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Balaam's Fourth Oracle

24: 15-19

Balaam's fourth oracle DIG: How is this oracle similar or different from the previous one? How does it continue the "theme song" of the "Balaam and Balak show?" In these oracles who is the "Star" on the horizon (compared to Revelation 22:16)? What is the scepter a symbol of? Who is the Ruler of Jacob? What near historical and far eschatological fulfillments of these prophecies do you see? How do these oracles relate to each other? What does this passage teach you about God?

REFLECT: What people or things do you face every day that keep you from doing God's work? How are these "enemies" similar to those facing ancient Isra'el? In the face of such "enemies," what hope can you draw from this passage? In the past year, how has God removed obstacles keeping you from serving Him? What part did you play in this? If you were to hitch your wagon to the "Star" of this story, where would it lead you? Thank the Lord that He uses us even though we are not perfect.

If there is any one verse in Torah in which the Messiah is revealed to us, it is in this verse about the "Star."

Hebrew poetry is not based on the concept of Western meter. The poetry of **Isra'el** was infused with rhythm, and the accentuation (with basically one "beat" per word) most likely signifies that pattern. The predominant feature of Hebrew poetic structure is the repetition of meaning in parallel expressions . . . or poetic parallelism. The biblical verse of poetry normally has two or more of these parallel units. The first line makes a statement, followed by the second line which elaborates on it in some manner. The words are not meant to rhyme, but are parallel in thought. **Therefore, Balaam's fourth oracle is written in five tightly parallel couplets.** At the beginning of **the oracle** proper, the speaker shifts from third to first person, with **Balaam** now speaking in **his** formal role as **the oracle** speaker.

This **oracle** is not an attempted **curse Isra'el**; rather, it's a glimpse into the future of **Isra'el** and **her** relationship with **her** neighbors. **The fourth oracle** that **Balaam** pronounced was specifically directed toward **the Moabites**. **Balaam** kept on insisting to **Balak** that **he** would not **curse the Israelites**. But **Balak** continually put **him** up to it.

Three times **Balak** made **Balaam** go through the standard ritual for **sorcery** which was prevalent in the ancient Near East. When the ritual was finished, **the sorcerer** was supposed to either see a demon or hear from him **the curse** that was to be pronounced. However, despite the fact that the ritual was done three times, it was never effective. **Balaam** never **cursed Isra'el**.

Finally, after the third attempt at **sorcery**, **Balaam** spoke **the Word of God**, not just in **blessing Isra'el**, but in **cursing Mo'ab**! The tables were completely turned. **Balak** must have been completely shocked. **He** was the one who hired **Balaam** to **curse his** enemy **Isra'el**. Now **he** heard that **the God of Isra'el** intended to use **Isra'el** to be a means of **cursing** for **him** and the rest of **the Moabites**. Yikes! The main figure who would lead **Isra'el** in destroying **the Moabites** (as well as other enemy nations mentioned in **Balaam's** fourth **oracle**) would be a figure referred to as **the "Star."** But who or what was that **"Star?"**

Today, most Jewish scholars see the fulfillment of Balaam's oracle in king David. However, the ancient rabbis have habitually interpreted this passage to be speaking about someone who would be more than king David. They thought it had something to do with the Messiah. According to Alfred Edersheim (the brilliant Messianic believer who lived from 1825 to 1889), both the Targum Onkelos and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan paraphrased it the way, as well as some ancient midrashim (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Volume 2, page 714). Moreover, such an eminent authority as Rabbi Akiva also understood "the Star" as speaking of the Messiah.⁵³¹

Then Balaam spoke under the control of the Ruach Ha'Kodesh (24:15-16), saying: This is the oracle of Balaam, son of Beor; the oracle of a man whose eyes have been opened, more aware now than he was before; the oracle of him who hears the words of God; who knows what 'Elyon knows, who sees what Shaddai sees, who falls down with eyes wide open (24:16). These verses form the introduction to the oracle; except for the one exception of the mention of 'Elyon, they are identical to 24:3-4. Balaam was unworthy of the words that passed through his lips, even as others were unworthy of the role they played in salvation history of the Bible. But his words were not compromised; for it was the LORD who put His words in his mouth as the Spirit of God came upon him (24:2b).⁵³¹

(A) I see Him, but not here and now, with the near historical fulfillment of king David,

(A) I perceive Him, but far in the distant future (24:17a), with the far eschatological fulfillment of King Messiah. This verse presents the grand idea that **Isra'el** has a coming **Deliverer**. But when will that happen? How will it happen? It is safe to say that there has never been a period of **Isra'el's** history when **she** experienced absolute peace and security from all **her** external dangers. There were two periods when **Isra'el** was close.

