



Parasha Balak

June 26, 2021

Torah: Numbers 22:2-25:9
Haftarah: Micah 5:6-6:8
Ketuvim Shlichim: 1Corinthians 1:20-31

Shabbat shalom! Our *Torah* portion today is entitled *Balak*. *Balak* was the king of *Moav*, the nation lying just opposite and east of where Israel is now encamped. Israel has been travelling for about 38 years, 38 years after they accepted the report of the ten negative spies and rebelled against ADONAI. But, ADONAI is now giving them military victory as they make the final approach to the Land of Promise. *Balak* knew this and became very concerned because Israel had just defeated the *Emori*, the Amorites, and the people in the territory of *Bashan*. He consulted the leaders of the nation of *Midyan* about this threat and the two nations, Moab and Midian, joined forces. But, because he felt they were still too weak, rather than confronting Israel militarily, he chose another method. *Balak* sent for a gentile prophet named *Bi'lam*, Balaam, to come and curse Israel for him.

What do we know about *Bi'lam*? We know that his father's name was "*Be'or*." The "he" in this verse is King *Balak* of Moab: *5 He sent messengers to summon Balaam son of Beor, at Pethor near the River in his native land,....* (Numbers 22:5a TLV). *Be'or*, בְּעוֹר, meaning, "a burning," is a name which appears twice in the *Torah* as someone's father. In Genesis 36, he is the father of a king called "Bela," בְּלַע בֶּן-בְּעוֹר. *31 Now these are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the sons of Israel. 32 Bela son of Beor reigned in Edom—the name of his city was Dinhabah* (Genesis 36:31-32 TLV). Bela is the first in a list of eight kings of Edom who, according to Genesis 36, reigned "before there reigned any king over the children of Israel." This information in Genesis is also found in 1Chronicles 1:43. Bela reigned in Edom, the kingdom founded by Jacob's brother Esau, Hebrew *Edom*, but we are not specifically told that Bela was a descendant of Esau.

In Numbers 22, verse 5 which we read a moment ago, *Be'or* is the father of a diviner called Balaam, בְּלַעַם בֶּן-בְּעוֹר. Some scholars also wonder if *Bela* and *Bi'lam* weren't the same person. Their names only vary by one letter. Don't look at the vowel marks, but just the Hebrew consonants. בְּלַע בֶּן-בְּעוֹר

בְּלַעַם בֶּן-בְּעוֹר These two names differ only by one letter, *mem* (ם). But, it's not very likely that they are the same. He would have to have been around 400 years old. But, their names are interesting.

Here is more background information. *Balak*, the son of *Zippor*, was the king of Moab, the nation which was descended from the incestuous relationship of Lot's eldest daughter with her father after the two daughters got him drunk. The Moabites were cousins of Israel. When Israel arrived near their territory, the Moabites allied themselves against them with a neighboring group of people, the Midianites, people who were also related to Israel and Moab. Their ancestor and founder, Midian, was the son of Abraham and his second wife *Keturah*. So, at this time, these relatives of Israel are at odds with Israel. But, even though they came

from the same ancestors, Israel, Moab and Midian didn't love each other and didn't all worship the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We don't know all of the different idols involved, but one of the false gods worshipped by Moab was *Ba'al Pe'or*. The "Lord of the mountain Peor," the "god of Peor," was an idol which was also worshipped by some of the Israelites during their drunken orgies which we read about later in this *parasha*.

Scholars are not certain about all of the gods which the Midianites worshipped. It is supposed that in addition to *Ba'al Peor*, that they also worshipped Ashtoreth, known then as the Queen of Heaven. Moses father in law, Jethro, was a priest of Midian, but we don't know who or what he worshipped. There is no Scriptural indication that he worshipped ADONAI. He did give good advice to Moses when he suggested that Moses set up sub-judges to take some of the burden of judging off himself, but he also turned down Moses' offer to remain with Israel and chose to return to Midian and continue serving as a priest of Midian. Even though Jethro was a Priest of Midian, he may not have actually been a Midianite. Joshua 1:16 says that he was a Kenite, a member of an ancient nomadic tribe which at that time occupied the general area of what is now Israel, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and most of Turkey. The Druze people of today in Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria are considered to be the descendants of Jethro and he is also considered by them to be their spiritual founder and chief prophet. These are the players in the drama unfolding in this *parasha*.

