

Beth Tephila Messianic Jewish Congregation
(Under same management for over 5783 years)

Shabbat Service

July 1st 10:30AM Lolo Community Synagogue
12:30 PM Oneg Shabbat & Torah Discussion



Parashat Balak
Numbers 22:2 – 25:9

וַיַּרְא בְּלָק בֶּן-צִפּוֹר אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאֹמֹרִי:

Va-yar Balak ben-Tsipor et kol-asher-asah Yisra'el la'Emori
And saw Balak, son of Zippor, all that did Israel to the Amorites.
And Balak, son of Zippor, saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.

וַיִּירָא מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי הָעָם מְאֹד כִּי רַב־הוּא

va-yarar Mo'av mip'nei ha-am m'od ki rav-hoo

And feared Moab before the people greatly because they were many.
And Balak was in great fear because of the people for they were numerous,

וַיִּקָּץ מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

va-yakats Mo'av mip'nei b'nei Yisra'el

And Moab was in distress before the sons of Israel.
and Moab was in dread of the sons of Israel.

Haftarah – Micah 5:7-6:8

B'rit Hadashah – Jude 11

Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

The futility of Trying to Alter God's Promises

We observe from history the "wishy-washiness" of human decision-making that can easily be altered by different human perspectives and interventions. Not so with God's decisions! When God promises, God acts in His time frame, and God accomplishes His purposes! Even though God seems to want to accomplish His will through men, His will is nevertheless accomplished, according to His plan! Therefore, all individuals must decide whether they will join themselves to God's plan and purposes, or whether they want to "go their own way," asserting their own plans for their own purposes. As we begin this week's Parsha, this is where we find King Balak. We will examine his futile decision-making, so that we can understand how we can apply a better decision-making process for our lives today. Joining ourselves to God's Plan for our lives and letting Him accomplish His will through us... according to His purpose, produces in us abundant living and a meaningful life.

The Predicament of a King

In the last parsha, we left God's people of the second generation of those, having left Egypt 19 years old and younger plus the Levites, at the plains of Moab on the East side of the Jordan River opposite Jericho. God had just given them victory over Og, King of Bashan (East side of the Jordan River as far North as the Golan Heights) and over Sihon, King of the Amorites (East of the Jordan River from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River). Camped out in the open along a 5-6 mile flat, fertile field, they were easily observed from the elevations of the surrounding hills and mountains. Observing "this horde" approaching their territory was Balak, King of Moab. King Balak's fear of the people of Israel was also translated to the adjacent Moabites and Midianites. They had heard about Israel's defeat of Og and Sihon and figured that they were next on Israel's agenda. Later in the book of Joshua, we find that Rahab in Jericho told Israeli spies that

even in Jericho, they had heard with fear about the coming of the people of Israel towards them, and how the God of Israel fought for His people.



The Shadow of Fear makes Balak Imagine the Worst

As fearful people do, Balak sought the company of others with the same fear. Without analyzing whether his fear was based in reality and without attempting to make peace with the people of Israel, Balak sought help from someone known for his ability to overcome the gods of other nations. He sent messengers about 370 miles North to employ Balaam, a famous soothsayer, to rid him of this people he was sure had come to conquer him.

Decision-making 101: 1) Check with God to ascertain whether one's fear is genuine. Had he done so, Balak would have found that God had instructed His people not to take land from the Edomites, Moabites, or Ammonites (**Deuteronomy, Chapter 2**), and the Midianites who were distant relatives. Instead, Balak's fear put into play a futile plan that would ultimately "backfire" on both Balak and Balaam.

