Parashah #40
(Updated for 7.9.11)

Balak ~ בלק ~ Destroyer, Devastator
Torah: B'midbar/Numbers 22:2~25:9
Haftarah: Mikhah/Micah 5:6~6:8
B'rit Hadashah: Kefa Bet/2nd Peter 2:1-22;
Y'hudah/Jude 11; Revelation 2:14-15

For whatever reason, this wasn't one of the OH WOW! (parah-shoat) Parashot, for me. In fact, it was pretty much the eleventh hour before I felt Yehovah had given me some understanding into a few of the matters we will get into. In my opinion, the portion should be called Bil'am because he is the central figure. However, the practice of naming a portion after the first few words has remained so the portion is called Balak.

CHAPTER 22

First of all, in verses 2-4, King (Bah-lahk) ***Balak***, meaning ***destroyer*** or ***devastator***, was shaking in his boots at this stage of the game. He had heard of the vast numbers who were headed his way. He was also aware of the acts Isra'el committed in completely destroying the (Eh-mor-eem) ***Emorim/Amorites***. At this point, the fame and reputation of Yehovah was becoming more and more known among the tribes of ***Kena'an/Canaan***. The offspring of Avraham were gaining a name for themselves: "the dreadful people who have come out of Egypt."

So, here is the mighty "destroyer" Balak, who sends for a man, (B'lahm) ***Bil'am/Balaam***, which means ***"not of the people"***. Balak wants to destroy Isra'el and he chose a prophet, not of Yehovah and not of the people of Isra'el, as a way to accomplish this feat. Although Bil'am was a false prophet, he had knowledge of Yehovah, who dealt with him on a personal level.

Needless to say, not everyone who calls on the name of Yehovah is a good guy. It is possible to know about Yehovah and even think or suppose "Yehovah is on my side" while being quite godless. History is blanketed with endless examples of religious leaders, or those who claimed to be religious leaders, who believed they were doing Yehovah a favor by persecuting Israel and His Chosen People. Apparently, ***Bil'am/Balaam*** was their forerunner. He talked the talk but his heart was full of malice and greed.

In Mattityahu/Matthew 7:21-23, Yeshua said, "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do what my Father in heaven wants. On that Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?' Then I will tell them in their faces, 'I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of **lawlessness**." (meaning Torah-less-ness or anti-Torah)

Bottom line: Bil'am was a wicked, wicked man. While ***B'midbar/Numbers*** doesn't state so specifically, passages in the B'rit Hadashah and rabbinic legend attest to that fact. Though he seemed to be godly and well meaning, claiming to only speak what the Yehovah put into his mouth, let's not be deceived by his fake holiness. When he set out, he had every intention of cursing Israel and he did his best to do so. (***In reality, he was more interested in the "PROF-IT" motive than the "PROPHET" motive.***) The blessings he spoke over Israel were words Yehovah put in his mouth against his will.

Let's check out a few verses. Verse 7: the leaders of (Mo-ahv) ***Mo'av/Moab*** and (Mid-yahn) ***Midyan/Midian***, (current day Jordan and Saudi Arabia) approached him with an undisclosed amount of payment for "divining" (speaking a curse over something or someone) per Balak's instructions. Bil'am asks them to stay the night, saying he will give them the answer as Yehovah instructs him. Verses 9-12 Yehovah wants to know what's going on, as if He didn't know, so Bil'am tells Him! And the answer is . . . "You are **NOT** to go with them; you are **NOT** to curse the people, because they are blessed." Seems pretty, cut and dried, clear to me!

Bil'am gets up the next morning, tells the dudes he can't go with **them**, which had an implication perhaps others of higher rank and additional payment might change his mind. Verses 15-20: Balak complies and sends princes of higher status assuring Bil'am if he comes he will be rewarded very well. Again Bil'am assures them he can only speak what Yehovah speaks regardless of the reward. What he says in verse 18 blows me away! "I cannot go beyond the word of ***Yehovah my God*** to do anything, great or small." Yehovah was no more his God than a hill of beans!!! Again Bil'am asks the princes to stay the night so he can find out what else Yehovah has to say. Now pay attention!!! Yehovah came to Bil'am and said "if the men have come to summon you, get up and go with them; but do only what I tell you." (verse 20) Yehovah has just given Bil'am permission to go, correct?

Verse 21 points to Bil'am's self-centeredness as well as his greed. Here is a man of substantial standing with two servants, yet he saddles his own donkey! Why? Because he was in a hurry to get down the road to see what wealth he might obtain!