As our *parasha* opens, *Balak*, the King of Moab is terrified when he sees the camp of Israel. Because of the great number of Israelites and presumably because of what he had heard that Israel had just done to his neighbors, he had very good reason to be afraid. Because he didn't believe that he could defeat them in battle, he decided to attack them spiritually and sent men to hire *Bi'lam* to curse Israel. In our *parasha* last week, Israel was attacked by the Canaanites of Arad and they defeated them. Then Israel offered to pass through the territory of the Amorites peacefully, but were attacked by them, defeated them and took their land. But now, *Balak*, the King of *Moav*, has realized that he cannot defeat Israel and sent his messengers to Balaam to come and curse them. *7 The elders of Moab and Midian left with divination fees in their hand. When they came to Balaam, they told him Balak's words* (Numbers 22:7 TLV). There is some mystery in the *Torah* account regarding Moab and Midian as to who and how each acted against Israel. Possibly, because of the alliance of the two groups, both were involved in *parasha Balak* and also in the next two *parshiyot*, *Pinchas* and *Mattot*. The names Moab and Midian seem to be used interchangeably at times.

After the messengers arrived at Balaam's house, he told them to spend the night because G-d would speak to him and tell him what to do. ADONAI told him that he was not to curse Israel and Balaam sent the messengers away. But, *Balak* sent more messengers and again, Balaam told them to stay overnight and he would inquire of G-d. This time ADONAI told him that he could go, but only to do and say what He told him. *20 God came to Balaam by night and said to him, "Since the men came to you to summon you, arise and go with them. However, only the word I tell you are you to do"* (Numbers 22:20 TLV)!

Then, in the very next verse we read this: *21 So Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the Moabite princes. 22 But the anger of God burned because he was going* (Numbers 22:21-22a TLV). Reading this verse, we are confused. Didn't ADONAI tell him to go, but now ADONAI was angry because he was going? And, on the way, Balaam encountered the *Malakh ADONAI*, the Messenger of ADONAI, blocking the path. After his donkey responded three times to the movements of the messenger, the donkey spoke to Balaam and then Balaam saw the messenger, the angel. The angel gave him instructions to

continue to Moab, but to only speak the words which ADONAI would give him. Our question is, why did ADONAI send the *malakh* to oppose Balaam? There is always an answer. You and I know that ADONAI does not contradict Himself. And, in this case He absolutely did not! Verse 32 explains it: 32 ... “Behold, I came as an adversary because your way before Me is a reckless one” (Numbers 22:32b TLV)! That’s really not very clear. But, the Complete Jewish Bible is much clearer. It says: 32 ... “I have come out here to bar your way, because you are rushing to oppose me” (Numbers 22:32b CJB). ADONAI knows our hearts and He knew what Balaam was thinking and what he was really thinking about was making some money. He was thinking about how this journey might profit him rather than focusing on waiting for ADONAI’s instructions and being willing to obey Him. So, in my mind, there is really no contradiction here. ADONAI was angry because Balaam’s heart was not right.

When Balaam arrived in Moab, he told *Balak* that he could only speak the words which ADONAI put in his mouth. After *Balak* offered sacrifices, ADONAI gave Balaam the words to speak in each of three different places of sacrifice, words which blessed and did not curse Israel. Blessings one and two were general blessings. The third blessing begins with the words which we chant as we begin our *Shabbat* service each week: *Mah tovu, ohalecha Ya'akov. Mish'k'notecha Yis'raeil.* 5 “How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, and your dwellings, O Israel” (Numbers 24:5 TLV)! This prayer is used in Judaism to express reverence and awe for ADONAI in synagogues and other places of worship. Taken from Numbers 24:5, it has the distinction of being the only part of a prayer in Judaism written by a non-Jew. The second part of our *Mah Tovu* prayer comes from four places in Psalms (5:8, 26:8, 95:6 and 69:14).

As Balaam is about to leave *Balak*, he prophesies again, this time speaking not words which ADONAI told him to speak, but directly under the inspiration of *Ruach HaKodesh*. Previously, ADONAI instructed him ahead of time, but this time He chose to have His Spirit directly provide the words: 17 “I see him, yet not at this moment. I behold him, yet not in this location. For a star will come from Jacob, a scepter will arise from Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab and the skulls of all the sons of Seth” (Numbers 24:17 TLV). In the last few months, we have been thinking quite a bit about what some modern prophets have spoken. I think we could agree that some were right and some were wrong. *Sha’ul* said that “we prophesy in part.” But, what we have just read also shows us that truth can be prophesied by anyone, believer or non-believer, under the inspiration of G-d’s Spirit.