The first was during the period of the conquest of **the Promised Land** by the wilderness generation. At that time, at least there was great potential for absolute peace; and in fact, for a brief moment it seemed like it was so. We read in **Joshua 2:7** that after **the Land** was conquered: **The people served ADONAI throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things YHVH had done for Isra'el.** For this to continue, it seems like all **Isra'el** had to do was to follow **the LORD** and **He** would have given them victory over all the enemies in the land of Canaan. Correct? No, wrong! **Judges 3:1** indicates that **Ha'Shem** left certain nations in **the Land** that **Joshua's** generation did not conquer, **to test all those Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars in Canaan.** **God** left a test for them; however, **they** didn't fare too well. Shortly after **Joshua** died, **Isra'el** proved unfaithful to **El Shaddai** and it has been that way ever since!

The second was during the reign of **king David**, when **Isra'el** almost gained absolute peace and security from **her** neighboring countries. Under **David's** and **Solomon's** leadership, **Isra'el's** borders expanded and **she** entered into a time when there was godly leadership. Yet, there was still an external threat from various enemies. After **their** reigns, the Kingdom divided (see the commentary on **the Life of King Solomon, to see link click [By - The Fall of the House of David](#)**). The northern kingdom of **Isra'el** fell quickly into idolatry (see **the Life of Solomon Dd - Golden Calves at Dan and Bethel**) and was swallowed up by the Assyrians in 722 BC. The southern kingdom of **Judah** lasted longer but suffered continually under threat from the Assyrians. **Isra'el's** history could, in fact, be outlined by examining **the curses** and **blessings** found in **Deuteronomy Chapters 27-29**. As **Isra'el** was unfaithful to **her God**, **He** disciplined **her** with more dangers, especially external menaces like the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans.

It seems that only **the Messiah** could completely deliver **Isra'el** from the threat of destruction. **He** would have to do a spiritual work among **the Israelites** that would cause the curses for disobedience to be lifted from **her** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Ff - Curses for Disobedience**). That would mean **He** would have to work a spiritual revival in **Isra'el** of such magnitude that **she** had never experienced before (see the commentary on **Ezeki'el Ea - The Valley of the Dry Bones**). **The sages of the Talmud** (see the

commentary on **The Life of Christ Ei - The Oral Law**) predicted that such a revival would come. However, according to Sanhedrin 96-99, Isra'el herself would do the work of repentance. They teach that the Messiah would only come when Isra'el was spiritually deserving to receive Him. Moreover, the Messiah would only be a mighty general who would defeat armies.

There is only one kind of **Messiah** who could cause both a spiritual revival and a decisive military victory for **Isra'el**. He is described in **Zechariah Chapters 12 and 14**. There we read of a predicted time in **Isra'el's** future when the armies of the world would come against **Isra'el**. When all seems lost, the leadership of **Isra'el** will cry out for **Yeshua** to return (see **Revelation Ev - The Basis for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ**). Then, at the most critical point, the **Messiah** will reveal **Himself** to **Isra'el** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Kg - The Second Coming of Jesus Christ to Bozrah**). Zechariah says: **And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son . . . On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity (Zechariah 12:10 and 13:1).** Furthermore, the **LORD** will go out and fight against those nations, as He fights on a day of battle. On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives (see **Revelation Ex - The Eight Stage Campaign of Armageddon**). Thus, we have a **Messiah** who will both cleanse **Isra'el** from sin and defeat her enemies. He is the **One** who will rule and reign in the golden age of peace and security that **Balaam** predicted (see **Revelation Fh - The Dispensation of the Messianic Kingdom**).⁵³²



(B) A “Star” will come out of Jacob. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, Joseph and Mary evidently decided to continue to stay and live in the town of their ancestry. Two years later, during the reign of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. They asked repeatedly: **Where is the One who has been born King of the Jews (Matthew 2:1-2a)?** The word **asked** is a present participle, emphasizing continuous action. They kept on asking and asking. They had calculated exactly how many years would transpire before the Messiah would come (Daniel 9:24-27). Although they were familiar with the book of Dani’el and the book of Numbers, they were, however, not familiar with the book of Micah, where in Micah 5:2 it predicted that the Messiah would be born in the town of Bethlehem. As a result, they came to Jerusalem because they were desperate to find Him (see [The Life of Christ Av - The Visit of the Magi](#)).

