

CHAPTER 22

At this chapter begins the famous story of Balak and Balaam, their attempt to curse Israel, and the baffling of that attempt; God's people are long afterwards told to remember what Balak the king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, that they might know the righteousness of the Lord, ^{<3165>}Micah 6:5. In this chapter we have,

- I.** Balak's fear of Israel, and the plot he had to get them cursed (v. 1-4).
- II.** The embassy he sent to Balaam, a conjurer, to fetch him for that purpose, and the disappointment he met with in the first embassy (v. 5-14).
- III.** Balaam's coming to him upon his second message (v. 15-21).
- IV.** The opposition Balaam met with by the way (v. 22-35).
- V.** The interview at length between Balak and Balaam (v. 36, etc.).

^{<0215>}NUMBERS 22:1-14

BALAK SENDS FOR BALAAM

The children of Israel have at length finished their wanderings in the wilderness, out of which they went up (^{<0215>}Numbers 21:18), and are now encamped in the plains of Moab near Jordan, where they continued till they passed through Jordan under Joshua, after the death of Moses. Now we have here,

- I.** The fright which the Moabites were in upon the approach of Israel, v. 2-4. They needed not to fear any harm from them if they knew (and it is probable that Moses let them know) the orders God had given to Israel not to contend with the Moabites, nor to use any hostility against them, ^{<3119>}Deuteronomy 2:9. But, if they had any notice of this, they were jealous that it was but a sham, to make them secure, that they might be the more easily conquered. Notwithstanding the old friendship between Abraham

and Lot, the Moabites resolved to ruin Israel if they could, and therefore they will take it for granted, without any ground for the suspicion, that Israel resolves to ruin them. Thus it is common for those that design mischief to pretend that mischief is designed against them; and their groundless jealousies must be the colour of their causeless malice. They hear of their triumphs over the Amorites (v. 2), and think that their own house is in danger when their neighbour's is on fire. They observe their multitudes (v. 3): *They were many*; and hence infer how easily they would conquer their country, and all about them if some speedy and effectual course were not taken to stop the progress of their victorious arms: "They shall *lick up* or devour us, and *all that are round about us*, as speedily and irresistibly *as the ox eats up the grass*" (v. 4), owning themselves to be an unequal match for so formidable an enemy. Therefore they were sorely afraid and distressed themselves; thus were the wicked *in great fear where no fear was*, ~~185~~ Psalm 53:5. These fears they communicated to their neighbours, the elders of Midian, that some measures might be concerted between them for their common safety; for, if the kingdom of Moab fall, the republic of Midian cannot stand long. The Moabites, if they had pleased, might have made a good use of the advances of Israel, and their successes against the Amorites. They had reason to rejoice, and give God and Israel thanks for freeing them from the threatening power of Sihon king of the Amorites, who had taken from them part of their country, and was likely to overrun the rest. They had reason likewise to court Israel's friendship, and to come in to their assistance; but having forsaken the religion of their father Lot, and being sunk into idolatry, they hated the people of the God of Abraham, and were justly infatuated in their counsels and given up to distress.

II. The project which the king of Moab formed to get the people of Israel cursed, that is, to set God against them, who, he perceived, hitherto fought for them. He trusted more to his arts than to his arms, and had a notion that if he could but get some prophet or other, with his powerful charms, to imprecate evil upon them, and to pronounce a blessing upon himself and his forces, then, though otherwise too weak, he should be able to deal with them. This notion arose,

1. Out of the remains of some religion; for it owns a dependence upon some visible sovereign powers that rule in the affairs of the children of men and determine them, and an obligation upon us to make application to these powers.

2. Out of the ruins of the true religion; for if the Midianites and Moabites had not wretchedly degenerated from the faith and worship of their pious ancestors, Abraham and Lot, they could not have imagined it possible to do any mischief with their curses to a people who alone adhered to the service of the true God, from whose service they had themselves revolted.

III. The court which he made to Balaam the son of Beor, a famous conjurer, to engage him to curse Israel. The Balaam lived a great way off, in that country whence Abraham came, and where Laban lived; but, though it was probable that there were many nearer home that were pretenders to divination, yet none had so great a reputation for success as Balaam, and Balak will employ the best he can hear of, though he send a great way for him, so much is his heart upon this project. And to gain him,

1. He makes him his friend, complaining to him, as his confidant, of the danger he was in from the numbers and neighbourhood of the camp of Israel: *They cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me*, v. 5.

2. In effect he makes him his god, by the great power he attributes to his word: *He whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed*, v. 6. The learned bishop Patrick inclines to think, with many of the Jewish writers, that Balaam had been a great prophet, who, for the accomplishment of his predictions and the answers of his prayers, both for good and evil, had been looked upon justly as a man of great interest with God; but that, growing proud and covetous, God departed from him, and then, to support his sinking credit, he betook himself to diabolical arts. He is called a *prophet* (^{<126>}2 Peter 2:16,) because he had been one, or perhaps he had raised his reputation from the first by his magical charms, as Simon Magus, who bewitched the people so far that he was called *the great power of God*, (^{<81>}Acts 8:10. Curses pronounced by God's prophets in the name of the Lord have wonderful effects, as Noah's (^{<95>}Genesis 9:25), and Elisha's, (^{<124>}2 Kings 2:24. But the curse *causeless shall not come* (^{<102>}Proverbs 26:2), no more than Goliath's, when he *curse David by his gods*, (^{<74>}1 Samuel 17:43. Let us desire to have the prayers of God's ministers and people for us, and dread having them against us; for they are greatly regarded by him who blesseth indeed and curseth indeed. But Balak cannot rely upon these compliments as sufficient to prevail with Balaam, the main inducement is yet behind (v. 7): they took *the rewards of*

divination in their hand, the wages of unrighteousness, which he loved,
^{<015>}2 Peter 2:15.

IV. The restraint God lays upon Balaam, forbidding him to curse Israel. It is very probable that Balaam, being a curious inquisitive man, was no stranger to Israel's case and character, but had heard that God was with them of a truth, so that he ought to have given the messengers their answer immediately, that he would never curse a people whom God had blessed; but he lodges the messengers, and takes a night's time to consider what he shall do, and to receive instructions from God, v. 8. When we enter into a parley with temptations we are in great danger of being overcome by them. In the night God comes to him, probably in a dream, and enquires what business those strangers had with him. He knows it, but he will know it from him. Balaam gives him an account of their errand (v. 9-11), and God thereupon charges him not to go with them, or attempt to curse that blessed people, v. 12. Thus God sometimes, for the preservation of his people, was pleased to speak to bad men, as to Abimelech (^{<018>}Genesis 20:3), and to Laban, ^{<032>}Genesis 31:24. And we read of some that were workers of iniquity, and yet in Christ's name prophesied, and *did many wondrous works*. Balaam is charged not only not to go to Balak, but not to offer to curse this people, which he might have attempted at a distance; and the reason is given: *They are blessed*. This was part of the blessing of Abraham (^{<013>}Genesis 12:3), *I will curse him that curseth thee*; so that an attempt to curse them would be not only fruitless, but perilous. Israel had often provoked God in the wilderness, yet he will not suffer their enemies to curse them, for he *rewards them not according to their iniquities*. The blessedness of those whose sin is covered comes upon them, ^{<016>}Romans 4:6, 7.

V. The return of the messengers without Balaam.

1. Balaam is not faithful in returning God's answer to the messengers, v. 13. He only tells them, *the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you*. He did not tell them, as he ought to have done, that Israel was a blessed people, and must by no means be cursed; for then the design would have been crushed, and the temptation would not have been renewed: but he, in effect, desired them to give his humble service to Balak, and let him know that he applauded his project, and would have been very glad to gratify him, but that truly he had the character of a prophet, and must not go without leave from God, which he had not yet obtained, and therefore for

the present he must be excused. Note, Those are a fair mark for Satan's temptation that speak diminishingly of divine prohibitions, as if they amounted to no more than the denial of a permission, and as if to go against God's law were only to go without his leave.

2. The messengers are not faithful in returning Balaam's answer to Balak. All the account they give of it is, *Balaam refuseth to come with us* (v. 14), intimating that he only wanted more courtship and higher proffers; but they are not willing Balak should know that God had signified his disallowance of the attempt. Thus are great men wretchedly abused by the flatteries of those about them, who do all they can to prevent their seeing their own faults and follies.

~~0215~~ NUMBERS 22:15-21

BALAK'S SECOND MESSAGE TO BALAAM

We have here a second embassy sent to Balaam, to fetch him over to curse Israel. It were well for us if we were as earnest and constant in prosecuting a good work, notwithstanding disappointments, as Balak was in pursuing this ill design. The enemies of the church are restless and unwearied in their attempts against it; but he that sits in heaven laughs at them. Observe,

I. The temptation Balak laid before Balaam. He contrived to make this assault more vigorous than the former. It is very probable that he sent double money in the hands of his messengers; but, besides that, now he tempted him with honours, laid a bait not only for his covetousness, but for his pride and ambition. How earnestly should we beg of God daily to mortify in us these two limbs of the old man! Those that know how to look with a holy contempt upon worldly wealth and preferment will find it not so hard a matter as most men do to keep a good conscience. See how artfully Balak managed the temptation.

1. The messengers he sent were *more*, and *more honourable*, v. 15. He sent to this conjurer with as great respect and deference to his quality as if he had been a sovereign prince, apprehending perhaps that Balaam had thought himself slighted in the fewness and meanness of the former messengers.

2. The request was very urgent. This powerful prince becomes a suitor to him: “*Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee* (v. 16), no, not God, nor conscience, nor any fear either of sin or shame.”

3. The proffers were high: “*I will promote thee to very great honour among the princes of Moab;*” nay, he gives him a blank, and he shall write his own terms: *I will do whatsoever thou sayest*, that is, “I will give thee whatever thou desirest, and observe whatever thou orderest; thy word shall be a law to me,” v. 17. Thus sinners stick at no pains, spare no cost, and care not how low they stoop, for the gratifying either of their luxury or of their malice; shall we then be stiff and strait-handed in our compliance with the laws of virtue? God forbid.


II. Balaam's seeming resistance of, but real yielding to, this temptation. We may here discern in Balaam a struggle between his convictions and his corruptions.

1. His convictions charged him to adhere to the command of God, and he spoke their language, v. 18. Nor could any man have said better: “*If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, and that is more than he can give or I can ask, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God.*” See how honourably he speaks of God; he is *Jehovah, my God*. Note, Many call God theirs that are not his, not *truly* because not *only* his; *they swear by the Lord, and by Malcham*. See how respectfully he speaks of the word of God, as one resolved to stick to it, and in nothing to vary from it, and how slightly of the wealth of this world, as if gold and silver were nothing to him in comparison with the favour of God; and yet, at the same time, the searcher of hearts knew that he loved the wages of unrighteousness. Note, It is an easy thing for bad men to speak very good words, and with their mouth to make a show of piety. There is no judging of men by their words. God knows the heart.

2. His corruptions at the same time strongly inclined him to go contrary to the command. He seemed to refuse the temptation, v. 18. But even then he expressed no abhorrence of it, as Christ did when he had the kingdoms of the world offered him (*Get thee hence Satan*), and as Peter did when Simon Magus offered him money: *Thy money perish with thee*. But it appears (v. 19) that he had a strong inclination to accept the proffer; for he would further attend, to know what God would say to him, hoping that he might alter his mind and give him leave to go. This was a vile reflection

upon God Almighty, as if he could change his mind, and now at last suffer those to be cursed whom he had pronounced blessed, and as if he would be brought to allow what he had already declared to be evil. Surely he thought God *altogether such a one as himself*. He had already been told what the will of God was, in which he ought to have acquiesced, and not to have desired a re-hearing of that cause which was already so plainly determined. Note, It is a very great affront to God, and a certain evidence of the dominion of corruption in the heart, to beg leave to sin.

III. The permission God gave him to go, v. 20. God came to him, probably by an angel, and told him he might, if he pleased, go with Balak's messengers. *So he gave him up to his own heart's lust*. "Since thou hast such a mind to go, even go, yet know that *the journey thou undertakest shall not be for thy honour*; for, though thou hast leave to go, thou shalt not, as thou hopest, have leave to curse, *for the word which I shall say unto thee, that thou shalt do*." Note, God has wicked men in a chain; *hitherto they shall come* by his permission, but no further that he does permit them. Thus he makes the wrath of man to praise him, yet, at the same time, restrains the remainder of it. It was in anger that God said to Balaam, "Go with them," and we have reason to think that Balaam himself so understood it, for we do not find him pleading this allowance when God reproved him for going. Note, As God sometimes denies the prayers of his people in love, so sometimes he grants the desires of the wicked in wrath.

IV. His setting out in the journey, v. 21. God gave him leave to go *if the men called him*, but he was so fond of the journey that we do not find he staid for their calling him, but he himself *rose up in the morning*, got every thing ready with all speed, and *went with the princes of Moab*, who were proud enough that they had carried their point. The apostle describes Balaam's sin here to be that he *ran greedily into an error for reward*,  Jude 1:11. The love of money is the root of all evil.

NUMBERS 22:22-35

GOD'S DISPLEASURE AGAINST BALAAM

We have here an account of the opposition God gave to Balaam in his journey towards Moab; probably the princes had gone before, or gone some other way, and Balaam had pointed out where he would meet them, or where they should stay for him, for we read nothing of them in this part of our narrative, only that Balaam, like a person of some quality, was attended with his two men — honour enough, one would think, for such a man, he needed not be beholden to Balak for promotion.

I. Here is God's displeasure against Balaam for undertaking this journey: God's *anger was kindled because he went*, v. 22. Note,

- 1.** The sin of sinners is not to be thought the less provoking to God because he permits it. We must not think that, because God does not by his providence restrain men from sin, therefore he approves of it, or that it is therefore not hateful to him; he suffers sin, and yet is angry at it.
- 2.** Nothing is more displeasing to God than malicious designs against his people; he that touches them touches the apple of his eye.

II. The way God took to let Balaam know his displeasure against him: *An angel stood in the way for an adversary*. Now God fulfilled his promise to Israel (~~Exodus~~ Exodus 23:22), *I will be an enemy to thy enemies*. The holy angels are adversaries to sin, and perhaps are employed more than we are aware of in preventing it, particularly in opposing those that have any ill designs against God's church and people, for whom Michael our prince stands up, ~~Daniel~~ Daniel 12:1; 10:21. What a comfort is this to all that wish well to the Israel of God, that he never suffers wicked men to form an attempt against them, without sending his holy angels forth to break the attempt and secure his little ones! When the prophet saw the four horns that scattered Judah, at the same time he saw four carpenters that were to fray those horns, ~~Zechariah~~ Zechariah 1:18, etc. When the *enemy comes in like a flood the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him*. This angel was an adversary to Balaam, because Balaam counted him his adversary; otherwise those are really our best friends, and we are so to reckon them, that stop our progress in a sinful way. The angel stood with his sword drawn (v. 23), *a flaming sword*, like that in the hands of the cherubim

(^{<0024}Genesis 3:24), *turning every way*. Note, The holy angels are at war with those with whom God is angry, for they are the ministers of his justice. Observe,

1. Balaam had notice given him of God's displeasure, by the ass, and this *did not startle him*. The *ass saw the angel*, v. 23. How vainly did Balaam boast that he was a man whose *eyes were open*, and that he *saw the visions of the Almighty* (^{<0023}Numbers 24:3, 4), when the ass he rode on saw more than he did, his eyes being blinded with covetousness and ambition and dazzled with the rewards of divination! Note, Many have God against them, and his holy angels, but are not aware of it. The *ass knows his owner*, sees his danger, but Balaam does *not know, does not consider*, ^{<0023}Isaiah 1:3. *Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see*, ^{<0023}Isaiah 26:11. Let none be puffed up with a conceit of visions and revelations, when even an ass saw an angel; yet let those be ashamed of their own sottishness, worse than that of the beasts that perish, who, when they are told of the sword of God's wrath drawn against them, while they persist in wicked ways, yet will go on: the ass understood the law of self-preservation better than so; for, to save both herself and her senseless rider,

(1.) She *turned aside out of the way*, v. 23. Balaam should have taken the hint of this, and considered whether he was not out of the way of his duty; but, instead of this, he *beat her into the way again*. Thus those who by wilful sin are running headlong into perdition are angry at those that would prevent their ruin.

(2.) She had not gone much further before she saw the angel again, and she, to avoid him, *ran up to a wall*, and *crushed her rider's foot*, v. 24, 25. How many ill accidents are we liable to in travelling upon the road, from which if we are preserved we must own our obligations to the divine Providence, which by the ministry of angels *keeps us in all our ways, lest we dash our foot against a stone*; but, if we at any time meet with a disaster, it should put us upon enquiring whether our way be right in the sight of God or no. The crushing of Balaam's foot, though it was the saving of his life, provoked him so much that he smote his ass the second time, so angry are we apt to be at that which, though a present uneasiness, yet is a real kindness.

(3.) Upon the next encounter with the angel, the ass fell down under Balaam, v. 26, 27. He ought to have considered that there was certainly

something extraordinary in this; for his ass was not restive, nor did she use to serve him thus: but it is common for those whose hearts are *fully set in them to do evil* to push on violently, and break through all the difficulties which Providence lays in their way to give check to them and to stop them in their career. Balaam the third time smote his ass, though she had now done him the best piece of service that ever she did him, saving him from the sword of the angel, and by her falling down teaching him to do likewise.

(4.) When all this would not work upon him, God opened the mouth of the ass, and she spoke to him once and again; and yet neither did this move him: *The Lord opened the mouth of the ass*, v. 28. This was a great miracle, quite above the power of nature, and wrought by the power of the God of nature, who made man's mouth, and taught him to speak, for otherwise (since we learn to speak purely by imitation, and therefore those that are born deaf are consequently dumb) the first man would never have spoken, nor any of his seed. He that made man speak could, when he pleased, make the ass to *speak with man's voice*, ¹⁰⁶2 Peter 2:16. Here Mr. Ainsworth observes that the devil, when he tempted our first parents to sin, employed a subtle serpent, but that God, when he would convince Balaam, employed a silly ass, a creature dull and sottish to a proverb; for Satan corrupts men's minds by the *craftiness of those that lie in wait to deceive*, but Christ has *chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise*. By a dumb ass God rebukes the madness of the prophet, for he will never want reprovers, but when he pleases can make the stones cry out as witnesses to him, ¹⁹⁰Luke 19:40; ³¹¹Habakkuk 2:11.

[1.] The ass complained of Balaam's cruelty (v. 28): *What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me?* Note, The righteous God will not see the meanest and weakest abused; but either they shall be enabled to speak in their own defence or he will some way or other speak for them. If God would not suffer a beast to be wronged, much less a man, a Christian, a child of his own. We cannot *open the mouth of the dumb*, as God did here, but we may and must *open our mouth for the dumb*, ¹¹⁸Proverbs 31:8; ³¹³Job 31:13. The ass's complaint was just: *What have I done?* Note, When we are prompted to smite any with hand or tongue, we should consider what they have done unto us, and what provocation they have given us. We hear it not, but thus the whole creation groans, being burdened, ¹¹²Romans 8:22. It was much that Balaam was not astonished to hear his ass speak, and put to confusion: but some think that it was no new

thing to him (being a conjurer) to be thus spoken to by his familiars; others rather think that his brutish head-strong passion so blinded him that he could not observe or consider the strangeness of the thing. Nothing besots men worse than unbridled anger. Balaam in his fury *wished he had a sword to kill his ass with*, v. 29. See his impotency; can he think by his curses to do mischief to Israel that has it not in his power to kill his own ass? This he cannot do, yet he fain would; and what would he get by that, but make himself so much the poorer (as many do), to gratify his passion and revenge? Such was the madness of this false prophet. Here bishop Hall observes, It is ill falling into the hands of those whom the brute-creatures find unmerciful; for *a good man regardeth the life of his beast*.

[2.] The ass reasoned with him, v. 30. God enabled not only a dumb creature to speak, but a dull creature to speak to the purpose. Three things she argues with him from: — *First*, His propriety in her: *Am not I thy ass?* Note,

1. God has given to man a dominion over the creatures: they are *delivered into his hand* to be used, and *put under his feet* to be ruled.

2. Even wicked people have a title to the possessions God gives to them, which they are not to be wronged of.

3. The dominion God has given us over the creatures is a good reason why we should not abuse them. We are their lords, and therefore must not be tyrants. *Secondly*, Her serviceableness to him: *On which thou hast ridden*. Note, It is good for us often to consider how useful the inferior creatures are, and have been, to us, that we may be thankful to God, and tender of them. *Thirdly*, That she was not wont to do so by him, and had never before crushed his foot, nor fallen down under him; he might therefore conclude there was something more than ordinary that made her do so now. Note,

1. The rare occurrence of an offence should moderate our displeasure against an offender.

2. When the creatures depart from their wonted obedience to us, we should enquire the cause within ourselves, and be humbled for our sin.

2. Balaam at length had notice of God's displeasure by the angel, and this did startle him. When God opened his eyes *he saw the angel* (v. 31), and then he himself *fell flat upon his face*, in reverence of that glorious

messenger, and in fear of the sword he saw in his hand. God has many ways of breaching and bringing down the hard and unhumbled heart.

(1.) The angel reproved him for his outrageousness (v. 32, 33): *Wherefore hast thou smitten thy ass?* Whether we consider it or no, it is certain that God will call us to account for the abuses done to his creatures. Nay, he shows him how much more reason he had to smite upon his breast, and to condemn himself, than to fly out thus against his ass (“*Thy way is perverse before me*, and then how canst thou expect to prosper?”), and how much wiser his ass was than himself, and how much beholden he was to her that she turned aside; it was for his safety, and not for her own, for had she gone on he had been slain, and she had been saved alive. Note, When our eyes are opened we shall see what danger we are in in a sinful way, and how much it was for our advantage to be crossed in it, and what fools we were to quarrel with our crosses which helped to save our lives.

(2.) Balaam then seemed to relent (v. 34): “*I have sinned, sinned in undertaking this journey, sinned in pushing on so violently;*” but he excused it with this, that he saw not the angel; yet, now that he did see him, he was willing to go back again. That which was displeasing to God was not so much his going as his going with a malicious design against Israel, and a secret hope that notwithstanding the proviso with which his permission was clogged he might prevail to curse them, and so gratify Balak, and get preferment under him. It does not appear that he was sensible of this wickedness of his heart, or willing to own it, but, when he finds he cannot go forward, he will be content (since there is no remedy) to go back. Here is no sign that his heart is turned, but, if his hands are tied, he cannot help it. Thus many leave their sins only because their sins have left them. There seems to be a reformation of the life, but what will this avail if there be no renovation of the heart?

(3.) The angel however continued his permission: “*Go with the men*, v. 35. Go, if thou hast a mind to be made a fool of, and to be shamed before Balak, and all the princes of Moab. *Go, only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak*, whether thou wilt or no,” for this seems not to be a precept, but a prediction of the event, that he should not only not be able to curse Israel, but should be forced to bless them, which would be more for the glory of God and his own confusion than if he had turned back. Thus God gave him fair warning, but he would not take it; he

went with the princes of Balak. For the iniquity of Balaam's covetousness God was wroth, and smote him, but he went on frowardly, ⁻²⁵⁷¹⁷Isaiah 57:17.

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MEETING BETWEEN BALAK AND BALAAM

We have here the meeting between Balak and Balaam, confederate enemies to God's Israel; but here they seem to differ in their expectations of the success.

1. Balak speaks of it with confidence, not doubting but to gain his point now that Balaam had come. In expectation of this, he went out to meet him, even to the utmost border of his country (v. 36), partly to gratify his own impatient desire to see one he had such great expectations from, and partly to do honour to Balaam, and so to engage him with his utmost power to serve him. See what respect heathen princes paid to those that had but the name and face of prophets, and pretended to have any interest in heaven; and how welcome one was that came with his mouth full of curses. What a shame is it then that the ambassadors of Christ are so little respected by most, so much despised by some, and that those are so coldly entertained who bring tidings of peace and a blessing! Balak has now nothing to complain of but that Balaam did not come sooner, v. 37. And he thinks that he should have considered the importunity Balak had used, *Did I not earnestly send to thee?* (and the importunity of people inferior to kings has prevailed with many against their inclinations), and that he should also have considered Balak's intentions concerning him: *Am not I able to promote thee to honour?* Balak, as king, was in his own kingdom the fountain of honour, and Balaam should have his choice of all the preferments that were in his gift; he therefore thinks himself affronted by Balaam's delays, which looked as if he thought the honours he prepared not worthy his acceptance. Note, Promotion to honour is a very tempting bait to many people; and it were well if we would be drawn into the service of God by the honour he sets before us. Why do we delay to come unto him? *Is not he able to promote us to honour?*

2. Balaam speaks doubtfully of the issue, and bids Balak not depend too much upon him (v. 38): *“Have I now any power at all to say any thing? I have come, but what the nearer am I? Gladly would I curse Israel; but I*

must not, I cannot, God will not suffer me.” He seems to speak with vexation at the hook in his nose and the bridle in his jaws, such as Sennacherib was tied up with, ~~287D~~ Isaiah 37:29.

3. They address themselves with all speed to the business. Balaam is nobly entertained over night, a sacrifice of thanksgiving is offered to the gods of Moab, for the safe arrival of this welcome guest, and his is treated with a feast upon the sacrifice, v. 40. And the next morning, that no time might be lost, Balak takes Balaam in his chariot to the high places of his kingdom, not only because their holiness (such as it was), he thought, might give some advantage to his divinations, but their height might give him a convenient prospect of the camp of Israel, which was to be the butt or mark at which he must shoot his envenomed arrows. And now Balaam is really as solicitous to please Balak as ever he had pretended to be to please God. See what need we have to pray every day, *Our Father in heaven, lead us not into temptation.*