In this fourth vision, Numbers 24:17-24, Balaam saw what would happen for the people of Israel in the *acarit hayamim*, the days to come. He saw Israel’s future, far in the future, and at a time when a special baby would be born from the Tribe of Judah. This baby is a king who in the future will destroy a portion of Moab and the descendants of Seth. There may be two levels of understanding in this prophecy, the first level applying to David and then later to his descendant, Yeshua. David did defeat Moab, but not completely and so their final defeat may be their descendants defeated by Yeshua when He returns to earth. The reference to defeating all the sons of Seth is also not completely understood. We’re all sons and daughters of Seth, unless His defeating us means that we each will spiritually submit to Yeshua. But then, it may not be a reference to Adam’s son Seth, but to a body part. The Hebrew word *shet* also means: “buttocks.” Who are the “sons of buttocks?” Another derivation of *shet* means “tumult,” the “sons of tumult,” and another is “desolation,” the “sons of desolation.” A possibility is that the “sons of desolation” refers to those who have caused the “abomination of desolation” to be placed on the Temple Mount and to their destruction by the King whom Balaam prophesied? This is just conjecture. No one really knows.

Then, the prophecy goes on to tell of other conquests, nations which will be defeated in the future. It speaks of *Edom*, the descendants of Esau, and *Se'ir*, the people who were in that area before Edom and also *Amalek*. The Amalekites, Israel's ancient enemies, were also descendants of Edom, Jacob's brother Esau. Balaam also saw in his vision a people called the Kenites. We mentioned them earlier as being one of the peoples living in the general area of the middle east. 21 "Then he saw the Kenite, so he uttered his oracle and said, "Your dwelling is secure. Your nest is set in the rock" (Numbers 24:21 TLV). This seems to indicate that ADONAI would not judge the Kenites, a group which may today be represented by the Druze, descendants of Jethro, Moses' father in law. But, the Midianites were judged by ADONAI and were all killed by Israel according to His instructions given in Numbers 31. And, as far as we know, there are no Midianites today. There is more in Balaam's prophecy about the judgment of other nations in the future, but this is all we're going to consider today.

1 While Israel was staying in Shittim, the people began to have immoral sexual relations with women from Moab. 2 Then they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, so the people were eating, and bowing down before their gods. 3 When Israel became bound to Baal of Peor, the anger of Adonai grew hot against Israel (Numbers 25:1-3 TLV). We learn later that the seduction by the women of Moab was the doing of Balaam (Numbers 31:16). He was unsuccessful in cursing Israel, so he took another tack. He showed the Moabites how through the attractive young women of Moab that they could get to the young men of Israel. The women enticed the men sexually and through that sexual relationship they encouraged them to take part in their festivals and to eat meat which had been sacrificed to their gods. Then, a few chapters later we read this: 7 They fought Midian just as Adonai had commanded Moses, and killed every male. 8 Among the slain they also killed the Midianite kings: Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba, the five kings of Midian. They also killed Balaam son of Beor with the sword (Numbers 31:7-8 TLV). There is no mention of Balak being killed. If Balaam got paid for advising Moab to sexually entice Israel, he didn't get to spend his money.

The men of Israel who entered into these relationships knew that what they were doing was wrong. I am not aware that any Israelite women were involved with Moabite men. But that the Israelite men could so easily be enticed is shocking. And, this was the second generation, those who were to enter Canaan. Israel continued to have sexual sins after their entry into the Land of Promise. Some months ago we spoke of the various sins of Israel before the fall of the Kingdom of Judah and included were sexual sins. The longer the nation existed, the more that sexual sins seemed to increase.

As the United States is getting a little long in the tooth, sexual sins are approaching main-stream acceptance. There have always been sexual sins in the U. S., but now it's almost, "ho hum, so what else is new!" Now, you don't have to subscribe to the premium TV channels to see it. Television depicts fornication as normal. It is accepted by a large segment of our population that it's ok to live together without marriage. We see this even in television house-hunting stories. A couple is looking for a house to buy. They get it and the man gets down on one knee and offers the woman a ring with their two or three children looking on. That's one kind of heterosexual sexual relationship frequently shown on TV and is considered normal by many. Or it's two cohabiting men who are house hunting on TV. Those homosexual relationships are also now main stream and commonly seen. It's even in our television ads, men kissing men and women kissing women. And, then there is the LGBTQ situation among adults and even now in our children. What does all this have to do with *Parasha* Balak? It is definitely related. This *parasha* serves as a spiritual example for us who have ADONAI's Word. Israel had also been taught the Word of G-d. In fact, the author

of *Torah* was even travelling with them. We have been taught the Word of G-d too. Many of the older generation of today, church people in mainstream denominations, think that LGBTQ is ok. Their denominations have also been taught G-d's Word, but have turned away from it to follow humanistic principles. Now, condemnation is coming upon us who uphold ADONAI's Word and not on those who violate it. We are the bad guys in much of public opinion.