Then verse 22 states: "Yehovah's anger flared up because he went". HELP ME!!! I don't understand!!! Didn't Yehovah just give him permission? Finally, I asked and this is what He shared with me. After all the conversations with Bil'am, it was apparent that Yehovah's ***perfect will*** was stated in verse 12 when Yehovah said "You are not to go with them." What happened in verse 22 was Yehovah's ***permissive will***. Yehovah's permissive will is not always best. It always carries the consequences of not following His perfect will.

In verses 22-35, we all know about the "talking donkey" and this was WAY before Mr. Ed appeared on TV! It is amazing Bil'am doesn't even think it incredible to have a conversation with a donkey! This must be considered the blindness of material lust! Even the incredible seems dull in comparison to hearts of greed.

As I reread verses 22-35 I became curious about the terminology of "the angel of Yehovah". It doesn't say "an angel" but "***the*** angel". Verse 32 says ". . . you are rushing to oppose **me**", and again in verse 35 "the angel of the Yehovah" says ". . . you are to say only what ***I*** tell you to say." Am I being too bold to say I believe "the angel of Yehovah" was none other than Yeshua, himself? Otherwise, how could the angel have said ". . . you are to say only what ***I*** tell you to say."? Didn't Yeshua proclaim He and the Father were one? (Yochanan/John 10:30)

Another interesting fact has to do with the original (eve-reet) ***Ivrit/Hebrew***. The phrase "the angel" is used and in Hebrew "**the**" uses the "**alef**" (א) and the "**tav**" (ת), which are the "first" and the "last" letters of the Hebrew ***alefbet/alphabet***. This coincides with the Greek "alpha and omega" in Revelation 22:13 "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." Since Yeshua was Jewish, He most likely said, "I am the Alef and the Tav". Another one of those "hidden in plain sight" signs of Yeshua in the Torah, in Hebrew, no less!

One other little tidbit from those verses (21-35). "The angel of Yehovah" in The Complete Jewish Bible appears nine times. Some of the "meanings" for the number nine are:

- The number of finality
- The number of judgment
- The number of the Holy Spirit
- (There are nine fruits of the Spirit)
- (There are nine gifts of the Spirit)

One of the most interesting features of nine is the sum of the digits which form nine are always a multiple of nine. For example:

- 2 X 9 = 18 (1 + 8 = 9)
- 3 X 9 = 27 (2 + 7 = 9)
- 4 X 9 = 36 (3 + 6 = 9)
- 5 X 9 = 45 (4 + 5 = 9)
- 6 X 9 = 54 (5 + 4 = 9)
- 7 X 9 = 63 (6 + 3 = 9)
- 8 X 9 = 72 (7 + 2 = 9)
- 9 X 9 = 81 (8 + 1 = 9)
- This is also true of larger numbers: 684,329 X 9 = 6,158,961

(and 6 + 1 + 5 +8 + 9 + 6 + 1 = 36 and 3 + 6 = 9) Okay, enough trivia!!!

A final note on this chapter: Verse 41 says Balak took Bil'am to the high places, the altars of (Bah-ahl) Ba'al and from there, Bil'am could see **a portion of the people**. Keep this thought in mind because I think, a little later on, we might be able to understand more about this.

CHAPTER 23

Back to our Parashah . . . Three different places in B'midbar/Numbers 23, specifically verses 1, 15 and 29, we have sacrifices. On seven altars, a bull and a ram were offered each time. Didn't we just talk about the relevance of threes and sevens last week? Three is the number of . . .

- restoration and resurrection
- strength
- stability and balance
- Divine completeness
- perfect testimony
- abundant witness.

Wow!!! Do those ever fit this portion of scripture! Then the number seven implies . . .

- spiritual perfection
- and completeness.

One commentary indicated Bil'am prefaced every attempt at cursing Isra'el by building seven altars and slaughtering seven sacrifices, alluding to a significant symbolism. Seven people in history had erected altars to Yehovah:

- Adam
- Abel
- Noah
- Abraham
- Isaac
- Jacob
- Moses

Bil'am said to Yehovah, wouldn't it be better for seventy nations to serve you, instead of only one (Isra'el)? By ignoring Bil'am's argument, Yehovah demonstrated He chooses not numbers but sincerity. According to Yehovah, massive sacrifices by seventy nations are insignificant in comparison with Isra'el's dedication to the Torah.

