

## Study 36: Balaam, Part 1 Numbers 22-24

**First:** Did everyone do the homework (reading the article, “An Air of Expectancy”)? Extra copies are available.

In **Num 22**, Balak, the king of Moab, sent messengers to fetch Balaam to come and curse Israel, who had set up camp in the plains of Moab. Balak the king was really scared, so he sent for the best. Apparently, Balaam lived about 400 miles away, so he must’ve had quite a reputation as a guy who could get the job done when it came to curses.

When he finally met with Balak, the king took Balaam up to a high place in order to see the camp of Israel. After Balaam blessed them and the king and Balaam relocated several times, he gave up trying to curse Israel. Then he prophesied.

We’re going to look at one of the prophecies of Balaam found in Numbers 24, but first let’s turn to the book of Revelation:

**Rev 1:1** The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must **soon** take place. [Emphasis added.]

**Rev 1:3** Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is **near**. [Emphasis added.]

What are we to make of this language? What does “soon” mean? What about “near”? (Discuss various interpretations/opinions).

Opinions vary on how we should understand this language. Some teach that the inspired apostles of Christ were **mistaken**—that they simply **misunderstood** Jesus’ prophecies. Coffman’s *Commentaries on the Bible*<sup>1</sup> says:

...[I]t is incorrect to suppose that the holy apostles of Christ erroneously “taught” that the end of all things would occur soon. It may be freely admitted that they may indeed have been mistaken in thinking such a thing; but, in fairness, it must be admitted that none of them either implied or declared the Second Advent to be an event in the immediate future.

Those who did the homework (i.e., studied the article, “An Air of Expectancy”) know this to be utter balderdash. The inspired apostles of Christ *repeatedly* taught that His Second Advent was in the immediate future!

Currently, the most *popular* way of looking at Scripture is from the Dispensational viewpoint. This method says to give “to every word the same meaning it would have in normal usage, whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking.”<sup>2</sup> Is that what happens in the case of these words (“soon” and “near”)?

As one Dispensational author put it, “When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic<sup>3</sup> and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.”<sup>4</sup> As the website that quotes this principle put it, “If scripture’s literal meaning is denied, then verses could be made to mean most anything!”<sup>5</sup>

Yet, even those who hold this statement to be true refuse to take the very opening verses of the book of Revelation literally, that is, in their “plain sense,” and “normal usage.” They go to fantastic lengths to deny that they mean what they appear to mean. “Soon” is turned into “rapidly,” and disconnected from any sense of imminence<sup>6</sup> or immediacy. After all, the Greek word **ταχος** (Strong# 5034, pronounced “TACK-oss”)<sup>7</sup> is the root used in our word “tachometer,” a device that measures how rapidly

<sup>1</sup> Coffman, James Burton. “Commentary on Revelation 1:1”. *Coffman Commentaries on the Old and New Testament* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1983-1999). <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bcc/view.cgi?bk=re&ch=1>.

<sup>2</sup> Ryrie, Charles. *Dispensationalism: Revised and Updated* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2007), 91.

<sup>3</sup> An axiom is “a self-evident truth that requires no proof.” <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/axiom>.

<sup>4</sup> Cooper, David L. *The World’s Greatest Library: Graphically Illustrated* (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1970), 11.

<sup>5</sup> From Ellen Kavanaugh’s “Light of Mashiach” site: <http://www.lightofmashiach.org/literal.html>. Incidentally, she also misunderstands and denies the doctrine of the Trinity: <http://www.lightofmashiach.org/oneness.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the very meaning of the word “imminent” has been altered. From “likely to occur at any moment; impending”, it has been redefined to mean “it might happen any old time, not necessarily in the near future.” This is deceptive, and a perversion of language.

<sup>7</sup> Mounce, William D. “τάχος”. *Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006). Teknia.com. <https://www.teknia.com/greek-dictionary/tachos>

something turns. So, when Jesus said the events He was revealing to His servants were going to take place “soon,” He really meant, “Whenever they *do* begin to happen, they’ll take place rapidly after that.” Of course, this contradicts the other places in Scripture where the word is used. For instance, **Acts 12:7** says:

And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared, and a light shone in the cell. He struck the side of Peter and woke him, saying, “Get up **quickly**.” And the chains fell off his hands. [Emphasis added.]

