

Numbers 24:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.

Analysis

I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel. Balaam's fourth oracle contains one of Scripture's clearest Messianic prophecies. The future tense ("shall come," "shall rise") points to a distant fulfillment, while "not now" and "not nigh" emphasize the prophecy's eschatological nature. Balaam sees beyond immediate events to Israel's ultimate glory under Messiah's reign.

The "Star out of Jacob" symbolizes royal glory and divine appointment. In ancient Near Eastern thought, stars represented kings or divine beings. Matthew's account of the magi following a star to find Jesus likely reflects awareness of this prophecy (Matthew 2:2). The "Sceptre" (shebet, שָׁבֵט) clearly denotes kingship—a royal rod or staff symbolizing authority and rule. Together, Star and Scepter point to a coming King from Jacob/Israel who will possess divine glory and sovereign authority.

The prophecy specifies this ruler will "smite the corners of Moab" and destroy "all the children of Sheth"—indicating military victory and judgment upon Israel's enemies. While partially fulfilled in David's reign (2 Samuel 8:2), the prophecy's ultimate fulfillment awaits Christ's return when He will judge the nations and establish His kingdom (Revelation 19:11-16). Early Jewish interpretation

recognized this as Messianic, even calling the failed Jewish revolt leader Bar Kokhba ("Son of the Star") in AD 132-135.

Historical Context

This passage from **Balaam's Final 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 messianic prophecy 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 star from Jacob 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

אָרְאָ אֵל	עַתָּה	אֲשֶׁר	אֵל
I shall see	him but not now	I shall behold	
H3808	H6258	H7789	H3808
H7200			
בָּבָרְךָ	בְּרוּ	בְּרוּ	בְּרוּ
him but	there shall come	a Star	out of Jacob
H7138	H1869	H3556	H3290
לְמִשְׁרָאֵל	וּמִמִּצְרָאֵי	בְּפָאַתִּים	רֹמֵא בְּ
out of Israel	and shall smite	the corners	of Moab
H3478	H4272	H6285	H4124
בָּנִים	שָׁתָּה:		כָּל
all the children	H8351		וְכִרְבֵּךְ רֹמֵא בְּ
H1121			וְכִרְבֵּךְ וְכִרְבֵּךְ

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 22:16 (Parallel theme): I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.

Genesis 49:10 (Parallel theme): The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.

Revelation 1:7 (Parallel theme): Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

Revelation 11:15 (Parallel theme): And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

Psalms 45:6 (Parallel theme): Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre.

2 Peter 1:19 (Resurrection): We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:

Zechariah 10:4 (Parallel theme): Out of him came forth the corner, out of him the nail, out of him the battle bow, out of him every oppressor together.

Hebrews 1:8 (Parallel theme): But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.

Luke 1:78 (Parallel theme): Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

1 Chronicles 18:2 (Parallel theme): And he smote Moab; and the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts.