



A relationship with YAH for personal gain

Parashat Balaq (40) – Balak

Torah: Bemidbar 22:2 to 25:9

Haftarah: Miḳah 5:8 to 6:8

Apostolic Scriptures: Romiyim 11:11:25-32

After nearly 40 years in the wilderness, with various obstacles, hardships, murmurings, but never without the provision of food and water, the new generation of *Yisra'el* stands on the eastern border of the promised land. Those with good eyesight can see from afar what 12 spies had personally seen and experienced several years earlier, something that caused a 2-week journey to become a journey of 40 years. The unfaithful generation may have all been wiped out by this time by disease, perhaps natural or other causes. This new generation, now already of the same age as their parents when the journey started, has not really complained any less, but they have hopefully learned from the mistakes their parents had made.

Despite the lack of modern means of communication that we are accustomed to, news still spread quickly. All the nations surrounding the children of *Yisra'el* knew what their Provider, the Creator *Elohim*, had done for them as a nation. They were aware of miracles such as the opening of the Sea of Reeds, daily provision of *man*, water that was supernaturally provided, and also skirmishes where *Yisra'el* was victorious. Even though these nations did not know YAH or had a covenant relationship with Him, they respected Him. They realised that *Yisra'el*'s King was a Force to be reckoned with.

One of these men was *Balaq*, the son of *Tsippor*. The name בַּלָּק (*ba-Laq*) translates as 'destroyer'. The name of his father, צִפּוֹר (*tzi-Por*), translates as 'bird'. It was the custom of the natives of *Midyan* to use the names of animals as a display of their power, hence we also see two other leaders of *Midyan* with names like עֲרֵב (*'o-Rev*), which translates as 'crow' and זֵאֵב (*ze-'Ev*), which translates as 'wolf' (cf. *Shophetim* 7:25). It is possible that these leaders of *Midyan* exploited the weaknesses of the *Mo'abites* and carried out a coup to take over the dynasty, since *Balaq* did not come from a royal lineage. However, they seem to fear fighting *Yisra'el* and try another method to weaken them before they even attempt war.

Although this *sidrah*'s original title is '*Balaq*', he does not play the main role. On the contrary, his role is initially inferior, but one of those without which the narrative would not be complete. *Balaq* is the cowardly type who cannot stand his ground himself and now has to rely on someone else to do his dirty work, just as we learned last week how the Romans did the Pharisees' dirty work. He may have thought that *Siḥon*, who had defeated them earlier (cf. 21:26), would also defeat the nation of *Yisra'el*. Since this did not happen, he sends messengers to *Bil'am*, the person in the main role, requesting that he comes to curse the nation of *Yisra'el*. In this way he hopes to force them to their knees after which he can beat them in a battle or that they will simply go away and leave him in peace.

After all, that is what devilish artists do: they twist the truth. Although he had already been instructed by YAH not to go with the first delegation, he now acts like a young child whining around an older person until he is relented. We see the answer:

Bemidbar 22 ²⁰ And Elohim came to Bil'am at night and said to him, "If the men come to call you, rise and go with them, but only the word which I speak to you that you do."

We learn a very important lesson from vv. 20 and 22, because in the original text and good translations, Bil'am did not wait until they called him – he went of his own accord: **כִּי הוֹלֵךְ הוּא** (*ki ho-Lech hu*), because he went. If the text had read **כִּי הָלַךְ** (*ki ha-Lach*), without the preposition **הוּא** (*hu* [pronounced hoo]), which translates as the masculine third person 'he', it would indicate that he went with the men under duress. For this reason YAH's anger burns and He sends a messenger who stands in the way of Bil'am's donkey three times. Sin blinds us to certain things and that is exactly what is happening here. We learn from Scripture that a dumb animal can see a messenger, but the messenger is hidden from Bil'am. We also know that YAH hides certain things from people or makes them visible as He wishes:

🏆 **Dani'el 10** ⁷ And I, Dani'el, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great trembling fell upon them, and they ran away to hide themselves.

🏆 **Ma'asei 9** ⁷ And the men journeying with him stood speechless, hearing indeed the voice but seeing no one.

Sin blinds us to such an extent that we sometimes confuse realities. Here, Bil'am is blinded to the messenger and does not even realise that he and the donkey are having a dialogue (22:22-27)! We saw the same evidence in our study two weeks ago with Qorach when the truth was hidden from many people (cf. *Luqas* 16:19-31), even after the ground split open and swallowed people. Only after Bil'am's spiritual eyes were opened could he face his evil and self-righteous course of action:

Bemidbar 22 ³² And the Messenger of יהוה said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? See, I have come out to stand against you, because your way is reckless before Me. ³³ "And the donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times. If she had not turned aside from Me, I certainly would have killed you by now, and let her live." ³⁴ And Bil'am said to the Messenger of יהוה, "I have sinned, for I did not know You stood in the way against me. And now, if evil is in Your eyes, let me turn back." [emphasis added]

We see evidence that Bil'am, regardless of his love for the reward of impartial honesty, would respect YAH and even be willing to disobey Balaq's request. Unfortunately, not all believers take this attitude, but continue in their wrong ways even though YAH is not pleased with them. May it be your desire, my dear brother and sister, to turn your life around and act only in YAH's favour. However, there is also another characteristic of Bil'am that we notice. He acts like the exorcists at the time of Yeshua, who cast out demons in his name but was not willing to follow him (cf. *Marqos* 9:38-39; *Luqas* 9:49). There was also Shim'on the magician¹ who deceived people; he even went so far as to say that he was the one who gave Moses all his laws and many people literally worshipped him! Under the guidance of the *talmid*, Philip, Shim'on repented, was baptised and then followed Yeshua fully (cf. *Ma'asei* 8:9-13). One commentator² puts it very well:

"Balaam is the pagan counterpart to Moses the man of God. The recovery of prophetic texts of Balaam in Aramaic from the sixth century at Deir-'Allah in Jordan shows how very famous this man was in the ancient Near East, even centuries after his death."

We are currently living in a world of chaos and although we see prophecy being fulfilled almost daily, there are still those who speak against it, even pray against it, or the dumb and ignorant, who do not want to see it. There are many who like to say: "YAH told me..." or "I received the following word from YAH ..." By

¹ Josephus: Antiquities of the Jews, book 20, hs. 7, part 2, p. 1128

² Allen, Ronald B. "Numbers.", p. 887: In Genesis—Numbers. Vol. 2 of The Expositor's Bible Commentary. 12 vols. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelein and Richard P. Polcyn. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990.

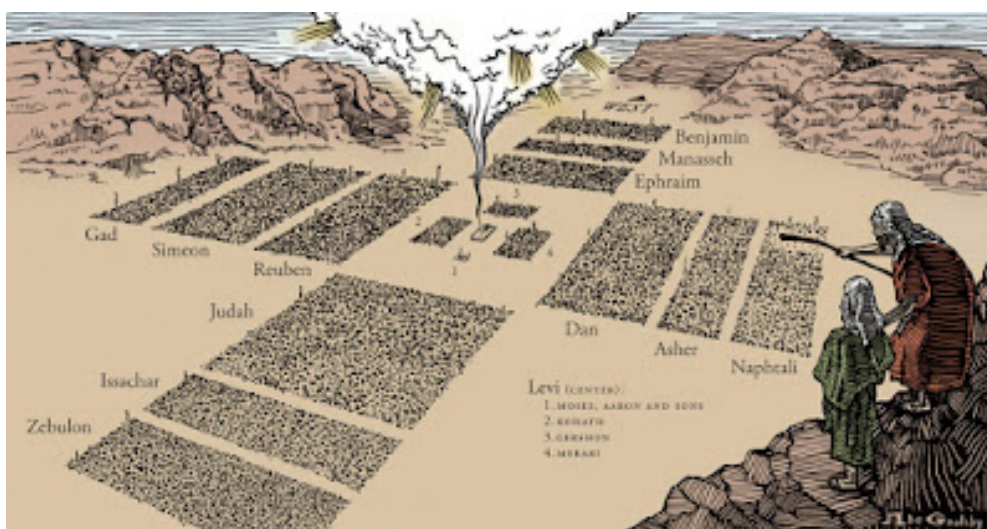
uttering words that we think may be prophecy, we are violating the third word, the third commandment and thereby bringing YAH's Character and Authority into disrepute. It is important that we rather play it safe and say: "I **think** YAH says..." or "**It may be** that YAH wants to make these words known..." Everyone will be judged on what he or she has said and if it turns out to be a false prophecy, there is a serious punishment awaiting that person.

Before *Bil'am* can utter the first words, *Balaq* offers a sacrifice of cattle and sheep to his idols, possibly also to gain the favour of YAH or to persuade *Bil'am* to say the words he wants to hear. Here we learn of another mistake that *Bil'am* makes, a mistake that we, as followers of *Yeshua*, should certainly not make: eating food that has been sacrificed to an idol. This would later also play a role in misleading the nation of *Yisra'el*:

🪦 *Mizmor 106* ²⁸ "And they joined themselves to *Ba'al Pe'or*, And ate slaughterings made to the dead.

🪦 *Ma'asei 15* ¹⁹ "Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the nations who are turning to *Elohim*, ²⁰ but that we write to them to abstain from the defilements of idols, and from whoring, and from what is strangled, and from blood. ²¹ "For from ancient generations *Mosheh* has, in every city, those proclaiming him – being read in the congregations every Sabbath."

Afterwards *Balaq* takes *Bil'am* to a high place, a *Mo'abite* place of worship for *Ba'al*, from where they can only see a portion of the nation of *Yisra'el*. The accompanying sketch is possibly what *Bil'am* could have seen during one of the pronouncements he delivers. *Balaq* is told to build seven altars so that seven bulls and rams can be sacrificed at the same time. What is taking place here is indeed a ritual of a religious nature, but not according to YAH's instructions. Any form of blessing or cursing would always be preceded by a sacrifice. One of the best examples in Scripture is where *Yitshaq* wanted to bless *Esau*, but it was snatched up by *Ya'aqob* (cf. *Bereshith* 27:6-41).



Abraham was called by YAH at a time long ago to move away from a pagan nation, to get away from the pagan system of the known world. He became the first *עֲבָרִי* (*iv-Ri*), Hebrew, from the root word *עָבַר* (*`a-Bar*), to pass over. He passed over from paganism to a way of life according to YAH's rules and institutions. He also received a very intimate promise from YAH:

Bereshith 12 ³ "And I shall bless those who bless you, and curse him who curses you. And in you all the clans of the earth shall be blessed."

The nation of *Yisra'el* is the nation that YAH created for Himself to walk according to the promises that He gives on various occasions and then the command: be set-apart because I am set-apart (cf. *Wayyiqra* 11:44; 20:7; *Kēpha Aleph* 1:15-16). This is therefore a nation blessed by YAH, despite their shortcomings and rebellious attitude. What YAH has blessed cannot be cursed by anyone else, in the words of *Bil'am* (cf. 23:20):

Bemidbar 23 ⁸“How do I curse whom *Ėl* has not cursed? And how do I rage at whom *יהוה* has not raged?

The first session did not go well for *Balaq*. Instead of the curse he wanted to have pronounced on *Yisra'el*, they were blessed! He decided to take *Bil'am* to another place, the top of mount *Pisgah*. This is in the field of *Tsophim*, a lookout tower that was used during wars to see enemy forces approaching in advance and also the place where *Mosheh* would later die. From here, a little less of the people were visible than at the previous place, but again *Balaq* built his seven altars and sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams as before. As if *Balaq* did not believe that *Bil'am* really brought the word of *YAH*, he had the audacity to ask him what *YAH* had said! The words with which *Bil'am* began, however, were not what *Balaq* wanted to hear, because it went against his wishes that *YAH* should not change his mind:

Bemidbar 23 ¹⁹*Ėl* is not a man, to lie; nor a son of man, to repent! Has He said, and would He not do it; or spoken, and would not confirm it?

The second statement that *Bil'am* makes, just like the first, begins with a critical assumption of *Balaq's* theological assumption that *YAH* can be manipulated by people. However, *Bil'am* sees that *Yisra'el* is blessed by *YAH* and He walks as King among His people (23:21). The exodus from *Mitsrayim* was an excellent example of the way in which *YAH* cares for *Yisra'el* and provides for them (23:22). The future of *Yisra'el* is as bright as the past was (23:23-24). However, *Balaq* is still full of courage that a breakthrough may come somewhere and takes *Bil'am* to a third location, a place from which he can see the entire camp of the people. It is here that *YAH's* Spirit comes upon him:

Bemidbar 24 ²And *Bil'am* lifted up his eyes and saw *Yisra'el* encamped according to their tribes. And the Spirit of *Elohim* came upon him.