Balaam, the soothsayer, lived close to the Euphrates River possibly by Haran or Carchemish, which would have been about 20-25 days trip to travel to Moab. When the messengers from Balak arrived with their "fees for divination," Balaam weighed his chances for success. He consulted the God of Israel, who said, "Do not go with them; you shall not curse the people; for they are blessed." So Balaam sent the messengers back to Balack and did not accompany them. Because Balaam consulted with the God of Israel, some think Balaam was a prophet. After all he did ask God's permission and took God's advice. Yet Balaam is never called a prophet but a soothsayer, and soothsaying was forbidden as "detestable" (Deut. 18:10,14). **2nd Peter 2:15** talks about **"...the way of Balaam ... who loved the wages of unrighteousness."** Balaam is described as one who prostituted his gift of prophecy for money. Avarice caused Balaam to accompany the messengers on their second trip to acquire his services...."for I (Balak) will honor your richly..." Balaam again asked "the Lord my God...what else the Lord will speak to me." Having already been told what was God's will, Balaam wanted God to allow him to go anyway in order to collect the money promised by Balak. God replied to Balaam that he could go to Balak but could only speak God's words. God had not changed His mind. God would still accomplish his plan to bless His people but would now do so in a way that would bring Him glory, while bringing frustration to Balak and Balaam. Remember, God also allowed Pharaoh to continue in disobedience in order to bring glory to Himself over the gods of Egypt without changing His plan to free His people from Egyptian bondage.



Balaam & the Angel -- Rembrandt 1626

Still God showed His anger with Balaam by having "the angel of the Lord" stand in the way on a narrow path between two walls with his drawn sword in his hand." Only the donkey of Balaam could see the angel poised to kill Balaam as he passed. The donkey tried to avoid the angel by turning off the trail, pushing against the wall, and finally lying down. Balaam became quite angry with his donkey and repeatedly struck her. God allowed the donkey to speak to Balaam, telling him about the threat to his life. What followed was a debate between Balaam and the donkey without mentioning the amazement of Balaam that he was actually talking to his donkey. Finally God allowed Balaam to see the angel, who told Balaam that his way was "contrary to me (the angel)." Balaam replied, "I have sinned" and said that he would go back home. **Just because someone says, "the Lord my God" and "I have sinned," while feigning repentance, does not necessarily mean that they are God's child, nor that they really want to do God's will.**

The angel told Balaam he could go to Balak, ... "but **you shall speak only the word which I shall tell you.**" This angel was a theophany, a manifestation of the presence of the Lord, Himself. [The test of a theophany - the manifestation of the Lord appears out of nowhere and returns again, saying something or accomplishing something only God could say or do.] Balaam has been told twice that he could not curse God's people, as Balak wanted....yet Balaam continued on to Moab.



How can I curse whom God has not cursed?
How can I denounce whom the Lord has not denounced?
From the tops of crags I see them,
From the hills I gaze down:
A people that dwells alone,
Not reckoning itself among nations.

Decision-making 101: 2) When God tells you His desires, attempts to change HIS will into YOUR will.....will be futile.

King Balak came out to meet Balaam and took him to one of the "high places," where Baal was worshipped. In **Chapter 23**, Balaam built an impressive offering to God, hoping God would change his mind and allow him to curse Israel (and of course collect his reward). This is what **Jude 11** refers to as "**the error of Balaam**:" ("Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.") **through deceit or covetousness trying to circumvent God's will**. God did meet with Balaam and gave him His words for King Balak. Balaam tells King Balak that he cannot curse, whom God has not cursed; that God has made this people a distinct people (even when dwelling among others) and has increased their numbers as the dust of the earth (compare with **Genesis 3:16**). Balak is furious with Balaam for blessing the people of Israel with his prophecy, rather than cursing them. Balak figured that if he took Balaam to an even higher place, Balaam might see things differently and then be able to supply the curse of Israel that Balak wanted. Today, we might call this "Plan B."

Decision-making 101: 3) Learn from your mistakes....rather than "beating your head against the wall."

Balak took Balaam to the top of Mt. Pisgah, where Moses would later go in order for God to show Moses the whole land of Israel. Again Balaam tried to impress God with his large offering. (It must have taken great effort to bring enough wood for seven altars and all those animals up to the top of that mountain.) Again God met with Balaam. The result was that Balaam again pronounced upon Israel God's blessing saying, "God is not a man that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent...When He has blessed, I cannot revoke it.....The Lord his God is with him (His people, Israel) and the shout of a king is among them (The **Targum Pseudo-Jonathan's Aramaic paraphrase**

calls this a Messianic reference. For there is no omen (magical charm) that can work against Jacob, nor is there any divination against Israel....Behold, a people rises like a lioness...It shall not lie down until it devours the prey and drinks the blood of the slain." Hearing this, Balak must have gone "bananas," telling Balaam that if you're not going to curse Israel, at least don't keep blessing them! Not yet deterred from his attempt to rid himself of this perceived enemy, Balak tried one last time.