There are several misconceptions in the common nativity scene. First, is the very popular Christmas song that begins with, “We three kings of Orient are.” There is no way of knowing how many there were. The Bible merely mentions them in the plural. There could have been two, twenty or a hundred. We don’t really know. The second misconception is that they were kings. They were not kings, but magi, or astrologers, from the east. Why would those Gentile astrologers want to worship a Jewish king? These were magi from Babylon. In the past, Dani’el had saved the lives of all the magi of Babylon by interpreting King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (see my commentary on [Jeremiah Dq - Nebuchadnezzar’s Troubling Dream](#)). The source of Daniel’s ability was not the stars of the heavens but the God of Heaven. As a result, a line of Babylonian astrologers spanning generations worshiped the One true God, and having Dani’el’s prophecy, looked forward to the coming of the King of the Jews. We can conclude from the book of Dani’el that Babylonian astrologers did know the time Messiah was to be born. But Dani’el says nothing about a star that would proclaim the birth of the King of the Jews. So how did the magi know about it?

Balaam, a Babylonian sorcerer, had the Spirit of God place these words in his mouth: **A “Star” will come out of Jacob; a scepter will arise out of Isra’el (Numbers 24:17).** But it was not a literal star because the “Star” and the scepter in this verse are one and the same. We know this because Balaam’s prophecy is in the form of Hebrew poetry, which is not based on rhythm or rhyme but on parallelism. The term scepter is a symbol of royalty. This “Star” that would come out of Jacob, be a symbol of God Himself.

Furthermore, Balaam’s occupation was that of a sorcerer/astrologer. Even more significant is that he came from Pethor, a city on the banks of the Euphrates River in Babylonia (Numbers 22:5; Deuteronomy 23:4). With the book of Dani’el and the prophecy of

Balaam, we have a double **Babylonian** connection. Therefore, the revelation of a “**Star**” in relation to **Messiah’s** birth came by means of a **Babylonian** astrologer who, no doubt, passed the information down to **his** colleagues. Centuries later, **Dani’el** was able to give further details to the **Babylonian** astrologers about the time that **the “Star” of Jacob** would appear (see the commentary on **Dani’el Cm - The Beginning of the Great Tribulation**).⁵³³

These **magi** said that **they saw His “Star” when it rose and had come to worship Him (Matthew 2:2b)**. The Greek word translated **star** is *aster*, and means *light, radiance or brilliance*. **What they actually saw was the Sh’khinah glory, or the visible manifestation of God Himself** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Ju - The Glory of the LORD Rises Upon You**). There are five reasons why this could not be a literal **star**. First, it was uniquely **the Messiah’s “Star”** because it is called **His “Star”** . . . and in that way, it is not true of any other **star**. Second, this “**Star**” appears and disappears. Third, this “**Star**” moved from east to west, from Babylon to **Tziyon**. Fourth, **it** moved from north to south, from **Jerusalem to Bethlehem**. Fifth, it hovered over the very **house** where **the child** was living. A literal **star** cannot hover in one place. **So, just as the Sh’khinah glory was used to announce the birth of the King of the Jews to Jewish shepherds** (see **The Life of Christ Ar - The Shepherds and the Angels**), **the Sh’khinah glory was also used to announce the birth of the King of the Jews to Gentile astrologers** (see my commentary on **Genesis Lw - The Witness of the Stars**).⁵³⁴

(B) A scepter will arise from Isra’el (24:17b). Balaam saw **the scepter** as a **Davidic King** who would **rise out of Jacob** like a “**Star**,” sometime in the distant future. **The scepter** is yet another allusion back to **Jacob’s** prophecy over **Judah** (see **Genesis Lg - The Scepter Will Not Depart from Judah Until He Comes to Whom It Belongs**). **The One** who has the right to the throne would be **King Messiah - the Kosher King** from **Judah** to whom the throne rightfully belongs. There were other godly kings from **Judah**, like David, Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Uzziah, Hezekiah and Josiah. But the sad prophecy of **Ezekiel 21** says **remove the crown**, it’s done. The kings of **Judah** stopped in 586 BC with the destruction of the Temple. There will be no more until **He comes to whom it** rightfully **belongs** (see my commentary on **Revelation Ce - The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David Has Triumphed**), and to this very day not one king of **Judah** has been crowned. The Maccabees were Levites. In fact, the Hasmonean Empire ran into trouble precisely because they were priests who tried to become kings later on. What about King Herod? His family was converted to Judaism. He was really a Roman king. In 1948 David Ben-Gurion didn’t call himself a king. So, for about 2,500 years – there has been no king of **Judah**. **This is why Rashi, and many other rabbis, believe that the last King of**

Judah has to be King Messiah.