Peter, you may recall, had been arrested and put into prison, to await trial and probable execution (**Acts 12:1-4**). The church, however, was praying earnestly for him to be delivered (v 5), and God sent His angel to get him out of jail. While Peter is sleeping, chained between two guards, an angel appears and pokes him in the side. Now, if we use the change in understanding proposed above, the angel would’ve said, “Whenever you get around to getting yourself up, do it rapidly.” Does this do justice to the text? Paul told Timothy:

**1 Tim 3:14** I am writing these things to you, even though I am hoping to come to you quickly....

Did Paul only want to convey his wish that traffic would be moving along rapidly? This kind of equivocation turns these verses into jokes. The angel told John in **Rev 22:6**, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.” Did he really just mean that whenever these things took place, they would happen rapidly? What kind of encouragement would that have been to God’s servants, suffering under intense persecution as they were? (In **Rev 1:9**, John says they were experiencing “**the** tribulation”).<sup>8</sup>

What about the word “near” (used in **Rev 1:3**)? According to most commentaries on Revelation, it means “*not* near”! The Greek word **ἐγγύς** (Strong# 1451, pronounced “en-GOOS”)<sup>9</sup> is also used in:

**Matt 26:18** [Jesus] replied, “Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, ‘The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.’”

**Mark 13:28-29** “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 29 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it [or, *He*] is near, right at the door.”

This is paralleled in **Luke 21:30-31**, where Jesus refers to “all the trees.” *The Pulpit Commentary*<sup>10</sup> has this to say about **Rev 1:3**:

**The time is at hand.** The appointed time, the season foreordained of God (καρπός, not χρόνος), is near. We may ask, with F. D. Maurice, “Did not the original writer use words in their simple, natural sense? If he told the hearers and readers of his day that the time was at hand, did he not mean them to understand that it was at hand?” No doubt. But that does not preclude us from interpreting the inspired words as referring, not only to events near St. John’s time, but also to other events of which they were the foretastes and **figures**. To us the meaning is that the **type** of the end has been foretold and has come, and the end itself, which has been equally foretold, must be watched for in all seriousness. [Emphasis added.]

Notice what the author of this commentary is doing. While he admits that the “simple, natural sense” of the words is that the things predicted are very close to being fulfilled, he then feels free to totally ignore this sense and presume it is merely speaking of a *type*. Many Christians believe the same thing today. However, there’s a problem with this kind of thinking. Not only does it do violence to the text of Scripture (ignoring and remaking what’s there), it makes the New Testament into another book of **types and shadows**, implying that another testament is necessary in order to properly understand it. This is what the Mormons teach! This is entirely contrary to what the New Testament says of itself. In **1 Cor 2:7**, Paul said he wasn’t declaring the wisdom of the age in which he was living. “No, we **declare** God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.” Is further hiding going on here?

<sup>8</sup> τὰχος is used in: Luke 18:8; Acts 12:7; 22:18; 25:4; Rom 16:20; 1 Tim 3:14; Rev 1:1; and 22:6.

<sup>9</sup> Mounce, William D. “ἐγγύς”. *Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006). Teknia.com. <https://www.teknia.com/greek-dictionary/engys>. There are two senses of this word: 1) close in physical **proximity**: Luke 19:11; John 3:23; 6:19, 23; 11:18, 54; 19:20, 42; Acts 1:12; 9:38; 27:8; Rom 10:8; Eph 2:13, 17; Heb 6:8, and, 2) close in **time**: Matt 24:32-33; 26:18; Mark 13:28-29; Luke 21:30-31; John 2:13; 6:4; 7:2; 11:55; Rom 13:11; Phil 4:5; Heb 8:13; Rev 1:3; and 22:10.

<sup>10</sup> Spence, H. D. M. and Joseph S. Exell, eds. “Revelation 1:3”. *The Pulpit Commentary* (Seattle, WA: BibleSoft, Inc., 2010). BibleHub.com <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/pulpit/revelation/1.htm>

In **Eph 1:8-9**, Paul says, “With all wisdom and understanding, he **made known to us the mystery** of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ....”

In **Col 1:25-26**, Paul says, “I have become its [the body of Christ] servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God **in its fullness**—the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now **disclosed** to the Lord’s people.” The New Testament proclaims itself as the *revealer* of mysteries, not the *creator* of new ones!