

Numbers 23:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied?

Analysis

Balaam declares: 'How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied?' This rhetorical question admits impossibility - no one can successfully oppose what God approves. The parallel Hebrew terms 'qabab' and 'za'am' (curse/defy/denounce) emphasize complete inability to harm those under divine protection. Balaam's oracle, though spoken reluctantly by a greedy prophet, declares truth: Israel's security rests in God's choice, not their righteousness. This foreshadows believers' security - if God is for us, who can be against us (Rom 8:31)? Christ's intercession guarantees no condemnation for those in Him (Rom 8:1, 34).

Historical Context

This oracle came from the high places of Baal where Balak brought Balaam hoping a different location might enable cursing (v.14). Despite seven altars and sacrifices (v.1-4, 14), Balaam could only speak what God put in his mouth (v.5, 16). His inability to curse despite being hired and eager for reward demonstrated that prophets speak God's words, not their own wishes. False prophets speak from their imagination (Jer 23:16), but true prophets can only declare what God reveals. This oracle's truth - that Israel cannot be cursed - finds ultimate fulfillment in the church, which gates of hell cannot prevail against (Matt 16:18).

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. Do you live in fear of curses, hexes, or others' ill wishes, or trust that God's blessing shields you?
2. How does understanding that no one can successfully curse whom God has blessed change your fear of spiritual opposition?

Interlinear Text

וַיְהִי	אֶקְלֵב	לֹא	קִבַּלְהֶם	אֲלֹהֵי	וַיְהִי	וַיְהִי
How	shall I curse	H3808	hath not cursed	whom God	How	hath not defied
H4100	H5344		H6895	H410	H4100	H2194
לֹא	וַיְהִי	יְהוָה:				
H3808	hath not defied	whom the LORD				
	H2194	H3068				

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 44:25 (Parallel theme): That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish;

Numbers 23:20 (Parallel theme): Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it.

Numbers 23:23 (References God): Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!

Numbers 22:12 (Curse): And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed.

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