

ARTICLE V.

THE CHARACTER AND PROPHECIES OF BALAAM.

Numbers XXII—XXIV.

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The condition of the Israelites at the time of Balaam's Prophecies.

THE Israelites arrived at Kadesh, near the foot of the mountain range which forms the southern boundary of Palestine, in the second year after their departure from Egypt. When the spies had brought back their report, the people there murmured against God, and received the sentence of exclusion from the promised land. Nearly thirty-eight years after, on the first month (April) of the fortieth year from the escape out of bondage, they again came to Kadesh. They now hoped that their dreary sojournings were at an end, and that they should receive a speedy admittance to their desired abode. But the last of those who were "twenty years old and upward" when they commenced their wanderings, had not yet been consigned to their long home in the desert-sands. The decree of Jehovah must be literally fulfilled. The new generation was to be still longer tried, and the contaminations of Egypt must be further purged, by new conflicts and by renewed precepts for future guidance, before they could be meet partakers of the promised inheritance.

The direct route north, up the steep mountain sides, or through narrow defiles, surrounded by hostile tribes, was not thought expedient, encumbered as the Israelites were by their household goods, and accompanied by their women and children. Moses therefore, sent messengers to the king of Edom, informing him that his "brother Israel," after much suffering in Egypt and by the way, was on the borders of his land, and desired a passage through it, by the "king's highway," without turning to the right or to the left. To this reasonable request, couched in the most respectful language, the reply was returned: "Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword." As the Israelites were not permitted to make war upon Edom, their "brother," they turned southward and "journeyed from Kadesh

and came unto Mount Hor." Here, according to the command of God, the priestly garments were transferred from Aaron to Eleazer, and Aaron "died in the top of the mount" and was gathered to his people, and all the house of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days.¹ "From mount Hor they journeyed by the way of the Red Sea² to compass the land of Edom." During the passage around the southern extremity of Mt. Seir, the people were discouraged by the length of the way; and were punished for their discontent by the "fiery serpents."³ Passing northward until they had crossed the Arnon, the boundary between Moab and the Amorites, when Sihon king of the Amorites refused the request of Moses for a passage through his land, and gathered all his people together to withstand him, Israel smote the Amorites with the edge of the sword, and possessed the land from Arnon to the border of the children of Ammon.⁴ After this victory the Israelites pitched their tents in the valley before Nebo, and "dwelt in Heshbon and the villages thereof."

During the abode at Heshbon, the song of triumph, (ascribed to the poets, *הַשִּׁירִים*.) over the Amorites the conquerors of Moab, was probably composed and addressed to the people, in order to prevent such discouragement as had a little while before brought upon them the judgment of God:

Come to Heshbon,
Built up and fortified is the city of Sihon.

In order to enhance the value of the possession of this city and the country around in the estimation of Israel, the poet proceeds to describe its conquest by the Amorites:

For a fire issued from Heshbon,
A flame from the city of Sihon,
It devoured Ar-Moab,
The dwellers on the heights of Arnon.
Woe to thee, Moab,
Ruined art thou, people of Chemosh.⁵
He [Chemosh] hath made his sons fugitives,
And his daughters captives
Of Sihon, king of the Amorites.

¹ Num. 20: 22 sq. and 33: 37, 38.

² The Euxine Gulf or Eastern arm of the Red Sea. ³ Num. 21: 5, 6.

⁴ Num. 21: 21 sq.

⁵ National god of the Moabites and the Ammonites, and hence "people of Chemosh" is here put for the Moabites.

We, (the Israelites,) it is added, have utterly vanquished even these conquerors of Moab :

But we cast our arrows ;
Perished is Heshbon to Dibon ;
We laid waste to Nophah,
Which extendeth to Medeba.

Whilst the main body of the people remained at Heshbon, they sent out expeditions against Jaazer, and against Og king of Bashan, and smote his people and possessed his land. After the return of this expedition, (or perhaps before the return they broke up simultaneously from the two camps,) the children of Israel left their quarters in the plain before Nebo and "set forward," and as stated in Num. 22: 1, "pitched in the plains of Moab, beyond Jordan by Jericho." Thus, verse first of the twenty-second chapter of Numbers must not be connected directly with the last verses of the preceding chapter, but with the thirty-first verse : "Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites;" so that there is a correspondence between the account given here and in Num. 33: 48: "And they departed from the mountains of Abarim and pitched in the plains of Moab, by Jordan near Jericho."

The "plains of Moab," where the Israelites abode not only during the occurrences connected with the prophecies of Balaam, but also during the promulgation of the second law, as recorded in the book of Deuteronomy, until they passed the Jordan, were the narrow strip of land, scarcely two leagues in breadth, lying along the eastern bank of the Jordan, opposite to the plains of Jericho.¹ The Dead Sea was on the south of it, mount Pisgah on the south-east, and the mountains of Gilead on the east; and toward the north, losing its specific name, this plain continues, as the valley of the Jordan, even to the sea of Tiberias. This country, as has already been indicated, seems from Numbers 21: 26—30 to have been taken, but a short time previous to the arrival of the Israelites, by the Amorites from Moab, whose name it yet retained.

In reference to the geographical designation, מֵעַבְרַת יַרְדֵּן, ἐκ πέρασ τοῦ Ἰορδάνου, beyond Jordan, it is only necessary to say here, that it is very commonly used in the Pentateuch and in the book of Joshua for the part of Palestine east of the Jordan.² When

¹ Josh. 4: 13. 5: 10, etc.

² The same thing is true of עֲבָרָה and עֲבָרָה. They always mean beyond, *trans*, either with reference to the speaker or as an established geographical designation.

the phrase is used to designate the country lying on the west of that river, as in Num. 32: 19. Deut. 3: 25, it has a subjective reference to the writer or speaker who had lived on the east side of the Jordan, or conceived himself as being on that side.¹

The Moabites who, driven from the valley, now occupied the mountainous country, along which the Israelites passed before they entered the valley of the Jordan, were "sore afraid of the people, because they were many." They did not, however, venture to impede their course. But as the Israelites passed peaceably by their territory, purchasing food for sustenance with money,² they looked down from their mountain-dwellings upon the long train of the wanderers, and forward to the victorious Amorites, whose conquest of them was yet fresh in their minds, thinking no doubt that these multitudes were advancing to certain ruin, and that they, therefore, would not molest them. But when they saw the busy encampment so firmly established on their ancient territory, they were "distressed because of the children of Israel." That their fears were groundless appears from Deut. 2: 9, where it is said in reference to this time, that the Lord commanded them: "Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle, for I will not give thee their land," etc. Thus Calvin in commenting upon this passage pertinently says: "*Ultero data fuerat fides, promissa securitas et oblatum foedus,*" but, "*Reprobas semper agitari vanis terroribus.—Deus singulari privilegio Moabitas exemerat ab omni molestia; ipsi autem anxietatis materiam sibi fabricant.*"

In these circumstances the Moabites had recourse to the Midianites who dwelt upon the eastern border of their territory, and in language befitting the character of herdsmen, express their apprehensions from this strange people: "Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field." Why, if there had been danger of this, thou evil and suspicious nation, had they not already done it? Did they not, to avoid any injury to thee, go a circuitous way along thy borders? *Hæc continentia eos omni sollicitudine liberasset, nisi maligne sibi pravas suspiciones imaginati essent.*³ These Midianites were not a warlike people, but traders, ("merchantmen," Gen. 37: 28,) and the information which they had acquired in their journeys for traffic, suggested an expedient for their delive-

¹ See Hengstenberg, *Die Authentie des Pentateuches*, Bd. II. S. 313 sq.

² Deut. 3: 26, 29.

³ Calvin, *Comm. Numer.* 22. 1.

rance, which they thought safer than an immediate conflict, and which doubtless met the cordial approbation of Moab.

Early Life of Balaam.

It is not the design of the author of the book of Numbers, to give the history of Balaam any further than it aids in unfolding the dealings of God with the Israelites. We are therefore obliged to gather the little knowledge which we have of his early life, from scattered hints. The name Balaam (more correctly Bileam, בִּלְעָם), seems to be derived from בָּלַע, devouring, and עַם, people,¹ or from בָּלַע, with the unusual ending -ām,² meaning, destroyer of the people, or simply destroyer. Thus his name is descriptive of his profession, according to the account in the passage under consideration. Whether this name was given him at his birth, in anticipation of his course of life, and indicating the employment of his family; or according to an oriental custom, after his character was developed, it is not material to inquire.

Balaam was "the son of Beor." Both Simonis and Hengstenberg derive the name בְּעוֹר from בָּעַר, to feed upon, consume, and make it to nearly correspond in meaning with Balaam.³—By the authors of the Vulgate and old Syriac versions, בְּעוֹרָא was understood as a personal appellation of Balaam, and rendered "ariolum," and פְּתוֹרָא, but it cannot now be doubted, that it is the name of his dwelling-place, פְּתוֹר, Pethor, with the ת local,⁴ indicating direction (to). The derivation of פְּתוֹר from the verb פָּתַר (Chald. פָּתַר), to interpret a dream, is generally acknowledged. It is not improbable then that this place, in accordance with its name, was inhabited by a class of people devoted to the practice of magical arts. That in later times the Babylonian Magi were collected in separate towns like the priests' cities among the Israelites seems evident from Pliny⁵ and Strabo.⁶

Pethor, it is said in Numbers 22: 5, was "by the river of the land of the children of his people." In Deut. 23: 4, "Pethor of

¹ See Simonis, *Onomast.*, p. 459, and Hengstenberg, *Gesch. Bil.* S. 20.

² Fürst, *Heb. Lex.* בָּלְעָם. For a confutation of Gesenius' derivation of the word, see Hengstenberg, *Gesch. Bil.* S. 21.

³ See Simonis, *Onomast.*, p. 88. Hengstenberg, *Gesch. Bil.* S. 21. For different significations, see Gesenius' and Fürst's *Lexicons*.

⁴ See Nordheimer's *Heb. Gr.*, § § 642, 643.

⁵ *Hist. Nat.* 6, 25.

⁶ 16, 1.

Mesopotamia," is designated as Balaam's dwelling-place, which shows that the river *נַחַל פָּרָה*, *נַחַל* with the article, here as elsewhere in the Old Testament, must be the Euphrates. This too is in accordance with chapter 23: 7, where Balaam speaks of having been brought from "Aram" and from the "mountains of the east." Aram, *אַרָם*, is undoubtedly used instead of *אַרְצוֹת אֲרָם*,¹ Mesopotamia, and is parallel with "mountains of the east." So that it is evident, that Pethor was situated somewhere among the Highlands in Mesopotamia upon the Euphrates, eighteen or twenty days' journey² from the Plains of Moab.—"The land of the children of his people," is probably added merely to designate Balaam as a native Aramaean, which renders his blessing of the Israelites more unexpected and wonderful, than if he had dwelt farther west, or had been in any way connected with the Israelites.

We are not limited to the origin of the name of Balaam and his place of residence, for proofs that he was by profession a soothsayer. In Joshua 13: 22 he is called *בְּרִיָּה*, the soothsayer. The original meaning of the verb *בָּרָא* is probably found in the

Arabic *بَرَسَمَ*, to divide, to divide into parts, and hence like *בָּרָא*, to decide, decree, divine. The masculine participle, as well as the other forms of the verb, is always used in a bad sense to designate soothsayers and diviners. And the connection in which it is found in the passage in Joshua, also indicates the sense in which it is to be there understood. Besides in Num. 22: 7, it is said that the elders of Moab and Midian departed to go for Balaam, with the rewards of divination, *בְּרִיָּה*, in their hands. It seems evident, therefore, that Balaam was known as a soothsayer or diviner before the embassy was sent to him by Balak. Numbers 23: 3, 4, 15, 16, and 24: 1, might also be referred to here in proof of his recourse to divination, but a particular examination of these verses comes more properly in a subsequent part of our discussion.

This character of Balaam is also in accordance with what we are able to gather of the history of his nation and country. It is evident that idolatry was prevalent there.³ According to Joshua 24: 2, Terah the father of Abraham was a worshipper of idols, and Laban and his daughter Rachel, (Gen. 31: 30 sq.) were more intent upon the possession of the household gods, than upon

¹ 24: 10.

² See Tholuck, *Vermischte Schrift*. Th. I. S. 408.

³ Tholuck, *Vermischte Schriften* I. S. 408.

the preservation of family ties, or even the observance of the precepts of common morality.

It seems also evident, that Balaam was not, as has sometimes been contended, a mere heathen soothsayer. It is not, however, our object at present to show how far he acted the part of a true prophet, in his proclamations in reference to Israel. That topic will be alluded to in the sequel. Our present wish is to give as correct a view as we can, of his character and life previous to the time of his summons to curse the enemies of Moab and Midian.

The fact that his reputation had extended so far, indicates that he did not belong to the common herd of his profession. And the circumstance that he alone is desired, and so earnestly desired, would render it probable that he was thought to be peculiarly qualified to render the curse in this particular instance efficacious. "Behold a people has come from Egypt—come now I entreat you, curse for me this people—for I know that he whom thou blessest is blessed and whom thou cursest is cursed." The probability that Balaam was not a mere heathen soothsayer, but stood in a peculiar relation to the God of Israel, is strengthened by his conduct when the messengers arrived. After they had preferred the request of Balak, Balaam answered: "Lodge here this night and I will bring you word again as the Lord, (יהוה not אלהים,) shall speak to me." He would appear to indicate by this to the messengers, that he was accustomed to go to Jehovah, the God of Israel, in circumstances of difficulty, to seek counsel and direction. When "Balak sent again princes more and more honorable than they," offering abundant wealth and honor, and saying, "Let nothing I pray thee hinder thee from coming unto me," Balaam answered: "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, אלהים יהוה, to do less or more" (anything), therefore tarry here this night also that "I may know what the Lord, יהוה, will say unto me more." The addition, my God, אלהים, to Lord, יהוה, in this verse, seems to contrast Jehovah, as his God, with the gods of the Moabites. So in 23: 21, Jehovah, יהוה, is the God of Israel, "his God," אלהים, in distinction from the Elohim of the heathen tribes around.

Some other specifications in reference to the use of the name Jehovah, יהוה, may not be inapposite here as indications of the knowledge and claims of Balaam. In his conversations with the messengers and with Balak himself, he always uses יהוה, except

in chapter 22: 36, where it is not difficult to give a reason for his using the more general term.¹ In the prophecies, too, Elohim is not found, except in connection with Jehovah in 23: 21, although the poetical name, *El*, אֱל, (Elyon, יְרֵבֶהּ, and Shaddai, שַׁדַּי, occur once each,) frequently appears alone and in parallel phrases with Jehovah. This very general use of the peculiar name of Israel's God cannot be accidental, since the narrator uses Elohim in close connection with the words of Balaam. In chapter 22: 8, for example, Balaam says: "I will bring you word again as the Lord, יְרֵבֶהּ, shall speak unto me;" and in the following verse the historian says: "And God, אֱלֹהִים, came unto Balaam," and in verse 10, "And Balaam said unto God, אֱלֹהִים, Balak hath sent unto me," etc. In like manner in other places; as in 23: 4. Have we not here an indication of the author's feeling in reference to Balaam? Does he not indicate the hypocritical pretensions of him who had from mercenary motives enlisted under the banner of Israel's God, and would now, if permitted, curse those whom he ought to have been desirous to bless?²

The question naturally arises, whence did one who was not of the posterity of Abraham obtain knowledge of the true God? Tholuck³ supposes that it was the remnant of a primitive monotheism and pure worship handed down by tradition, but almost extinct in the time of Moses. In this particular he finds a parallel to Balaam in Melchizedek, "priest of the most high God," who, although not of the lineage of Abraham, was a true worshipper of the one God. But Melchizedek knew nothing of the name יְרֵבֶהּ, Jehovah, by which God revealed himself to his chosen people, and which was ever in the mouth of Moab's prophet.

The only supposition which fully accounts for the knowledge which Balaam possessed of Jehovah seems to be, that it was derived from the Israelites; of whom there would naturally be many floating reports, widely diffused among the heathen tribes, during the forty years of their wanderings.⁴ That there was communication between the region upon the Euphrates and Edom, is clear from Gen. 36: 37, where in an enumeration of "the kings that reigned in the land of Edom," it is said, that "Samlah died and Saul of Rehoboth by the river [the Euphrates],⁵ reigned in

¹ See Hengstenberg, *Authentic des Pentateuches*, Bd. I. S. 405.

² Hengstenberg, *Authentic*, Bd. I. S. 408, 9.

³ *Vermischte Schriften*, Th. I. S. 406.

⁴ Hengstenberg, *Gesch. Bil.* S. 12 sq.

⁵ See Rosenngller's *Com. upon the verse*, and *Bib. Alterthumsk.* Tom. I. P. ii. p. 270.

his stead." The supposition is also entirely in accordance with the character of Balaam, as exhibited in the account before us. With a mind awake to everything which concerned his profession, he would naturally be attracted by the reports of the deliverances effected by the new God of this people, who had come out of Egypt. He had perhaps heard of the passage of the Red Sea, of the waters of Meribah, of the miracle of the brazen serpent, and a new source of celebrity and of pecuniary gain, enticing to his besetting sins, was opened before him. He, it may be, adopted Jehovah as his God and named himself Jehovah's prophet. And it is evident, that Jehovah in the accomplishment of his own great purposes, vouchsafed unto him peculiar manifestations of the divine character. Another argument in favor of this theory, might be drawn from the knowledge of the promises contained in Genesis, on which parts of his prophecies are based, but a bare allusion is all that can be given at present.¹

In addition to the passages which speak of the terror spread abroad among the heathen tribes by the children of Israel, such as Ex. 16: 14 and Joshua 5: 1, two examples may be adduced in illustration of our position. In Ex. 18: 1 sq. it is said: "When Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel his people, and that the Lord, יהוה, had brought Israel out of Egypt;" he went out to meet Moses, and learning more particularly from him of the deliverances of Israel, "Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the Lord, יהוה, had done to Israel," and said, "Now I know that the Lord, יהוה, is greater than all gods, אֱלֹהִים.—And Jethro took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God." In Joshua, 2: 9 sq. Rahab says to the spies whom she had concealed: "I know that the Lord, יהוה, hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord, יהוה, dried up the waters of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites that were on the other side of Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the Lord, יהוה, your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath."

¹ Compare Num. 23: 10 with Gen. 13: 16. 23: 24, and 24: 9 with Gen. 49: 9, 24: 17 with Gen. 49: 10; and see also Gesch. Bil. S. 13.

The Embassies to Balaam.

The first ambassadors having arrived upon the banks of the Euphrates, presented themselves before the Mesopotamian soothsayer, and delivered their message, closing with the strong expression of their master's confidence: "I know that he whom thou blessest is blessed and he whom thou cursest is cursed." Although this declaration in connection with attending circumstances, is an indication of the peculiar qualifications of Balaam for the object required, yet it is true, that a belief, that certain persons, holding a peculiar relation to the gods, could surely call down their vengeance, by certain forms of incantation or formulas of cursing, was widely diffused throughout the heathen nations of antiquity. Traces of it are found scattered through the classical authors of Greece and Rome,¹ engraven on the monuments of Egypt, preserved among the traditions of the Arabs of the dark ages,² as well as recorded upon the pages of divine inspiration. Job, while speaking of the day of his birth, in his misery, says: "Let the cursers of the day curse it." Nor is this feeling confined to ancient nations. The Arabs of the present day still retain a similar superstition.³ Herder in speaking of ancient tribes as well as of the "rude nations of the present day," says: "they attached much importance to the blessings of their soothsayers. They believed that misfortune awaited them, if they had offended one of these, and even ascribed invincible power to the precise words and figures of the curse or of the blessing."⁴

Although Balaam seems to have been aware, that the people which he had been called to curse, were objects of the peculiar favor and care of Jehovah, yet he did not return the messengers an answer at once; for it may be supposed that "the rewards of divination" which were in their hands, and the honor which he hoped would attend him, had already begun to exert their influence. He requested them to lodge there that night, and he would bring them word in the morning, what Jehovah would have him do. "And," it is said, "God came unto Balaam."

¹ Plin. Hist. Nat. 38. 3 sq.

² De Sacy, in the Mem. de l' Acad. des Inscript., (quoted by Tholuck,) and Pococke Spec. Hist. Arab. Ed. Oxon. 1806, p. 313.

³ See Lane's Modern Egyptians and various other accounts of Travellers in the East.

⁴ Spirit of Heb. Poetry, Marsh's Tr. Vol. II. p. 171.

That there was a real revelation from God to Balaam at this time, the language and subsequent occurrences prove beyond a question. But whether it was made in a dream as to Abimelech, Gen. 20: 3, and to Laban, Gen. 31: 24, or by a vision, the other customary mode of his revelation in that early age,¹ cannot be determined. The night when the external senses, in consequence of darkness and silence, were in a measure closed, was an especially appropriate time for the latter, as well as the former mode of communication. Besides, the fact that the revelation was expected, and not sudden and unforeseen as in the other instances referred to, would not seem altogether in keeping with the supposition of a dream. It need not excite surprise that God made a special revelation of himself to one, who was not truly in heart his prophet. Did he not come to Abimelech king of Gerar in a dream by night? And did not "he that revealeth secrets" make known to king Nebuchadnezzar by a "dream and by the visions of his head upon his bed, what should come to pass in the latter days?"

The question: "What men are these with thee?" has been supposed to be, not merely a phrase thrown in to introduce what follows, but to contain a kind of reproof for the desire of Balaam to go with the messengers, which had caused their detention, in order that, if possible, he might obtain permission of Jehovah. Calvin says: *Interrogando, qui sint viri illi, perversum ejus affectum oblique castigat.*

The refusal to allow Balaam to accompany the messengers, in order to curse Israel, was explicit and decided: "Thou shalt not go with them, thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed." Balaam accordingly arose in the morning and sent away the messengers, saying; "Jehovah refuseth to give me leave to go with you." By this answer he should seem to indicate his own willingness, his desire even, to accompany them, but that he was under the necessity of being subject to the command of his God. Accordingly it has been justly said: *Specie quidem modestiæ simplices fallerent hæc verba, Non ibo quia Deus vetat; sed minime dubium est, quin, ut eum trahebat ambitio et avaritia ad gratificandum, significet se alioqui propensum fuisse ad suscipiendum iter, nisi divinitus esset prohibitus.*

The grounds on which his desire was based, his ambition and love of gain, seem even to have been manifest to the princes of Balak, and in accordance with this impression, on their return,

¹ See Numbers 12: 6.

"Balak sent yet again princes more and more honorable than they," who urged Balak's promise to promote him to very great honor and to do for him whatever he should desire. Balaam's answer, had it been sincere, was befitting a true prophet of Jehovah: "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more [anything]." Why then, vain man, dost thou detain the messengers to make another effort to gratify thy evil desires.¹ Dost thou not know that God is not man that he should lie or the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken and shall he not make it good? Think not to retain the favor of God and yet minister to thy own evil desires. Thou canst not serve God and mammon. But thy wish is granted and thy destruction sealed: "Go with them," but not to curse; although thou thinkest not so, thy golden dreams shall vanish. The word that Jehovah shall speak to thee thou shalt do, and thou shalt not "die the death of the righteous, and thy last end shall not be like his." Thou wouldst not relinquish the service of

Mammon, the least erected spirit that fell
From heaven;—[whose] looks and thoughts
There always downward bent, admiring more
The riches of heaven's pavement, trodden gold,
Than aught divine or holy else enjoyed
In vision beatific,

and thy doom shall be with him and his followers.

There seems, at first view, to be a discrepancy between the command in the twentieth verse: "If the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them," and that in the twelfth: "Thou shalt not go with them;" as also between the permission to go, in the former passage, and the declaration in the twenty-second verse: "And God's anger was kindled because he went." But the difficulty disappears on a closer examination. The stress of the prohibition is upon the object of the journey. "Thou shalt not go with them, thou shalt not curse the people; for they are blessed." The last part of the verse, thrown in without a connective, as a parallel phrase, indicates the objects of the refusal:

¹ Calvin says: *Praeclara vox, et index generosae fortitudinis, Etiam si Balaac mihi domum argento et auro plenam dederit, non transgrediar Dei mandatum. Sed cur non statim procul ablegat improbos licitatores, qui eum ad transgressionem sollicitant? Videmus ergo ut se potius venditet, quam Deo tribuat justam gloriam. Voluit enim hac obedientiae jactantia sibi acquirere sancti Prophetae titulum et honorem.*—*Com. in Num. 22: 15 sq.*

“Thou shalt not go to curse this people.” But as Balaam was not satisfied with the declaration of Jehovah, but still desired to curse those who had been pronounced blessed, with the intention of punishing his disobedience, He says, when Balaam presents himself again before him: Go—“*but* yet the word that I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do.” In the first instance, the going in the abstract is not prohibited, only going in order to curse; and in the last, going is commanded but with the restriction which precludes that, on account of which he was before commanded not to go. So that there is a perfect consistency between the passages. If this be the correct explanation of the preceding verses, then the phrase “that God’s anger was kindled because he went,”¹ is easily understood. The permission is given in anger, that Balaam did not rest satisfied with the explicit command first given, and is in no way a retraction of the obligation of that command; rather, when rightly understood, it is a substantiation of it, by compelling Balaam to go to bless those whom he would curse, and thus inflicting a penalty for its violation. In the expressive words of one from whom we have already several times quoted: *Ironice ergo permittit Deus quod interdixerat. Si quis absurdum existimet, Deum qui veritas est, simulate loqui: in promptu est solutio, Deum nihil finxisse, sed homini in sua contumacia obstinato laxasse habenas, acsi quis protervum filium et moribus perditis emancipet, quia se regi non patitur.*

The Occurrences of the Journey of Balaam.

“Balaam rose up in the morning and saddled his ass and went with the princes of Moab.” A common mode of travelling in the time of Moses was upon asses, so that there is nothing strange in the fact that one who expected to be loaded with riches and honor, set out on such an expedition in so unostentatious a manner. While on this journey, “the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him” (to oppose him). This representation of the appearance of the angel and the speaking of the

¹ In the Arabic translation of Saadi, the explanatory word, طَامَعًا, ex aviditate, is added to the declaration that, “he went;” and in the passage in 2 Peter 2: 15, it is said of those who in addition to other crimes, have exercised a heart with covetous practices, “they have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam, the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, ὃς μισθὸν ἁδικίας ἠγάπησεν.”

ass, has been the subject of various and contradictory opinions among biblical expositors. With some it has been considered so strange and unnatural, as to render the genuineness of the passage questionable. Others have supposed that it was a figment of Balaam to cover his retreat, should he not be successful in the object of his mission; or that his horse stumbled and fell, which he considered to be a bad omen, an indication that God was displeased with him for undertaking the journey, and that this circumstance occasioned the imaginary conversation with the animal on which he rode and with the angel of Jehovah. Still others, on the opposite extreme, suppose that a literal angel, with an actual sword, stood in the way and talked with him, and that the animal literally uttered the words of a man. But it is impossible, were it desirable, to enumerate all the explanations which have been made of these words, much more to discuss all the theories which have been devised for escaping the difficulties of the passage. It is only necessary for our present purpose, to endeavor to give the most reasonable explanation of these occurrences.

The ass turned aside out of the way, and Balaam smote her to turn her back. In a narrow pass between two vineyards Balaam's foot was pressed against the wall, and he again smote the faithful animal on which he rode. Subsequently when the divine messenger stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn to the right or left, the ass fell down and Balaam became angry, and struck her with a staff [divining rod], and the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she expostulated with her master for his cruel treatment. "What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?" "Hast thou not ever ridden upon me? and have I been wont to be restive and obstinate? How then didst not thou suppose there was good reason for my conduct?" Until this time, Balaam had seen nothing to prevent him from proceeding directly on his way; but Jehovah now opened his eyes, and he saw the angel, and bowed himself in adoration before him. The angel chided Balaam for his blindness, which was even greater than that of the stupid animal on which he rode, and for his consequent cruelty. "And Balaam said unto the angel of the Lord, I have sinned for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me."

It cannot be doubted by those who acknowledge the genuineness of this passage, that the several occurrences, of which we have enumerated only some of the most prominent, were reali-

ties to Balaam. The plain, straightforward narration demands this. The only question is, in what *manner* did they present themselves to him. Did God exert such an influence upon a beast, that she saw his messenger which men did not see, and distinctly uttered the words of a rational being? Or did he exert such an influence upon Balaam himself, that the expostulation of the messenger of God and his own faithful animal, sounded in his ears and sunk into his heart? The difference is really and strictly formal. There is not indeed such a gulf fixed between the two, as at first view there seems to an occidental reader to be. The one is as really, though not so palpably, accomplished through the direct agency of God, as the other. On the one supposition, God causes such exhibitions as are perceptible to the bodily organs; in the other, he causes the direct internal perception of the same thing. In the one case, the instrument is brought a little more directly into view than in the other. It can hardly be supposed that the ass was endowed with a reasoning mind, by which her words were prompted. Bochart well says: "Non tamen hic verus fuit asinae sermo. Sermo enim est imago mentis; et τὸν λόγον προφορικόν præcedit ὁ ἐνδιάθετος. At in asina nihil fuit tale: non capiebat animo voces, quas ore suo proferebat." We ought not to judge this case by our own feelings in reference to visions and dreams, or by the standard of the present age and this western world. We should remember that the Lord had said: "If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a *vision*, and will speak unto him in a dream." These were evidently the customary methods by which he revealed himself in the Mosaic age. "Why then," says Herder, "should not the Divine Being, who would now employ the voice of this crafty diviner, going not in fact to curse but to bless, proceed in the way which was the most customary, and most effectual upon the mind of the diviner. A fearful phenomenon was to meet him in the way. He actually heard and saw, in a waking vision what is here related, and how trifling for us to inquire, Whether the ass actually spoke? and How? Whether and in what way God gave her reason and human organs of speech, etc.? To the diviner the ass spake in a vision, that is, he heard a voice and saw an appearance."² It may not be amiss, however, since so much stress has been laid

¹ Hengstenberg, *Gesch. Bil.*, S. 49.

² *Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, Vol. II. pp. 173, 4. Marsh's Translation.

upon this point, to enquire which is the more probable manner of this divine communication.

In the first place, it seems quite certain that the angel was seen by Balaam in vision, and not with the physical sense. That he did not see it, at first, and not until Jehovah had opened (literally uncovered, פָּתַח,) his eyes, would indicate an internal communication. It was only when, in the language of the apostle, the veil that was upon his heart was taken away, that he saw. Similar language is used in 2 Kings 6: 17, "I pray thee open [the verb פָּתַח,] his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw, and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." Here there is an evident reference to seeing in vision. So in Ps. 119: 18, "Lord open mine eyes, פָּתַח לִי אֵינִי, that I may behold wonders in thy law," the prayer is for internal illumination. When פָּתַח is used in the Bible in connection with פָּתַח עֵינַי, it seems to denote that one sees something out of the ordinary course, or desires an especial illumination.

There is but one way in which the blindness can be explained, if there were a real physical appearance of an angel, and that is, that God closed Balaam's eyes so that he could not see; for an accidental inattention is impossible in the circumstances. But in that case there would have been no guilt in not seeing, whereas it is plainly implied in the thirty-fourth verse, that Balaam felt condemned for his blindness: "I have sinned, for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me." The visions of future wealth and honor that would accrue from this expedition, were too vivid before the eyes of the prophet for him to perceive what was the will of the Lord. This was his guilt.

Now if the angel was perceived by the internal sense, it is a strong argument in favor of explaining the speaking of the ass in the same way. For the different parts of the narration of the supernatural phenomena, are so blended together and mutually dependent, that the manner of their occurrence cannot be supposed to be so widely separated, without doing violence to the connected relation. But there are other arguments in favor of this manner of understanding the communication of God to Balaam.

1. We have no evidence that Balaam ever received any other communication from Jehovah, except through visions. When the messengers arrived, in both instances, he waited until the

night, the proper season¹ for visions and dreams. There is no evidence of a personal appearance of God, when Balaam retired before his first and second prophecy; and in the third and fourth, he designates himself as one in an unnatural, *prophetic* state, who saw the vision of the Almighty.

2. No astonishment is produced in Balaam by the speaking of the ass. He answers the question, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? directly, and with as much coolness as if it were a common occurrence for him to be thus addressed; and even with a severe threat: "Because thou hast mocked me, I would there were a sword in mine hand for now would I kill thee." Is not this reply most unnatural on the supposition of an external communication? Would not his answer in that case have indicated fear, reverence, dread, as to a messenger of Jehovah? Augustine says: "*Nihil hic sane mirabilius videtur, quam quod loquente asina territus non est, sed insuper ei velut talibus monstris assuetus, ira perseverante respondit.*"² Wonderful indeed is it, that such an unheard of thing made no impression upon him. A stupid learner, "in schola asinae," he must surely have been. The contents of the speech only seemed to have any significancy with him; the fact of so unnatural and strange an occurrence is not noticed.

3. In Numbers 22: 22, it is said, that when the angel first appeared, Balaam "was riding, and his two servants were with him." And the Moabitish messengers were also yet in company with him according to the thirty-fifth verse: The "angel of the Lord said unto Balaam, Go with the men.—So Balaam went with the princes of Balak." This, be it remembered, was said after the occurrence of the supernatural phenomena, so that they could not, as has sometimes been supposed, have gone on before, to prepare for the reception of Balaam. It is not a little strange, if there was an external communication to Balaam, that no evidence appears that the messengers and servants were aware of it. It may be that the messengers were separated for a time from him, but his servants were with him (verse 22). It is possible also that God shut up the sense of sight and hearing in all these men. But it is far more probable that the communication was not to the external senses of Balaam.

Objections have been urged against this manner of explaining

¹ See, for example, Zechariah 1: 8 sq. "I saw by night," etc.

² Quest. 48 in Num., Hengstenberg, S. 62.

the wonderful phenomena which occurred to Balaam on his way to the Plains of Moab:

1. As the relation occurs in an historical book, there is no ground for considering it as occurring in vision, unless it be expressly stated. To this objection it may be replied, that frequent cases do occur of a like nature in the Old Testament. The authors are so well aware that the customary method by which God reveals himself, is in visions and dreams, and that such exhibitions of himself have all the characteristics of reality, that they do not seem to think it necessary to apprise the reader of the precise method of a given communication. Thus, we are not informed of the particular way in which the command is given to Abraham to offer up his son Isaac, but we infer from the phrase in Gen. 22: 3, "And Abraham rose up early in the morning," that it was by a nightly vision or dream. So in Gen. 21: 12 sq. "God said unto Abraham let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bond woman."—"And Abraham rose up early in the morning"—"and sent her away with the child." In Gen. 15: 1, it is said that "the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision," and the verses that follow seem to make a part of that vision, and yet in the fifth verse, God is represented as taking him forth and saying to him: "Look now towards heaven and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them." But in the twelfth verse the sun is represented as going down, so that this must have been a *vision* which, contrary to the usual method, occurred in the middle of the day.¹

Similar passages occur also in the New Testament. The voice which came from heaven, in answer to the prayer of Christ, in John 12: 28, 29, seems to have been but partially cognizable by the outward senses; for the people who stood by "said that it thundered, others said, an angel spake to him." The great mass recognized merely a murmuring, only those who were divinely illuminated understood the words. A parallel case is found in Acts 9: 4 sq. where only Paul understood the words spoken, those who were with him merely saw the light and heard a voice. A good illustration of the narrow separation between the external and internal in supernatural communications, is found in 2 Cor. 12: 2—4, where the apostle Paul knew not whether in his rapture to heaven, he was in the body or out of the body, *Εἴτε ἐν σώματι, οὐκ οἶδα· εἴτε ἔκτος τοῦ σώματος, οὐκ οἶδα.*

¹ Compare also Gen. 28: 12 sq. 32: 2. 1 Sam. 3: 1: sq., et cet; and see Hengstenberg, *Gesch. Bil. S.* 51, 2.

2. It is also objected, that we cannot draw the line of demarcation between that which was seen in vision, and that which actually occurred before the eyes of all. But as Hengstenberg well says, this appears not to be difficult. So long as the narrative is in the province of ordinary external occurrence, we may suppose that it commemorates external events. There can be no doubt, that Balaam saddled his ass, and taking his two servants with him accompanied the princes of Balak; that he beat, three several times, the animal which had carried him out of the way, crushed his foot against the wall, and fallen down under him. But in reference to those events which may be considered as falling at least as naturally within the province of the internal as the external sense, such as the appearance of the angel with the drawn sword, we must judge by the probabilities in the case, and they, it seems to us, favor the supposition of a subjective communication. Let it not be said that this explanation limits the power of the Almighty. We neither deny nor disbelieve, that God might have actually caused the beast, which furnishes the metaphor for expressing the most inveterate stolidity, to have uttered the words of a rational man, or that he might have placed an angel, visible to mortal eyes, with the veritable appearance of a sword in his hand in the way of Balaam; all that we intend to say is, that the other explanation seems to us more natural and answers all the demands of the case.

3. It is said that "God opened the mouth of the ass," and in 2 Pet. 2: 16, it is asserted that Balaam "was rebuked for his iniquity; the dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, forbad the madness of the prophet." It cannot be denied that, at first view and by themselves, these passages seem to indicate that there was an external communication. But they do not necessarily favor this opinion. They are easily explained upon the supposition that there was a direct communication to Balaam; and as that seems to be the most natural explanation of the whole account, we need not hesitate to give them that interpretation. By the first phrase, then, nothing more seems to be intended than to show the agency of God in the production of these wonderful phenomena, and to give a just representation of them as they passed before the mind of the seer. In the second passage, the apostle speaks first of the rebuke of Balaam and then gives the manner in which it was effected. Now the rebuke is the same, whether God put the sound of words into the mouth of the dumb beast, or into the ears of Balaam, as coming from the beast; and we could

not expect the apostle in the circumstances, to give a detailed account of the manner in which it was effected. He merely wishes to indicate the severity of the rebuke, which consisted in showing that the beast saw what Balaam, although a professed seer, did not behold. And this is accomplished whether the speaking is considered as an objective or subjective occurrence.¹

“And Balaam said unto the angel of the Lord, I have sinned;—now therefore if it displeaseth thee, I will get me back again;” but the angel replied: “Go with the men; but only the word that I shall speak unto thee that thou shalt speak. So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.” From these words it seems that it was not the object of these wonderful phenomena to prevent the journey of Balaam, but only to impress upon his mind that he was to speak only that which should be given him to declare by Jehovah. It seems probable that, notwithstanding the command that was made to him before leaving Mesopotamia, he was hastening on with hope of obtaining the rewards promised him. His subsequent history would perhaps warrant us in believing that unless some such warning had been given him, he would have thrown off all remaining restraint, and cursed the chosen people of the God whose prophet he professed to be. His tardiness in receiving the warning is also another indication how much his heart was set on his own emolument, and how little on doing the will of his master. It is true his curse would not have directly availed anything; but so strong was the belief in the efficacy of such incantations, that it might have discouraged the Israelites and given hope to their enemies. And this would have had the more influence, since he professed to be the servant of Israel's God, and had so vehemently declared, that he could do nothing which Jehovah did not approve. Besides, as it has been said: *Voluit [Deus] per os Balaam probare quam efficax et immutabile esset suum consilium de adoptione populi, quo veritas ejus et constantia magis illustraretur.*—Calvin in Num. 22: 35.

We are not told in what part of the journey the warning was given; but it is probable, that it was not far from the borders of Moab, so that the vision might be fresh in the remembrance of Balaam when he should stand before the king, and receive his proffers of honor and wealth. In the very next verse after it is

¹ For a further discussion of this whole subject of the supernatural communication of God to Balaam, see Hengstenberg, *Gesch. Bil.* S. 48—65, and Tholuck, *Vermischte Schriften* S. 410, 411, note.

said that "Balaam went with the princes of Balak," we are told that "Balak when he heard that Balaam was come, went out to meet him unto a city of Moab, which is in the border of Arnon, which is in the utmost coast." It has been before stated that the Amorites had taken possession of the country of the Moabites unto the Arnon;¹ so that a city which had been in the interior of their dominions was now a border city. The Arnon was the dividing line between Moab on the north and the Amorites, and the city here designated was Ar, which is mentioned in Numbers 21: 15, 28, and which, in later times, was called Areopolis.² This special honor paid to Balaam by the king, of going out in person to the borders of his country, to welcome him, was undoubtedly shown with a view to conciliate his favor, so as to render him more earnest in cursing this wandering tribe from Egypt. His first salutation to the seer was equally well devised, to persuade him of the royal power and munificence: Did I not send to thee, to call thee? Why did you not come to me? Am I not indeed able to honor you? If Balaam had not received the signal warning by the way, we can hardly suppose that he would have maintained his integrity, when tempted by such alluring prospects. But the angel with the drawn sword was before his eyes, and the miraculous words were sounding in his ears, and he dared not do otherwise than he was commanded. He accordingly replied: "Behold I have come to thee; now can I say anything? The word that God puts into my mouth that will I speak."

From Ar they passed on in company to Kirjath-huzoth, (Strassburg, the city of streets,) where Balak offered oxen and sheep as a thank offering for Balaam's safe arrival, or more probably as a propitiatory sacrifice to Balaam's God, for the favorable issue of the business on which they were the next day to enter. He also sent of the offerings to Balaam and the princes that were with him, as a further pledge of the honor which he had promised to bestow upon him. Calvin says: *Huc tendunt omnia, blanditiis illectum fuisse Balaam, ut eum pnderet regi tam magnifico, et à quo non modo amice, sed liberaliter tractatus erat, quisquam negare.*

The first Prophecy.

Balak, impatient to know the event of his plan for defeating the Israelites, took Balaam early the next morning after his arri-

¹ See 21: 26.

² Gesenius Thesaurus and Hengstenberg, *Gesch. Bil.* 8. 66, 234 sq.

val, and went upon the Bamoth-Baal (heights of Baal), where he could see "the extremities," the whole of the people. This place is probably identical with the Bamoth in Chap. 21: 20, and was a spur of the Pisgah mountains, extending into the valley of the field of Moab. There seems to have been two reasons for choosing a high place for the scene of this solemn execration of Israel. First, the curse, it was thought, would be more effectual if uttered with the people in full view; and, secondly, mountains and elevated regions generally were considered, by the ancients, as sacred; since they are nearer to the Heaven, where is the source of all holiness. God has been pleased to make upon mountains some of the most striking exhibitions of himself. On Sinai Jehovah spoke with Moses, and the people saw the thunders and the lightnings and the noise of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, and stood afar off from fear; on Horeb he also passed before the awe stricken prophet in the storm, the earthquake, the flame and "in the still small voice;" on Tabor was the transfiguration of our Saviour, and the appearance of Moses and Elias talking with him. Aaron was called home from the top of mount Hor and Moses after he had caught a glimpse of the promised Land from Nebo, died, and God buried him there in a valley, and no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day. The altars of the heathen gods were often placed upon the mountain-tops, and the Israelites are chided by the prophets for nothing more than for their desire to worship on high places. The height upon which Balaam was taken, probably received its name, from its consecration to Baal, but it does not appear to have been chosen, at this time, particularly on that account, but because of its favorable position.

According to Balaam's direction, seven¹ altars were erected and seven oxen and seven rams were sacrificed to Jehovah. The choice of the same number, *seven*, for the altars and the offerings before each of the prophecies of Balaam, seems to indicate some imagined appropriateness in this number, to be employed in the worship of Jehovah; and this is abundantly confirmed by its use in other passages of the Bible. The custom of offering sacrifices before undertaking any important work, was prevalent throughout the nations of antiquity.² Divination especially was accompanied by sacrifices. Diodorus of Sicily says, that the

¹ For the origin and use of seven as a sacred number, see Bähr's *Symbol. I.* 145 sq., and Hengstenberg, *Gesch. Bil. S.* 70 sq.

² See Naegelsbach, *Die Homerische Theol. S.* 181 sq.

Chaldeans, to whom Balaam holds a close relation, were accustomed to attempt to avert ill and procure favor, by their offerings and enchantments.¹

After he had sacrificed, Balaam left Balak by the burnt offerings, and went upon a hill, *עֲרֵב*, which literally means a bare place, from *עָרַב*, to scratch, scrape, to make bald, like the Syriac *ܥܪܒܐ*. See Job 33: 21 and Isa. 13: 2. Here a higher spot of ground than that in which they were, is designated, where the view was not obstructed by trees. This is in accordance with Hartung's description of the position chosen by the Romans for their auspices: "For this purpose a high place, where the view is unobstructed was selected. In the town it was commonly the citadel;—in the country, a projecting, barren, unfrequented mountain-summit."²

It should be noticed here, how careful Balaam is, to impress it upon Balak, that he can say nothing but what is given him to say by Jehovah, and also how dependent he is upon the direct influence of Jehovah: "Peradventure Jehovah will come to meet me, and whatsoever he showeth me, I will tell thee." The prophet undoubtedly now felt that his message must be an unwelcome one, and he desired to throw off the responsibility, and to indicate to the king his own willingness to curse Israel, if he were not constrained by a higher power. We are told that "God met Balaam," and put a word into his mouth and commanded him to return and speak it. The king and the princes faithfully watched their smoking altars, casting probably now and then an anxious look upon the glistening tents of their enemies, spread out in the plain below, with the hope, that ere long mildew and wasting would settle upon them, and that the angel of death would hover over them with pestilence and death on his wings. As they saw the seer slowly returning, it is easy to imagine that the royal chaplet hung over a brow almost distorted with the mingled emotions of fear and hope. But the hope to hear the curse streaming from the enchanter's lips, was speedily dissipated by the following unequivocal communication.

7. And Balaam uttered his prophecy, and said :

From Aram Balak hath brought me,

The king of Moab, from the mountains of the East :

¹ 2. 29, quoted by Hengstenberg, S. 70, where see other proofs of the prevalence of this custom.

² Hartung's Relig. der Römer S. 118.

'Come, curse for me Jacob,
Come, denounce Israel.'

8. How shall I curse whom God curses not?
How shall I denounce whom Jehovah does not denounce?
9. For from the rocky heights I see him,
And from the hills I behold him;
Lo, a people that dwelleth alone,
And among the nations is not reckoned.
10. Who can compute the dust of Jacob,
Who, the number of the fourth of Israel?
Let me die the death of the righteous,
And let my last end be like his.

Verse 7. *His prophecy*, כִּשְׁפָה. The verb כִּשַׁף signifies originally, to liken, to compare (one thing with another); so the Arabic مَثَل, assimilavit, aequiparavit (alterum alteri), and the Syriac مَثَل. The signification, to rule, to have dominion, common in Hebrew, is not found in any of the cognate dialects except the Phœnician. The noun כִּשְׁפָה, signifies a similitude, a comparison. Its use in the Hebrew Bible corresponds substantially to this original meaning of the word. It is found to designate passages where there is a similarity of language and sentiment in parallel phrases, one of the most distinguishing characteristics of Hebrew poetry. Hence it is frequently used to designate a sententious saying, an apothegm, a proverb, as in the Proverbs of Solomon, 1: 2, 3, 6, 7, et cet., Job 13: 12; also a song, a poem as in Job 27: 1. 29: 1. Ps. 49: 5. 78: 2; so in Arabic مَثَل, parabola, sententia, Syriac مَثَل. Chald. מִתְּלָא. It is worthy of notice that it is never used for prophecy as such, but only to designate the poetic language used in prophetic passages. Hengstenberg makes the use of this word in reference to the prophecies of Balaam an indication of the difference between them and real prophecy. See Gesch. Bil. S. 78. The word *prophecy*, by which it has been translated must, then, necessarily be understood in a very general sense, especially in reference to those parts of the messages of Balaam in which there is no prediction, as in this first communication.

From Aram, מִן־אֲרָם, Sept. *in Mesopotamiis*, from Mesopotamia. אֲרָם is from the obsolete root אָרַם, to be high, elevated; hence it designates the mountainous region, or the highlands, as opposed

to the קִנְנָן, the low country. See Ges. Thesaurus. When used alone it generally denotes Western Syria, and when Mesopotamia is designated נְהַרֵּימָה (of the two rivers) is added. But the qualifying word is omitted here. That it must however mean Mesopotamia is clear from the parallel passage, Deut. 23: 5, where the residence of Balaam is declared to be Pethor of Mesopotamia אֶרֶץ נְהַרֵּימָה; and from Num. Chap. 22: 5, "He sent messengers unto Balaam son of Beor, to Pethor which is by the river" (נְהַר), the Euphrates. See p. 253, and Hengstenberg's Gesch. Bib. S. 81.—*Hath brought me*, יִבְחֵנִי, Hiph. future tense from בָּחַח with the Suffix נִי, me. In animated narration where a past occurrence is spoken of as passing before the mind, the future tense may be used in Hebrew. Literally, *brings* me, the historic present of occidental languages. See Stuart's Heb. Gram, § 504 b. 2. and Nordheimer, § 967. 2. c.

The king of Moab, מֶלֶךְ-מֹאָב, corresponds to Balak in the first member of the parallelism. It is not, therefore, in apposition with that word, as it has often been translated, but there is an ellipsis of יִבְחֵנִי, *hath brought me*, after it. The word corresponding with the last word of the first member of the parallelism, stands first in the second member; so in verse 17: Rise up Balak and *hear, listen* to me, son of Zippor; although in other cases throughout these prophecies of Balaam, the position of the words corresponds in the two members.

The mountains of the East, בְּהַרֵּי-קֶדֶם, Sept. ἐξ ὀρέων ἀπ' ἀνατολῶν, i. e. from the mountainous parts of Mesopotamia upon the river Euphrates, north-east from the plains of Moab. But the general designation, east, is in accordance with the common usage of the Hebrew writers, who were accustomed to specify only four principal points of the compass. The appellation "mountains of the east," for his native country, was probably suggested to Balaam by the mountainous region of the Moabites in which he now was; see verse 9. In Deut. 33: 15 and Habakkuk 3: 6, בְּהַרֵּי-קֶדֶם may be rendered, the ancient mountains; but the parallel phrase, בְּדָ-אֶרֶץ precludes that interpretation here.

Come, לָבוֹא, Imper. from יָבֹא or יִבְאֵה with הוּא paragogic. The paragogic letter seems to be used here to soften the command, and make it an earnest request, as, *come, I pray you*. So in אָרְחוּ and זָבְחוּ in this same verse; and in 22: 6, where, as frequently elsewhere, it is followed by the precativè particle מִן.—See Nordheimer's Heb. Grammar, § 207. 1. The language in the remainder of this verse corresponds to chap. 22: 6, with the exception of its

poetical form.—*Curse for me*, אָרַרְתִּי לִי, Imp. from אָרַר with הַ parag. For the form here, see Nordheimer's Grammar as just quoted above. The primitive meaning of this word is plain from the Arabic أبغض, to abhor, detest. In Gen. 3: 14, the part. אָרַרְתִּי is used in nearly the same sense, i. e. avoided with abhorrence art thou, etc. Here it is used with a more intensive signification like the Greek *ἀράομαι*, to curse. So in Judges 5: 23, and in Job 3: 8. In this last passage as well as in the one under consideration, it is used in reference to that class of men so common in the East, who were supposed to have the power of bringing misfortune or evil upon those persons or things, in reference to which imprecations were made. In Malachi 2: 2, the same word is used in reference to the curse which Jehovah inflicts upon the disobedient priests.—לִי, *for me*, Dat. Commodi, i. e. in my behalf, so that I may prevail over him and drive him out of the land, 22: 6.—*Jacob*, יִשְׂרָאֵל and יַעֲקֹב are here used as designations for the Israelites without any distinction in meaning, as in the 10, 21, 23 verses, also in 24: 5, 17, and often elsewhere. The name Israel, first given to Jacob to indicate his power with God, (Gen. 32: 28,) literally, when used for his descendants, designates them in their higher existence, in their relation to God.—*Denounce*, יִזְכֹּרְתִּי Imper. with הַ parag. as above, from יָזַח. For the Euphonic change in the vowels, see Ges. Lehrgebäude, †47. 5. It is a poetic word meaning to be angry, and hence as here to speak in anger, to curse, *denounce*. The original signification of the word, as given by Gesen., Fürst and others, to foam at the mouth, does not seem to be well substantiated by the reference to V. cong. of زَعَمَ in Arabic. In Hebrew, at least, it is used only in the tropical significations as given above. In the LXX. יִזְכֹּרְתִּי is translated by *ἐπικατάρασαι*, to imprecate curses upon; and in the Peschito version, by أفحم, the Aphel form of أفحم, which means, to destroy, 'perde mihi Israellem.'

Verse 8. *How*, מִן, literally, *what*; but here it is used simply as an interrogative adverb, how, in what way. So in Gen. 44: 16, "How shall we clear ourselves," etc., and also in 1 Sam. 10: 27. See Noldius, Concord. Partic. Ebraeo-Chald. word מִן.—*Shall I curse*, אָרַב, fut. Kal. from אָרַב, (according to Gesenius from אָרַב). אָרַב is from the same verb with the masculine suffix הַ- instead of י-, the common form. For the interchange of quiescent letters when preceded by the same vowel, see Stuart's Heb. Gr. †122.

This word signifies, to hollow out; compare **قَب** in Arabic; and then, metaphorically, to curse, to pierce with words like **נָקַב**.—*Denounce*, **נָדַב** and **נָדַב**; see under verse 7. This word, being intransitive, is not here followed by an object, for although the construction is allowable and occurs in the preceding verse, yet a repetition of it would not be in accordance with good usage in Hebrew.—*God*, **אֱל**, from the verb **אָלַל**, to be strong, powerful, signifies the Powerful one, and hence, God as preëminent in power. It is, however, never used distinctively for the Supreme God in prose, without either an attributive, as **אֱלֹהֵינוּ** or **אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה**, or another name of God, as in Gen. 33: 20, **אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל**; but it is very often used in poetry as the name of God, both with and without the article and with the suffix of the first pers. sing., **אֱלִי**. For the origin of the name Jehovah, **יְהוָה**, see Gesenius' Thesaurus, and an Article translated from Tholuck, in *Bib. Repos.* Vol. IV. p. 89 sq., and for its use by Balaam, see p. 355 above. This whole verse would be literally translated:

How shall I curse, God curses him; not;
How shall I denounce, Jehovah denounces not.

But the suffix **־הִי** him, according to a common idiom of the Hebrew, may be supposed to have the relative pronoun, **אֲשֶׁר** understood before it, and hence be rendered by *whom* in English. See Stuart's *Heb. Gram.* † 478 and 553 *d*; Nordheimer, † 408. 1. 6, and † 909.

This verse seems to have reference to Chap. 22: 6: "for I know that he whom thou blessest is blessed," etc. Balaam intends in this particular case to renounce his ability to curse contrary to the will of God. This people are his especial care, and who will venture to curse those whom he blesses. The point at issue between Balaam and Balak, seems not to be that of cursing contrary to the will of God. Balak does not desire that; but supposes that Balaam has influence to bring the will of God into harmony with his own will. This power Balaam renounces, at least in reference to the people now before him. The ground of Balaam's certainty that God will bless Israel, seems to be twofold. The promise to Abraham, Gen. 13: 16 and 22: 17 sq. which will subsequently be brought more distinctly into view, and a direct communication from God: "Jehovah put a word into Balaam's mouth," by which his previous knowledge was confirmed, and which compelled him to make the affirmation, God curses not.

Verse 9. *For*, **וְ** introduces the proof, contained in this and the

first half of the 10th verse, of the preceding assertion, that Jehovah is not angry with and does not curse Israel.—From the rocky heights, מִרְאשׁ צְרִיחַ, (literally, from the top of the rocks,) and from the hills, מִתְּבִיחוֹת, are different designations of the high places of Baal, בְּמִזְבֵּחַ בַּעַל, on which Balaam stood. See p. 368.—I see him, אֶרְאֶהוּ, first pers. sing. fut. from the verb רָאָה = Greek ὁράω to see, and הוּא־יִּי sing. suffix pronoun referring to the collective noun כָּל in the 3 *stichoi*. The Hebrew writer, when carried along by the excitement of his theme, frequently employed a personal pronoun without any immediate antecedent; and the noun to which the pronoun refers is sometimes introduced in a subsequent clause. Nordheimer, † 867, 1.

I survey him, אֶשְׁבֹּרֶה from שָׁבַר, meaning primarily, to go around or about, and secondarily, to look around. Here it seems to designate the act of running the eye over any space or body of men to distinguish peculiarities, numbers, etc. The future is used in both these *stichoi* to indicate an action going on in the time of narration. See Nordheimer, † 964. 2. b.

Lo, הֵן, a demonstrative adverb or interjection, like the Arab. **أَنَّ**, Latin, en. Much less frequently used than the form הֵנָּה with **ח** paragogic.—לָבֶד is used in contrast with גִּזְרֵם in the next *stichoi*, which in the plural is generally used for other nations than Israel, *foreign nations*. Dwelleth by itself, לְבַדָּר יִשְׁבֵּן. The verb שָׁבַן means, to let one's self down, to settle down, and hence like the Arabic **سَكَنَ**, to abide, to dwell, followed by a preposition with the noun designating the place in Gen. 26: 2, et saepe. Here it is used without a specification of the place, but with a designation of the manner, *alone*.—לְבַדָּר is compounded of a preposition ל, in respect to, and בָּדָד, separation, hence, *apart, alone*. In Deut. 33: 28: Israel dwelleth in safety, alone, the fountains of Jacob, etc., where בָּדָד corresponds to בְּטָחָה, *safely, securely*, in the first *stichos*; the ground of the security appears in v. 27: "He shall thrust out the enemy from before thee, and shall say, Destroy them." Jer. 44: 31 is a good commentary upon this passage: "Arise get you up into the nation that is at ease, that dwelleth without care, saith the Lord, which have neither gates nor bars, which dwell *alone*." See also Judges 18: 7. Israel dwelleth apart from other nations, does not mingle with them and is secure against all their assaults. This is spoken generally of Israel, as the true Israel of God. When they revolted from him and transgressed, their security was gone; they no longer, in the full sense of this passage, dwelt,

לְבָדֵי, *alone*. Dicit autem habitatarum esse solum, ut alienis auxiliis minime indigeat. לְבָדֵי enim tantundem valet ac solitarie, vel seorsum. Dicitur ergo populus ita habitaturus esse, ut sua sorte contentus sit, non desiderat alienas opes, neque aversat aliena auxilia.—Calvin, Com. in Num. 28: 9 sq.—*It is not reckoned*, חָשַׁב, the Hithpael fut. from חָשַׁב, lit. he reckons not himself. This clause is parallel with the last in meaning. See Hengstenberg's remarks upon this verse, Gesch. Bil. S. 84 sq.

We are not to suppose that a mere physical view of the camp of Israel is all that is meant by *seeing* and *beholding* in this verse. God made this view a medium of unfolding to Balaam more fully the peculiar relation of this people to himself, of giving him, in connection with his knowledge of the promise to the Patriarch Abraham, a deeper insight into the future destinies of this people which he had been called to curse.

Verse 10. *Who can compute the dust of Jacob*, חָשַׁב אֶת עֲפָר יַעֲקֹב. There is an evident, and apparently an intentional allusion here to Gen. 13: 16, "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth, so that if a man can number the dust of the earth then shall thy seed also be numbered." So Balaam: "The posterity of Jacob is as innumerable as the dust of the earth, and whenever that can be numbered they may be." This seems to be strong language to use in reference to a people no more numerous than the Israelites at this time, but it is justified by the allusion to the promise, which was already then taking effect, and would go on to its fulfilment. The idiom by which a thing now in the process of accomplishment is spoken of as if already completed, is very common in poetic and especially in the prophetic style of the Hebrews, and for this purpose the *praeter tense* is often employed, thus denoting the absolute certainty of the occurrence of the thing stated. See Nordh. Heb. Gr. †966. 1. a. It should not be forgotten, too, that the reason given for the terror of the Moabites is that the "people are many," Num. 22: 3; and that in Deut. 10: 22 it is said: "The Lord thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude." Calvin says in reference to this declaration of the number of Israel: Tenendum est, quamvis populi scelere ad exiguam numerum redacta fuerit illa multitudo, non tamen frustra hoc fuisse pronuntiatum; quia paucitas illa tandem exundavit, ut totum mundum expleret.

And the number, וְהִסְתַּחֲסַת. The noun חִסְתָּהּ is strictly an accusative used adverbially (see Stuart's Heb. Gr. †428. (2), and Gesenius,

† 116) having *מִן* implied before it: Who shall compute by number, etc., but the meaning is the same and more clear to render it in English as in the construct state before *מִן* and governed by *מִן* implied. Rosenmüller considers *מִן* as a noun used for the verb in the infinitive and governing *מִן* in the accusative.—*The fourth of Israel*, *מִן*. There is without doubt a reference here to the division of the camp of Israel in Num. ii. and x. where the different tribes are arranged for marching, on the east, south, west and north sides of the tabernacle.

Let me die, *מִן*, literally, let my soul die, etc. According to a very common idiom in Hebrew, the personal pronoun is here supplied by the most distinguished and essential part of the man. *מִן* is often so used; also *לֵב*, *קַיִם* and some other nouns.

The death of the righteous, *מִן*. *יֵשָׁרִים* is from *יָשָׁר*, straight, right. The omission of the article may be accounted for, from the poetic style which often omits it where it would be used in prose. But an additional reason may be, that it is used here for the Israelites, and substantially as a proper name, the Jesharim, like *יֵשָׁרִים*, *Jeshurun* in Deut. 32: 15. 33: 5, 26. The Israelites are spoken of as emphatically the Jesharim. See Hengst. Gesch. Bil. S. 97. If it be asked how this term, *right* or *righteous*, can be properly applied to the Israelites, who so often erred from the right way of the Lord, and rebelled against him; it may be replied that there were always some among them, an *ἐκλογή*, to whom this term was appropriate, and who were ready to lift up their voice against the prevailing defection. And repentance and return always succeeded revolt, showing that there was among them a foundation for rectitude, which did not exist among heathen nations. And besides, a reason furnished by Calvin in his commentary on this verse, may have weight, though not to the exclusion of the one before given: *Recti vocantur Israelitae sicut aliis locis, non propria rectitudine, sed Dei beneplacito, qui eos dignatus fuerat segregari ab immundis gentibus.* The propriety of this name, then, depends both upon objective and subjective reasons, the promises of God and real character.

And let my last end be like his, *מִן*, literally, like him, i. e. like his end. *מִן* means the end, the extreme part of anything, as of the sea in Ps. 139: 9; but it is oftenest used of time, to designate the end, event, the last days, *מִן*, Isa. 2: 2; and it is evident from the parallel phrase

that it here signifies, the end of life, death. But what was the definite idea in Balaam's mind? Did he connect with a happy death the idea of immortal blessedness? Many have so interpreted this passage, but, as it seems to us, without good reason. There appears to be no sufficient evidence, that Balaam's thoughts, when he gave utterance to his desire for the death of the righteous, *וַיִּשְׁפָּט*, extended beyond the grave. The whole prophecy has reference to prosperity in this life. The effect to be produced by his curse is a temporal effect. The Israelites had become so numerous and powerful that their enemies could not expel them; even execrations were of no avail. The promises in the Pentateuch respecting the Israelites, which Balaam seems to have in mind while uttering this and the preceding verses, have reference to prosperity in this world. The probability, then, is that Balaam, as he beholds the present good estate of Israel, and recalls the promises of God, that it shall continue until the end of this life, feeling his own ill deserts for the course he is now taking, and having, perhaps, some premonition of his unfortunate end, breathes forth the longing desire, that even to the end of his life, the good fortune which now belongs to the righteous, the Israelites, and will attend them, may be his. This seems to be the most natural and easy explanation of the words in their connection.

And here we might leave the discussion; for the natural import of the language and the whole spirit of the context, should seem to be sufficient grounds for an interpretation, especially where there are no stronger objections to it than in the present case. But one other argument may be adduced. It is in accordance with the spirit of the whole Pentateuch, to suppose that temporal death only is referred to by Balaam. A happy and peaceful death is frequently spoken of as an especial object of desire, and promised as a particular favor to the faithful, when there is no allusion to a happy existence beyond the grave. In Gen. 15: 15, it is said to Abraham, that he shall go to his fathers in *peace*, and shall be buried in a good old age; and passages of similar nature are frequent; *Gesch. Bil.* S. 95. On the other hand, to say the least, no other so distinct expression of a belief in immortality is found in the whole Pentateuch, as here, (see Hengstenberg's *Beitr.* III S. 576, 7,) if the common interpretation among the older expositors is the right one. If Balaam gives utterance to his desire for the happy immortality of the righteous, the passage stands without a parallel in the Books of Moses, and

God vouchsafed to the false prophet a clear view of that, which the apostle Paul says, was brought to light by Jesus Christ through the Gospel. Surely there ought to be more solid reasons for adopting such an interpretation than have yet been given.

[To be continued].

ARTICLE VI.

REDEPENNING'S LIFE OF ORIGEN.

By Rev. B. Sears, D. D. President of Theol. Institution, Newton.

Origenes. Eine Darstellung seines Lebens und seiner Lehre von Ernst Rud. Redepenning, Doctor und ordentlichem Professor der Theologie zu Göttingen. Erste Abtheilung, pp. 461. Bonn. 1841.

A GREAT man is not only the product of the age in which he was born and educated, but also the originator of some peculiarities which mark the age next succeeding. He is an essential link in society, connecting the past with the future, but transmitting more than he received. In order to form a right estimate of the character and merits of Origen, it is necessary to keep in mind both the time and the place of his birth and education, as well as the peculiar events which rendered his life so remarkable. Alexandria was at that time the principal seat of Grecian culture. Its Museum in the quarter of the city, called Bruchium, with its colonnades and walks, its stupendous library and large hall for public disputation, its numerous smaller apartments for study and for copying from books, and its dining hall for the accommodation of those who were supported there as men of learning, resembled rather an academy of sciences than a university, but was more extensive and magnificent than either. To increase the accommodations, the Serapeum had, long before Origen's time, been added. In this city, there was by far more of mere learning and knowledge than there had ever been in Greece, but infinitely less of genius. The Alexandrian scholars were mostly philologists and eclectic philosophers. Their philosophy, now both Grecian and oriental, had more surface than depth. Their theosophic and Gnostic speculations, had led even many pagans to contemplate subjects kindred with some of the more mysterious truths of revelation.