The **first perspective** Balak had provided for Balaam to see and curse Israel was from one of the worship hills of the Canaanite god, Baal. Thinking that if Balaam could see Israel from a **different perspective**, he could then curse them, Balak **secondly** took Balaam the top of Mt. Pisgah. The **last perspective** Balak gave Balaam was from the top of Peor, where Balaam could see Israel camping tribe by tribe. Here after a final impressive sacrifice, Balaam pronounced his largest and most grandiose blessing upon Israel. Balaam prophesied that Israel would be greatly expanded, dwelling with abundant water and agriculture. He even named a king, Agag, King of the Amalekites, that Israel would kill and dominate 500 years into the future. Especially significant to Balak, Balaam says of Israel, "He shall devour the nations who are his adversaries, and shall crush their bones in pieces and shatter them with his arrows." Balaam, who had probably never heard of the **Abrahamic covenant**, prophesied the reaffirmation of it: **"Blessed is everyone who blesses you, and cursed is everyone who curses you."** **This represents the perspective of God.** As I stated above, **human decision-making can easily be altered by different human perspectives and interventions, but God's affirmations cannot be altered by human covetousness and deceit.**

King Balak had had enough, already! He had brought Balaam to curse Israel and enrich him for services rendered. But instead the God of Israel had led Balaam to bless Israel. Therefore Balaam could "thank" the God of Israel for the fact that he would receive no reward at all. Balaam replied that he had no choice at all except to deliver the words of God, which he proceeded to do again. **Balaam prophesied the coming of the Messiah..."I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; a star shall come forth from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise from Israel..."** He predicted that Israel would defeat Moab, Edom, and Amalek. He predicted the Assyrian captivity and then the fall of Assyria.

Thought Question: 1) Were God's people protected by God, even while the Moabite threat was unknown? Are God's people **today** protected by God from unknown threats?

Are there Balaks Today?

(adapted from **Elliott Klayman**, UMJC/resources)

There is a pattern in Jewish history. Our enemies have always tried to destroy us. But God is faithful to his covenant. Those who plot to destroy the Jews are destined for defeat and disaster. We have seen it in all the ancient civilizations that rose up against Israel: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, and we see it even today in Palestinian terrorist groups such as Hamas.

Balaam, "taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel," "to eat things sacrificed to idols," and "to commit fornication" (**Rev. 2:14**). Moreover, he was

guilty of greed and seeking fame (2 Pet 2:15; Jude 11), and exhibited ungodly anger toward an animal.



Balak needed to have understood that instead of being bent on the destruction of Israel, he really needed Israel – to bless her and not curse her – so that Moab would be included in God’s economy of mutual blessing for Israel and the nations. Balak’s, fear is like Egypt’s earlier fear of the Israelites. In both cases they perceive Israel to be a threat. We have parallels in both the Exodus and Numbers that evidence this. Israel is numerous. Both Balak and Egypt felt a disgust at the children of Israel. They both saw Israel as more powerful than they. Moab says Israel has covered the “eye of the land,” and this is the same wording used about the locust plague in Exodus. **These concerns are not founded in reality but in fear.** Here we see the human tendency to assume that a group who is strong and different is a threat. But the text does not say that Israel had hostile intentions against Moab. Moab was a descendant of Lot. It was Abraham who rescued Lot and his family, but Lot’s descendants had forgotten this and did not return the same kindness shown to them by Abraham.

