

Numbers 24:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!

Analysis

Balaam's oracle 'How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!' expresses involuntary admiration for Israel's encampment. The Hebrew *ma tovu* (how goodly/beautiful) shows aesthetic and moral approval. What Balak wanted Balaam to curse, God forced him to praise. The 'tents' and 'tabernacles' represent Israel's organized communal life under divine order. This blessing became so significant that Jewish synagogue liturgy begins with these words (*Ma Tovu*). The praise of Israel's dwelling reflects God's dwelling among them—their beauty came from His presence.

Historical Context

Israel's camp in the wilderness was organized by divine command (Numbers 2) with tribes positioned around the central tabernacle. From an elevated perspective, the arrangement formed a cross-shaped pattern with God's presence at the center. This divinely ordered community contrasted sharply with the chaotic pagan nations surrounding them. Their visible order testified to the God who dwelt among them.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does God's presence among His people create visible order and beauty?
2. What makes Christian community attractive to watching outsiders?
3. How should churches reflect divine order in their corporate life?

Interlinear Text

מִה	אָבָל יְה	בְּיַעַק בָּ	מִשְׁכְּנָת יְה	יִשְׂרָאֵל:
H4100	How goodly	are thy tents	O Jacob	and thy tabernacles
H2895	H168	H3290	H4908	H3478

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