additional Cross-References

1 Samuel 15:29 (Repentance): And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent.

James 1:17 (Good): Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Malachi 3:6 (Parallel theme): For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

Hebrews 6:18 (References God): That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

Titus 1:2 (References God): In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;

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

Luke 21:33 (Parallel theme): Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.

Habakkuk 2:3 (Parallel theme): For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

Psalms 89:35 (Parallel theme): Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David.

Hosea 11:9 (References God): I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city.