The same sacrifices as before are offered again, but here *Bil'am* realises that his previous methods will not work – nothing can compete with the Spirit of *YAH*. We also see three other witnesses who confirm exactly what *Bil'am* is saying:

☞ *Shemu'el Aleph 15* ²⁹“Moreover, the Eminence of *Yisra'el* does not lie nor relent. For He is not a man, that He should relent.”

☞ *Iyob 9* ³²For He is not a man as I am that I answer Him, and we come together into right-ruling.

☞ *Hosh'ea 11* ⁹“I shall not let the heat of My wrath burn, I shall not turn to destroy *Ephrayim*. For I am *Ėl*, and not man, the Set-apart One in your midst, and I shall not come in enmity.

Scripture does not lie nor does it speak against itself. The most high *YAH* can never contradict Himself or change His mind. The nonsensical idea that *YAH* changed Himself into a human being and came to earth is caused mainly by deception and confusion of mistranslations, most of which was brought in by the Roman Catholic harlot church. These people do not understand that the term *אֱלֹהִים* (*e-lo-him*) is not only used for *YAH*, but can also refer to His messengers and ordinary people. When we study Scripture from translations, many terms are deliberately mistranslated and cause confusion. One of the biggest problems created by this is the concept that *YAH* came to earth as a man in the flesh, was killed, and then resurrected Himself. The *Torah* teaches us very clearly that *YAH* is not a human being, therefore cannot be born or die, much less be resurrected. When we entertain this thought of *YAH*, we not only limit His omnipotence as the Supreme Being, but we also violate the third word (commandment) by belittling His Name. However, He can reveal Himself through a human being, but can never become that human being, because every human being has limitations, something which *YAH* doesn't have.

During this third opportunity that *Bil'am* gets to curse *Yisra'el*, he brings out more truth than ever. In the previous verse we read “the man whose eyes were opened”, but this doesn't really make sense until we study the next verse:

Bemidbar 24 ¹⁶the heavenly revelation of him who hears the words of *Ĕl*, and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty, who falls down, with eyes opened wide:³

The term “who falls down, with eyes opened wide” immediately lets us understand that this person is in a supernatural state during which he receives the revelations from *YAH* – possibly a prophetic trance or a type of sleep, as he falls down in worship before the Most High and a supernatural presence comes over him. Refer to what *Adam* had gone through when *Hawwah* was taken from his side. However, even though someone’s eyes are uncovered, does not mean that the person can physically see, perhaps not even spiritually. From the Vulgate we see the true meaning, he with his eyes closed. This is another one of those descriptions of the *Targum* that has been misinterpreted and most translators have just followed blindly.

The third time that *Bil’am* utters words, it is not only blessings, but also a foreshadowing of the troubles that *Mo’ab* would later experience, as well as a double prophecy: one prophecy concerning *Dawid* and his eternal rule, as well as a Messianic prophecy, the future king who would be born of the tribe of *Yehudah*. Most of *Bil’am*’s words describe *Mo’ab*’s downfall, as well as that of *Amalēq*, the *Qēynites*, *Asshur*, and *Ĕber*. His task, he says, is now finished, so he rises and he and *Balaq* go their separate ways.

In summary, we see all three of *Bil’am*’s statements as a reaffirmation of the promises *YAH* made to *Yisra’ēl* through *Abraham*, a testimony of a partial fulfillment thus far in the nation’s history:

- The first statement refers to the seed (23:10);
- The second statement points to the promised land (23:22-23);
- The third statement indicates the promise of blessing (24:9).

Although *Bil’am*’s presence stops here, he advises *Balaq* to bring the nation down in another way (*cf.* 31:16). The people of *Mo’ab* and the people of *Midyan* act as allies and decide on a cunning plan. Seduce the men of *Yisra’ēl* to get involved with the women of *Mo’ab* – something that *YAH* will certainly not approve of. There is no rule that *Yisra’ēl*’s men could not marry *Mo’ab*’s women; after all, they are distant relatives. However, this was nothing less than adultery and lust. *Bil’am* could have walked away with a pat on the back, but he brought about equalisation, assimilation. It is like modern interfaith movements in christianity, teaching that different paths lead to *Elohim* and therefore also to salvation. It blinds people to reach agreements that depict a lifestyle without any moral values. Everything is fine, as long as it is done in love, according to them. This nullifies *YAH*’s value and the integrity of the nation collapses. This was *Bil’am*’s greatest sin, because *YAH*’s people had to live a set-apart lifestyle at all times, not mingle with pagan nations. These problems that *Yisra’ēl* now bring upon themselves, have consequences even in the Apostolic Scriptures:

Hazon 2 ¹⁴“But I hold a few *matters* against you, because you have there those who adhere to the teaching of *Bil’am*, who taught *Balaq* to put a stumbling-block before the children of *Yisra’ēl*, to eat *food* offered to idols, and to commit whoring. ¹⁵“So you also have those who adhere to the teaching of the *Nikolaites*, which *teaching* I hate. ¹⁶“Repent, or else I shall come to you speedily and fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

Even if men of *Yisra’ēl* had officially married women of *Mo’ab*, it would still be considered adultery, since *YAH*’s people were to remain set apart. However, it does not stop at adultery, for the *Ba’al* of *Pe’or* is now worshipped as well (25:2, 3). This is followed by a slightly ambiguous verse. The first possibility is that *Mosheh* is instructed by *YAH* that the leaders of the people should kill all offenders and hang them in the sun – this would be by impalement or on a cross. A public execution is always very effective, because it makes potential offenders realise what consequences await them. On the one hand, we see how *YAH*’s anger burns against the people, but on the other hand, how He instructs *Mosheh* to turn His anger away.

³ The words in black text have been changed in this verse to conform to the Hebrew text.

This teaches us that YAH judges in impartial sincerity with immense compassion. The offenders do not deserve to be saved from the plague, but there is a way out through YAH's favour.

Another possibility that some commentators bring up and may also be more likely is that it was only the leaders who were publicly executed to show the rest of the people the sin they were committing. Leaders who indulge in sin should be the first to be judged, not the rest of the people. A leader who transgresses publicly should be publicly condemned in order to teach the people to fear the consequences of sin and to serve YAH with reverence. Regardless of which camp interprets these verses correctly, 1 in every 25 of the people died: 24 000 people. *Sha'ul* mentions 23 000 (cf. *Qorintiyim Aleph* 10:8), which leads some commentators to think that *Pinehas* and his messengers killed 1 000 leaders, while the plague that YAH sent among the people would kill 23 000 of the people.

Regardless of who did what and how the totals are calculated, adultery and idolatry remain sins and cause serious consequences. We see two strong admonitions that are not to be ignored:

1. *Qorintiyim Aleph* 6 ¹⁸Flee whoring. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits whoring sins against his own body.
2. *Qorintiyim Aleph* 10 ¹⁴Therefore, my beloved ones, flee from idolatry.

Pinehas, son of *El'azar*, the priest and grandson of *Aharon*, was a man of action and in his zeal for YAH had had enough of what was happening. When he saw *Zimri*, a leader from the tribe of *Shim'on*, openly entering a tent with *Kozbi*, a princess of *Midyan*, he immediately took action. It is striking that *Zimri* had no respect for the covenant, the tabernacle, the priests or for YAH's judgment on the leaders. We will discuss this event in depth next week, in the will of YAH.

There is a Hebrew expression frequently used by commentators in *parashat lech lecha*: מַעֲשֵׂה אֲבוֹת סִימָן לְהִנּוֹם (*ma'aseh avot siman labanim*): "The deeds of the fathers are a sign to the children." *Bil'am* was later remembered by the prophets as a stern warning to *Yisra'el* to remain set apart from the pagan nations and to abhor their idolatry (cf. *Mikah* 6:5; *Nechemyah* 13:1-3). The Apostolic Scriptures speak of "the way of *Bil'am* , the son of *Be'or*, who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (cf. *Kěpha Bět* 2:15), "*Bil'am*'s deception" (cf. *Yehudah* 1:11), and "the teaching of *Bil'am*, who taught *Balaq* to cast a stumbling block before the children of *Yisra'el*" (cf. *Hazon* 2:14). Note that the teaching of *Bil'am* is coupled with the debauched "doctrine of the *Nicolaitans* which men hold" to pursue their own ecclesiastical/spiritual desires (cf. *Hazon* 2:6, 14-15).

May it please YAH to help us to love the truth honestly and to keep us far away from the error of *Bil'am*!

Shabbat shalom!

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Sources:

We prefer to not use the word 'God', because of personal conviction. In most cases, unless quoted from another source, it will be replaced by '*Elohim*' or inflections of the same word.

All citing of Scripture is taken from The Scriptures 2009, unless indicated differently.⁴

⁴ <https://isr-messianic.org/>

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