This is where we come in, us Messianics. We unapologetically state that ADONAI's Word is true. If it says that homosexuality is wrong, it's wrong. But, ADONAI didn't discriminate. He also made laws pertaining to heterosexuals. Adultery is also judged to be against His Word. Would the world believe a group of men who formed an organization to further the practice of adultery, claiming that it was a part of their G-d-given nature, that they were born that way and should not be discriminated against because they are adulterers? But, the fact is that it's not a part of their G-d-given nature. And, neither is homosexuality. ADONAI gave *Adam* and *Chava* a pure and sinless nature. The sin nature that each of us inherited from them was courtesy of *HaSatan* and the tendency to sin remains with us today. So, the situation doesn't matter, whoever violates G-d's laws is sinning against Him. Even the young children who question their gender are sinning and going against His word. *27 God created humankind in His image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them* (Genesis 1:27 TLV). Most don't know this because they have not been taught God's Word and have been influenced by others to believe that it's natural. I feel most sorry for them because they really are innocents who have been manipulated by others.

The public that believes in and approves of these kinds of things being ok generally does not understand our spiritual position. I'm certain that position varies among Yeshua's very diversified followers, but we here in *Beit Shalom* take a very strong position against the violation of *Torah*. With regard to our stance, what should our response be to what we see going on in the world around us? We all know the answer. It is to love them in spite of what they do. "Love your neighbor as yourself." It's easy to say, but sometimes very hard to do. But that is what ADONAI requires of us. If we don't, then we are the sinners. Even though we disagree with what they are doing, we are not their judges. To outsiders, our position appears to be self-righteous and judgmental. But, if we do have that type of attitude, we are wrong. ADONAI, Yeshua on His judgement seat, will be their only judge. They have been given free will, just as we have. Each of us has the opportunity to make a choice; either follow Yeshua and G-d's laws or follow the interpretation of men.

There are no easy and quick answers for the problems which our nation is facing today. But for us, there is but one answer. Put our money where our mouth is. Follow *Torah* in every aspect individually to the best of our ability. Hate sin, but love the sinner. What is sin? We know very well what John said about it: *4 "Everyone practicing sin also practices lawlessness—indeed, sin is lawlessness"* (1John 3:4 TLV). Contemporary Christian Bibles say much the same: *4 "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness"* (1John 3:4 NIV). The Greek word translated as lawlessness is *anomia* (an-om-ia). It could very easily be translated as "violation of *Torah*" and be quite correct. Because it's true, everyone who violates the teaching of ADONAI and Yeshua is a sinner. And, we all are at one time or another. But, we have the opportunity to repent. And we must when we recognize that we have sinned. It's also the individual's responsibility to learn what G-d views as sin.

ADONAI gave us *Torah*, His teaching and instruction and laws so that we could remain in relationship with Him. What did David say about the Law? Many things, but this one

verse sums it up very well: 97 “O how I love Your Torah! It is my meditation all day” (Psalm 119:97 TLV). We, too, should love it.

We might think that as followers of Yeshua, we are morally strong and able to resist temptation. But, it is very dangerous today to live in a society which has values so much in opposition to ADONAI’s values. Both heterosexual and homosexual sins happen within the body of Messiah today just as sexual sins did among the Israelites while they were camped at Shittim. Even Israel, who had the presence of ADONAI in their midst, allowed their natural desires to overrule their personal relationship with G-d; at least the men did. Possibly some women also entered into sexual sins or worshipped *Ba’al Peor*. Numbers 25:3 says that “Israel was bound to *Ba’al Peor*.” This seems to indicate that the idolatry would also include women. Women also commit sexual sins. But, as followers of Yeshua today, we don’t understand how a group of people who had seen so many miracles done on their behalf, could turn away so quickly.

By connecting two verses from Balaam’s blessing of Israel, words given to him by ADONAI, we can make a *midrash*. The first verse is from the first blessing and the second is from the second blessing. By combining these two verses, we are shown through G-d’s own words how He wants us to view those whom we perceive to be in violation of His laws. It is really the way that He wants us to treat each other in every kind of situation.

8 “How can I curse one whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce one whom Adonai has not denounced? 20 Look, I received a command to bless. He has blessed—I cannot change it” (Numbers 23:8;20 TLV)

We must love and pray for those outside of ADONAI’s laws in the United States. Our *Haftarah* reading closes for us. *8 “He has told you, humanity, what is good, and what Adonai is seeking from you: Only to practice justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8 TLV)*. To practice justice is to walk individually in ADONAI’s *Torah*, obedient to His commands. To love mercy is to show mercy to those who have been led astray. To walk humbly with our G-d is to recognize that we too are sinners who remain standing because of ADONAI’s mercy. May He have mercy on the people of the United States. *Shabbat shalom!*