Sovereignly, God chose a nation!! And throughout history God stuck by his covenantal promise, even though Israel demonstrated disobedience, stiff-neckedness and rebelliousness. By God’s action it is clear that “chosennes” was based upon a physical genealogical family through whom all families of the earth could be blessed. God’s intention from the beginning of human history has been to choose Israel as an instrument through which God fulfills His economy of mutual blessing among the families of the earth. **There simply is no blessing without Israel!! Therefore, it is against the purposes of God to purport to love God while wiping out Israel.**

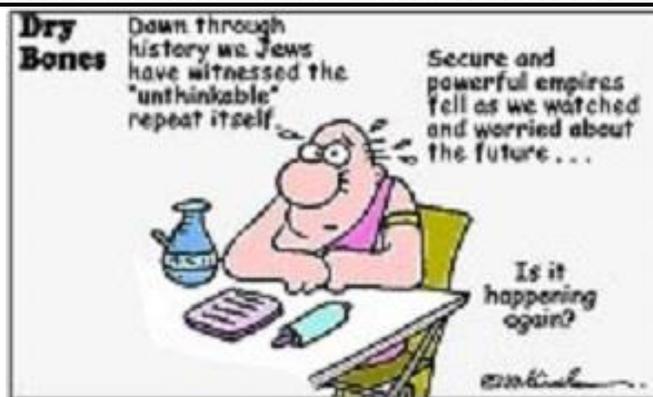
Some Christians today are bent on removing Israel from its place before God, as He intended. A **replacement theology**, often called **supersessionism**, decentralizes the Hebrew Bible and Israel, thereby stripping Israel of circumcision, promises, blessings, law, history, distinctiveness, Shabbat, and holy days, leaving only an appendage that disappears when **Yeshua** appears. It is as if the bible establishes Israel but omits her continuing historical significance contained prominently throughout scripture. Replacement Theology would seek to require Messianic Jews to be assimilated into a Gentile culture with no remaining Jewish distinctiveness. **Many in The Church seek to win Jews to their Jewish Messiah in a way that eliminates the distinctive markers of a Jew, once he or she is won to the faith.** Let me again clearly say that **there is no blessing without Israel!**

It was Israel who brought the recognition of one God to the world. It was Israel who preserved and transmitted the Word of God. It was the Jewish people whom God chose to inscribe both the Hebrew Bible and the B'rit Chadasha (newer testament) and to cast His story of Tikun O'lam (repairing the world) around Israel as a people and a land. And it was Israel through whom the Son of God, Yeshua HaMashiach, came. It is Israel who will be restored to the priesthood in the Kingdom to come. The nations will be judged based upon how they treated Israel and they will only be blessed as they come alongside God's beloved Israel and Yeshua, as a part of the commonwealth of Israel.

Chapter 25 shifts our attention from the gathering of Israel in the plains of Moab to the activities of the people themselves. They have moved into a staging area called Shittim. From there they will begin to cross the Jordan River into their "promised land." It was from Shittim that Joshua would send spies to visit Jericho prior to his crossing the Jordan. Also at Shittim, Moabite women began to invite Israeli men to attend their sacrifices to their gods, including Baal, the Canaanite god of fertility. These ceremonies included immorality, food, and worship. The Lord was angry with Israel, and initiated a plague among the people. God instructed Moses to have those men involved in immorality killed. **Numbers 31:16** explained that **Balaam had advised the seduction of Israel** through this means. **Revelation 2:14** calls this **the "teaching of Balaam,"** that taught **the conquering of Israel through seduction, intermarriage, and the introduction of idol worship.** The immorality was so brazen that even while some were weeping for those killed by God's plague, "Zimri, the son of Salu, a leader of a father's household among the Simeonites" (vs. 14) brought a Midianite woman into his tent right in front of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the new High Priest. Phinehas took a spear and went after them into their tent. Catching them together, he pierced them both with his spear, stopping the plague. Still, 24,000 men died, removing the last of the first generation. This incident is mentioned in **1st Corinthians 10:7,8** in connection with idolatry and immorality. Paul admonished the Corinthians not to engage in the same conduct that brought God's judgment to His people at Shittim.

SHABBAT SHALOM

Has America ceased to be a safe haven for the Jews?



The Jewish diaspora has lived through a string of mighty empires and world powers. Each, in turn, has fallen. Is the unthinkable happening again? Is America doomed?