

Num. 23:23

Lo, there is no augury in Jacob,
 No divining in Israel:^h ^h Cf. Deut. 18.10-15.
 Jacob is told at once,
 Yea Israel, what God has planned.

Deut. 18:10

Let no one be found among you who consigns his son or daughter to the fire, or who is an augur, a soothsayer, a diviner, a sorcerer, 11 one who casts spells, or one who consults ghosts or familiar spirits, or one who inquires of the dead. 12 For anyone who does such things is abhorrent to the Lord, and it is because of these abhorrent things that the Lord your God is dispossessing them before you. 13 You must be wholehearted with the Lord your God. 14 Those nations that you are about to dispossess do indeed resort to soothsayers and augurs; to you, however, the Lord your God has not assigned the like. 15 The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet from among your own people, like myself; him you shall heed.

KJV: Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!

NRSV: Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob,
 no divination against Israel;
 now it shall be said of Jacob and Israel,
 ‘See what God has done!’

כִּי לֹא-נִחַשׁ בְּיַעֲקֹב וְלֹא-קָסַם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כָּעֵת יֵאמָר לְיַעֲקֹב וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל מִה-פָּעַל אֱלֹהִים:

Jacob Milgrom, Numbers (JPS Torah Commentary)

in Jacob . . . in Israel *Be-ya'akov. . . be-yisra'el*, so the Gk., Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, Ramban, whereas others, like Targ. Onk., render the preposition *be-* as “against.” However, the context points to the rendering “in.” Moreover, there is no indication in either the prose or the poetry (except in the ass episode) that Balaam ever intended to curse Israel. Finally, augury and divination, the craft of Balaam, are used for prediction, not “against” (see Excursus 59).

RASHI: **There is no augury in Jacob.** That is why they deserve blessing: There are no augurers or diviners among them.

RASHBAM: **There is no augury in Jacob.** They do not (says Balaam) perform divination or augury, as we do, and do not turn to ghosts or inquire of familiar spirits. Rather ... **Jacob is told at once, yea Israel, what God has planned.** Since the Shekhinah dwells among them, the prophets tell Jacob and Israel today what the Holy One has decreed for the time to come. So they have no need of augury or divining.

IBN EZRA: **Lo, there is no augury in Jacob.** God has given them strength because they cleave to the Lord and ask for nothing but from Him; they have no need for augury and divination.

e-mail: torahtalk@earthlink.net

iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/torah-talk/id291683417>

web: <http://mcarasik.wordpress.com/category/podcast/>

Donate: <http://www.gofundme.com/s78nbc>

Unless otherwise identified, English translations are from *Tanakh* by permission of the Jewish Publication Society.

<http://www.jewishpub.org/product.php?id=478&promocode=CBNUM>

NAHMANIDES: **There is no augury in Jacob.** See Rashi's comment. In my view, the whole point of this is that Balaam himself *was* a diviner. This is the implication of what Balak said in his message to Balaam: "I know that he whom you bless is blessed indeed, and he whom you curse is cursed" (22:6)—that Balaam did his blessing and cursing by means of divination. As we saw in v. 7 there, Balak actually sent him tools for divination. Our verse is a direct response to that attitude: Augury and divination have no effect on Israel, whether to harm or help. **Jacob is told at once, yea Israel, what God has planned.** God Himself decrees what is to happen to them, whether good or evil: "For the Lord's portion is His people" (Deut. 32:9). They are not under the dominion of the stars and the other astrological forces, which might enable someone to harm them magically, as is the case with the other nations. As Moses told the Israelites, "When you look up to the sky and behold the sun and the moon and the stars, the whole heavenly host, you must not be lured into bowing down to them or serving them. These the Lord your God allotted to other peoples everywhere under heaven; but you the Lord took and brought out of Egypt, that iron blast furnace, to be His very own people" (Deut. 4:19-20). See my comment to Lev. 18:25.

- 18 And he took up his theme, and said:
 Up, Balak, attend,
 Give ear unto me, son of Zippor!
- 19 God is not man to be capricious,
 Or mortal to change His mind.
 Would He speak and not act,
 Promise and not fulfill?
- 20 My message was to bless:
 When He blesses, I cannot reverse it.
- 21 No harm is in sight for Jacob,
 No woe in view for Israel.
 The Lord their God is with them,
 And their King's acclaim in their midst.
- 22 God who freed them from Egypt
 Is for them like the horns of the wild ox.
- 23 Lo, there is no augury in Jacob,
 No divining in Israel:
 Jacob is told at once,
 Yea Israel, what God has planned.
- 24 Lo, a people that rises like a lion,
 Leaps up like the king of beasts,
 Rests not till it has feasted on prey
 And drunk the blood of the slain.