

The Distant Star and the Final Kingdom

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*“I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near;
A star shall come forth from Jacob,
A scepter shall rise from Israel,
And shall crush through the forehead of Moab,
And tear down all the sons of Sheth.
Edom shall be a possession,
Seir, its enemies, also will be a possession,
While Israel performs valiantly.
One from Jacob shall have dominion,
And will destroy the remnant from the city.”*
(Numbers 24:17–19)

Few prophecies in Scripture are delivered with as much mystery as Balaam’s oracle of the “Star from Jacob” and the “Scepter from Israel.” Spoken by a pagan seer, this oracle is among the most foundational Messianic prophecies in the whole Bible. Balaam saw something far beyond his own time: the rise of Israel’s true King and the final end of Satan’s dominion. Balaam’s oracle thus becomes the first explicit expression of what scholars call *Jewish apocalyptic* hope; foreseeing the rise of Israel’s true King who will overthrow every oppressor and establish God’s dominion over all the earth, specifically in “the end of days.”

A Pagan Prophet and a Sovereign God

Scholars all affirm that the Balaam narrative (Numbers 22–24) is one of the most intricate literary works in the Pentateuch. It begins with Balak, king of Moab, summoning Balaam to curse Israel. Balak’s request is clear: *“Please come, curse this people for me ... for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed”* (Numbers 22:6). That statement, whether Balak realized it or not, perfectly echoes God’s promise to Abraham: *“And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed”* (Genesis 12:3).

From the start, the story is framed with covenant language. Balak, the enemy of Israel, tries to manipulate spiritual power to subvert God’s promises. But the narrative’s outcome is predetermined: Israel cannot be cursed, because the covenant cannot be broken. God’s faithfulness stands immovable against all human schemes.

Even through a pagan mouthpiece, God will reaffirm His covenant. Balaam is the living demonstration that the Most High rules over all nations—and that His purposes will prevail, even through the lips of His enemies.

The Donkey and the Prophet: God's Irony and Mercy

The famous scene of Balaam's talking donkey (Numbers 22:22–35) is not an odd side note, it is actually the intended interpretive key to the whole narrative. Balaam is led by a donkey who can see the Angel of the Lord standing in the way. Three times Balaam beats his animal; three times the donkey turns aside. Then, after the third strike, *“the LORD opened the donkey's mouth”* (Numbers 22:28). Later, *“the LORD opened Balaam's eyes”* (Numbers 22:31).

The pattern repeats in the second half of the story: Balak pressures Balaam three times to curse Israel, and three times Balaam instead blesses them. The symmetry is deliberate. The one who tried to force his beast is now himself a beast who is under God's control.

Balaam is, as theologian Seth D Postell puts it, “God's donkey.” The message is unmistakable: YHVH's sovereignty is absolute. He can use a pagan prophet, a talking animal, or even a hostile empire to accomplish His plan of redemption. The instrument is irrelevant; God's sovereignty is unlimited.

The Spirit of God and the Opened Eyes

By the third oracle, something extraordinary happens:

“When Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not go as at other times to seek omens, but he set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe; and the Spirit of God came upon him” (Numbers 24:1–2).

This is the only time in the narrative that the *Spirit of God* explicitly comes upon Balaam. His earlier oracles were true, but now his eyes are opened, and he sees, not just Israel blessed, but Israel's King.

“The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, and the oracle of the man whose eye is opened; the oracle of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, yet having his eyes uncovered” (Numbers 24:3–4).

The progression of revelation is clear: the first two oracles focus on Israel as a nation; the third and fourth turn to an individual—Israel's royal Redeemer. Balaam sees the One who will rise from Jacob, conquer the nations, and establish everlasting dominion.



A Star Shall Rise From Jacob

The Star and the Scepter: The Messiah Foretold

Balaam's climactic vision declares:

"I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; A Star shall come forth from Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab, and tear down all the sons of Sheth. Edom shall be a possession, Seir, its enemies also, will be a possession, while Israel performs valiantly. One from Jacob shall have dominion, and will destroy the remnant from the city." (Numbers 24:17–19)

The language unmistakably echoes Jacob's blessing over Judah:

"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples."
(Genesis 49:10)

Both prophecies speak of a royal ruler who will arise from Israel to subdue the nations. The imagery of the *star* points to heavenly glory and divine appointment; the *scepter* speaks of royal authority and dominion. Together, they anticipate the Messiah—the Son of David, the Lion of Judah, the King who will reign in righteousness.

This same royal-messianic imagery reappears throughout Scripture. In *Psalms 2*, the Son is installed on Zion's hill, promised the nations as His inheritance. In *Psalms 72:8*, it is said of the coming King: *"May he also rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth."* And in *Revelation 22:16*, Jesus declares the ultimate fulfillment of Balaam's words: *"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."*

Balaam's "distant Star" was the Messiah Himself, seen dimly, ages beforehand.

Gog or Agag? The First Name of the Final Enemy

In Numbers 24:7, Balaam prophesies: *"His king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted."* Yet several early textual witnesses read "Gog" instead of "Agag." The implications are stunning. Balaam's prophecy is the first time the final adversary is named in Scripture. Gog—the end-time enemy described in *Ezekiel 38–39*—appears here in seed form, centuries before Ezekiel's vision.

In other words, the same Spirit who opened Balaam's eyes to see Israel's Messiah also revealed the name of His ultimate foe. Gog is the eschatological "seed of the serpent," the final rebel whom the Messiah will crush at His coming. The prophecy thus spans the entire biblical

narrative arc—from Genesis 3:15 (“He shall crush your head”) to the end-time battle in Ezekiel and Revelation.

The End of Days: The Eschatological Frame of the Torah

Balaam introduces his final oracle with these words: “*Come, I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the days to come*” (Numbers 24:14). The phrase “the days to come” (*b’acharit hayamim*) is used in only a few key places in the Torah—Genesis 49:1, Numbers 24:14, and Deuteronomy 4:30; 31:29—and in every case, it has an eschatological meaning: the final period of history when God restores His people and establishes His kingdom.

In Genesis 49, Jacob gathers his sons and says, “*Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the days to come*” (Genesis 49:1). There too, the prophecy culminates in a royal figure—the ruler from Judah.

In Deuteronomy 4:30, Moses warns that “*in the latter days*” Israel will be scattered but will return to the LORD. These “latter days” stretch beyond Israel’s historical kings to the final restoration after exile and judgment.

Balaam’s use of the same phrase places his vision in that same horizon. The “Star” and “Scepter” are not merely about David’s partial victories over Moab or Edom—they look to the consummation of God’s redemptive plan, when the King of Israel reigns over all nations.

From the Seed of the Woman to the Star of Jacob

The “Star from Jacob” prophecy is not an isolated prediction—it’s part of the continuous thread of Messianic hope that begins in Eden. In the Garden, God promised the serpent: “*He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel*” (Genesis 3:15). That promise introduced the war between two seeds: the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent.

Balaam’s prophecy picks up that same imagery: “*He shall crush through the forehead of Moab*” (Numbers 24:17). The Hebrew verb used for “crush” (*machatz*) is the same root used for “smite” or “strike” in later messianic texts, including *Psalm 110:6*: “*He will crush the head over a broad country.*”

The line of connection runs unbroken:

- Genesis 3:15 – the promise of a skull-crushing Redeemer.
- Genesis 49:9–10 – the lion from Judah with the scepter.
- Numbers 24:17–19 – the star who crushes the enemies of God.

- Psalm 110:2 – the Messiah who rules in the midst of His enemies.
- Revelation 19:11–16 – the Rider on the white horse, striking the nations with a sharp sword.

Balaam’s vision, then, is one more link in the great chain of messianic revelation—the story of the coming King who will reverse the curse, conquer the serpent’s seed, and restore the earth under the reign of righteousness.

The Final Kingdom: The Triumph of the Skull-Crushing King

When Balaam’s eyes were opened, he saw something few prophets have ever seen so clearly: the Messiah in His final victory. *“One from Jacob shall have dominion”* (Numbers 24:19). The Hebrew verb *radah* (“to rule”) first appears in Genesis 1:26, where humanity is commanded to “rule” over the creation. What Adam lost through sin, the Messiah will restore through dominion.

Balaam’s vision looks beyond Israel’s wilderness journey, beyond Canaan’s conquest, beyond David’s throne—to the eternal kingdom of the Messiah. This is the same dominion promised in *Daniel 7:14*: *“And to Him was given dominion, honor, and a kingdom, so that all the peoples, nations, and populations of all languages might serve Him; His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away.”*

The prophecy that began with a pagan seer ends with the promise of the everlasting King. What began in rebellion ends in restoration. The God who would not allow His people to be cursed will not allow His creation to remain broken.

Conclusion: Hope in the Rising Star

Balaam’s eyes saw a star, far in the distant future. We now live under the light of this star. Though the nations rage and the darkness continues to deepen, the prophecy still stands: *“A Star shall come forth from Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise from Israel.”* The same King who once came in humility will come again in glory to crush evil and bless the nations. Every promise of God converges here, in the face of the risen Christ, the bright Morning Star (Revelation 22:16). In Balaam’s reluctant prophecy, we glimpse the faithfulness of God who cannot lie, the sovereignty of God who cannot be thwarted, and the mercy of God who still offers blessing to all who bow before His chosen King.



God's Donkey

