

b. The first utterance (xxiii.7-10)

These four verses are quite general in nature, merely stating Balaam's inability to curse a nation which God has not cursed, but has instead selected to occupy a unique place (9b) and to be an innumerable multitude (10a). Balaam knows that this defiance of Balak might cause his death, but declares his desire to die the death of the righteous (10b; but cf. xxxi.8). Yesharim (righteous) is plural, and refers to the Israelites. See -note on xxiii.21 below. In verse 10b it is doubtful whether aharith should be translated last end. It is formed from the preposition ahar, 'after,' and probably really means 'that which comes after, or beyond.'

c. Introduction to the second utterance (xxiii.11-17)

After each of the first three utterances, Balak rebukes Balaam for doing the opposite of what he was hired to do (xxiii.11,25,xxiv.10-11), and Balaam replies that he can say only what God commands (xxiii.12,26,xxiv.12-13). Then (after the first two utterances) Balak suggests that he move to another place in the hope that this will change the spell (xxiii.13-14,27-28). Balak evidently thinks of Balaam to some extent as a powerful magician, able to accomplish weird things by his incantations (xxii.6,17), and also as one subject to queer magical spells which a change of place may alter. Balaam never says anything to show agreement with these ideas, but always insists that he is merely a spokesman for the Lord (xxii.18, 38, xxiii.8,12,19-20,26, xxiv.3-4,12-13,16).

d. The second utterance (xxiii.18-24)

Balak has brought Balaam to the top of Pisgah, in the hope that this will change the spell. Balaam declares that God cannot be forced in this way, but will stand by His word (19). He declares that Israel will overcome its enemies (24), since God has been working for Israel (22-23).

After noting the terrible accounts of murmurings and open rebellions among the Israelites, which occupy so large a part of chapters xi-xxi, it seems strange to