

Numbers 24:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable, and said, Amalek was the first of the nations; but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever.

Analysis

And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable, and said, Amalek was the first of the nations; but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever—Balaam's oracle (מָשָׁל mashal, proverb/prophecy) against Amalek declares their status as **first of the nations** (רֵאשִׁית גּוֹיִם reshit goyim)—chronologically Israel's first enemy (Exodus 17:8-16), not greatest. The prophetic **latter end** (אַחֲרִיתוֹ acharito) promises complete destruction (אֲדֵי אֶדֶי adei oved, 'unto perishing').

This judgment fulfilled God's decree: 'I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven' (Exodus 17:14). Saul's incomplete obedience in executing this command cost him the kingdom (1 Samuel 15), while later Haman the Agagite (Amalekite descendant) nearly destroyed Jews in Persia (Esther 3-7). Amalek symbolizes perpetual opposition to God's people, ultimately destroyed in eschatological judgment.

Historical Context

Amalek descended from Esau's grandson (Genesis 36:12) and attacked Israel's vulnerable rear guard at Rephidim (Deuteronomy 25:17-18). Their cowardly assault on weak and elderly Israelites earned divine decree of total extermination, making Balaam's prophecy confirmation of earlier judgment pronouncements.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does Amalek's identity as 'first of nations' (chronologically first enemy, not greatest power) illustrate that opposition's timing matters less than its ultimate outcome?
2. What does Saul's failure to completely destroy Amalek (keeping Agag alive) teach about partial obedience in spiritual warfare?
3. How does Amalek's prophesied 'perishing forever' encourage believers facing persistent spiritual opposition?

Interlinear Text

וַיֵּרָא	אֶת	עֲמֹלֵ קַ	וַיֶּשֶׂא	מִשְׁלֹ וְ	וַיֹּאמֶר
And when he looked	H853	Amalek	he took up	his parable	and said
H7200		H6002	H5375	H4912	H559
רִאשׁוֹן	גוֹיִם	עֲמֹלֵ קַ	וְאַחֲרָיו	עַד יְ	
was the first	of the nations	Amalek	but his latter	for ever	
H7225	H1471	H6002	H319	H5703	
אֲבָד:					
end shall be that he perish					
H8					

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 17:14 (Parallel theme): And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.