Historically, this prophecy has already been fulfilled. Once the tribe of **Judah**, under king **David**, attained leadership over the nation, **the scepter** (or the symbol of **the king**) never departed from **Judah** until after **Messiah** was born.⁵³⁵ About that time the Romans, who had the right to rule, took away **the scepter**, the right of capital punishment, from the Jews. This changed the death penalty from stoning to the Roman method of crucifixion for the Jews (**John 18:31-32**). **When this happened, the high priest went throughout the city of Yerushalayim wearing sackcloth and ashes saying, "Woe to us for the scepter has been taken from Judah and he to whom it belongs has not come."** They thought the word of **God** had been broken because **they** didn't know that up in a Nazareth carpenter's shop, little **Yeshua, the One to whom the scepter** belonged, had come, and **Genesis 49:10** had been fulfilled.

(C) It will crush the heads of Mo'ab's people (24:17c). This phrase was a symbol of defeating one's enemies in Hebrew literature. **Mo'ab** would be destroyed as a nation because **she** defiled **YHVH (Jeremiah 48:40-42)**, but a believing remnant will survive. **Mo'ab** had become a satellite of Assyria by the late 8th century BC and was conquered by the Babylonians in 582 BC, upon which **the Moabites** disappeared from history as a nation. **Their** territory was resettled by the Nabataeans in the fourth/third century BC.⁵³⁶ However, by the grace of **God**, the descendants of **Mo'ab** were not totally obliterated (see the commentary on **Jeremiah D1 - The Punishment and Restoration of Moab**). **Those** who survived repented and became a faithful **remnant** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Dw - The Hope of Moab's Salvation**). So peace will come between **Mo'ab** and **Isra'el** by means of a partial destruction that will lead to a national regeneration of **Mo'ab**. As such, there will be a saved nation called **Mo'ab** during the Messianic Kingdom.

(C) and subdue all descendants of Seth (24:17d). **These** are probably not **the descendants of Seth** who were the descendants of Adam, for that would imply the annihilation of a major portion of the human race. But instead, the phrase **the descendants of Seth** would be the equivalent of the phrase **the people of Mo'ab** in this couplet. Such parallelism is reinforced by the couplet of **Edom** and **Seir** below.⁵³⁷ **King David** accomplished all of this. Ironically, **king David's** great grandmother was **Ruth, a Moabite** (see the commentary on **Ruth Bd - Coda: The Genealogy of David**). At one point, **David** was on good terms with **the king of Mo'ab**. He even left **his mother and father** in the protection of **the king of Mo'ab** so that **Sha'ul** could not kill **them** in **his** madness (**First Samuel 22:3-4**). Yet, when **David** took the throne of **Isra'el**, **the Moabites** challenged **him** and **he** went to war with **them**, defeating them and collecting tribute.⁵³⁸

There is a sense in which the modern reader might regard **24:18** and **19** as somewhat anticlimactic to what it followed. Yet, this is not at all unusual in biblical prophecy. One can pick almost any well-known messianic text (**Isaiah 9:6-7** or **Micah 5:2** for example) and find it to have what appear to be rather humble associations. However, the wording of these two verses are significant for the advance the idea of **24:17**, that the coming **Deliverer** will have a great victory and will provide a Kingdom for **His people**.⁵³⁹ With a slight rearrangement of the Hebrew text, these verse may be read:

(D) Edom we be conquered,

(D) and Seir will be conquered, when Isra'el grows strong (24:18). Edom and Seir are synonymous terms (**Genesis 32:3, 36:8-9; Deuteronomy 1:44, 2:4, 8 and 12, etc**). The paring of the two words may help us understand the pairing of **Mo'ab and Seth (24:17c and d)**. In **Moshe's** day, **Edom** was a nation that **Isra'el** was forbidden to attack. The future projection of the text assumes a time when **Edom** attacked **Isra'el** (see the book of **Obadiah**), for which **Edom** finally receives **her** punishment for refusing passage to the **Hebrews** in route to the Promised Land (see **De - The Resistance of Edom**).⁵⁴⁰ In **the near historical fulfillment**, king **David** was victorious over **Edom**. **He** defeated the **Edomites** and **they** became **his servants** (see **the Life of David Cx - David's Victories: Edom defeated in the south**). This was predicted in **Obadiah 18-21**. In the narratives of the books of **Kings**, we read that **David's** conquest of **Edom** was extremely brutal. **First Kings 11:15-16** tells of how **David's** general, **Joab**, occupied **Edom** for six months in an attempt to slaughter every male **Edomite**. And one of **David's** mighty warriors, is credited with **striking down 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt** (see **the Life of David Ej - David's Mighty Warriors: Abishai**).⁵⁴¹ The words contrasting the ultimate downfall of **Edom** are to be stressed: **Isra'el** will **grow strong** while **her** enemies languish. This is the promise of **24:19**, **Jacob** will provide a **Ruler** who will finally destroy all of the enemies of God.

(E) And a Ruler will come out of Jacob,

(E) who will destroy the survivors of the city of Babylon (24:19). In **the far eschatological fulfillment**, **Ha'Shem** will **destroy** the kingdom of Darkness during the Great Tribulation. However, as a display of **His** grace, **the Lord** will restore the believing remnant of countries during the Messianic Kingdom that had previously opposed **Him** and **His people Isra'el** (see **Revelation Fk - Gentiles in the Messianic Kingdom**). The entire world will be fruitful and very productive. Yet, there will be two areas of perpetual desolation during the entire thousand years. The first of these two desolate areas, **Babylon**, will be the former commercial and political capital of the antichrist (see **Revelation Em - Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She Has Become a Home for Demons**); and the

second desolate area will be **Edom** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Gi - Edom's Streams Will Be Turned into Pitch**). **Messiah** will ultimately exercise dominion over all **nations, tribes, and peoples**. The theme of **the oracle** is constant: **Isra'el's** ultimate **blessing** is dependent on **her Deliverer**.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for **Your** incredible **love** that was willing to bear the great shame and pain to be the spotless **Lamb of God** (**John 1:29; First Corinthians 5:7; Romans 8:34**) bearing my punishment of death because of my **sin**. **Your love** is so great that you withhold nothing that will **bless** those who **love You** (**Psalms 84:11**). It is so comforting to know that nothing can **separate** me from **Your love, neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Messiah Yeshua, our Lord** (**Romans 8:35-39**). What a wonderful **blessing** it is to be **Your** child! It is a **blessing** that no one can take away.*

***Isra'el** is **Your first born** and **You** so desire to **bless Isra'el**. **This is what ADONAI** says: **Isra'el is My son, My firstborn** (**Exodus 4:22b-c**). **Your** promise of **blessing** is so definite, that **Your** promised **blessing** extends even to those who also **bless Isra'el**. **My desire is to bless those who bless you, but whoever curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed** (**Genesis 12:3**). No **sorcerer**, or anyone else, can ever take away the **blessing** that **You** so desire to pour on **Isra'el**.*

***Israel** itself by its disobedience, brought on discipline when it refused to enter **the Promised Land** (**Numbers 14:22-35**) out of a fear of the giants rather than trusting in **Your Almighty** power. That disobedience was a thing of the past for now the new generation vowed to obey **God** by entering and conquering **the Promised Land**. **Then Isra'el vowed to ADONAI and stated, "If you deliver this people into our hand, we will put their cities under the ban of destruction"** (**Numbers 21:2**)! As the people obeyed, **God** was able to fulfill **His** promise to **bless Isra'el**.*

*Trials and suffering in this world often comes, but it will soon be over and for all who love you, **Messiah Yeshua** is preparing a heavenly home of eternal joy and peace (**John 14:1-3**). **You** always keep **Your** promises! **You** kept **Your Word** to **bless Isra'el** and **You** will also keep **Your Word** to bring those who love **You** home to live with **You** in heaven, where there will be eternal joy and peace (**Revelation 21:1-4**). Praise and thank **You** for always being so faithful, even when I am not! It is a joy to think of praising **You** forever in heaven! In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*