In verses 7-10, we see Bil'am's first attempt at cursing Isra'el becoming a blessing. And, in verses 18-24 Bil'am blesses Isra'el again. In verse 22 Bil'am says Yehovah gives Isra'el "the strength of a wild ox" and again in B'midbar/Numbers 24:8. This coincides with Tehillim / Psalm 92:11.

This time, in verse 13, Balak says, "All right, come with me to another place where you can see them. You will **see only some of them, not all**; but you can curse them for me from there."

CHAPTER 24
(This chapter is SO prophetic, I can hardly stand it!!!!)

"Bil'am raised his eyes and **saw Isra'el encamped tribe by tribe**." (verse 2) This is the third and final time there is mention concerning Bil'am seeing B'nei Israel. Before we begin our Haftarah, I will remind you about these verses.

Bil'am's third blessing occurs in verses 1-9.

A couple of Hebrew names for Yehovah are introduced;

- first in verse 4, ***Shaddai*** is used, which means ***Almighty***
- and in verse 16 ***Elyon*** meaning ***Most High***.

Oh yes, did you notice in verse 5 the ***Ma ToVu***? This is where Bil'am finally acts in accord with the Word of Yehovah. The ***Ruach HaKodesh/Holy Spirit*** comes upon him and opens his eyes and mouth! The blessing which he utters is most significant. In fact, it was so impactful, it was placed in the Siddur (Hebrew prayer book) and is recited every Shacharit (morning prayer time).

"Ma tovu ohalecha Ya'akov mishkanotecha Yisra'el!"
(How lovely are your tents, Ya'akov; your dwelling places, Isra'el!)

This must have stunned the evil king of ***Mo'av/Moab***, as well as shocked Bil'am into reality. What he was seeking to do, was not only an abomination to Yehovah but he was powerless against Yehovah's Chosen Ones! After all, Yehovah is a covenant-keeping God. He has promised to uphold His called-out ones in blessing and not condemnation. He will not allow anyone pronounce anything contrary to the plans and purposes He has for them. He alone is in control of their destiny!

Several years ago, I made the comment of ***Ma ToVu*** being the only gentile prayer in the Hebrew prayer book, the Siddur. To which my "Brother" Lynn sent the following:

- ***I think this might need some more thought. Here is the way I see it. The voice used may have been that of a Gentile but it was not a Gentile prayer. Case in point: Num. 22:38 ". . . am I empowered to say anything? Whatever word <u>God puts into my mouth</u> that shall I speak. And Num. 24:2, 3, & 5 ". . . and the <u>SPIRIT of God was upon him He declaimed this parable</u> and said . . . . MaToVu. To me this is not a Gentile prayer in the Siddur, rather it is a proclamation by the Spirit. That is not to say I'm opposed to Gentile prayers in the Siddur; I just don't think this can be labeled as such. Just my thoughts.***

(Having given thought to the above, I stand corrected. 'Tis a good thing to have a "Li'l Bro" who loves Torah as much as I do.)

The last half of this chapter is quite prophetic! Verse 17 speaks of (Ha Mah-she-ahk) ***Ha Mashiach/The Messiah***. In part, "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not soon – a star will step forth . . . a scepter will arise". Wow! This is good stuff!!!

Often, we fail to see the prophetic because the biblical names are used for the nations instead of the current day names. Verses 12-25 speak of **<u>nations who will afflict Isra'el for a time and</u>**

then they will be destroyed. They are ***Mo'av/Moab***, Amalek, ***Keini/Kenites***, and ***Kittim/Chittim***. This is an (ah-khar-reet hah yah meem) ***acharit hayamim/last days*** event.

- Mo'av is within the kingdom of **Jordan.**
- Amalek is most probably a reference to the present day **Palestinians**.
- The Keini are probably, in their most pure form, the Arabs in the area of Israel, who are still friendly with Israel. They will also suffer with Israel and need to remain strong.
- Kittim speaks of **Greece, Macedonia, Italy and other coastal European peoples of the Mediterranean.**

In the days of the (tahl-m'deem) ***talmidim/apostles,*** (She-moan Kay-fah) ***Shimon Kefa/Simon Peter*** compared Bil'am to those who "loved the wages of unrighteousness." (Kefa Bet/2nd Peter 2:15). They felt Bil'am was an example of a man who misused religious authority for his own profit. Speaking of such people, Jude, the brother of ***Ya'akov/James*** and half-brother of Yeshua, says "for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Bil'am". (Y'hudah/Jude 11) Bil'am's error was his obedience to greed rather than Yehovah. Remember when Yeshua's rage at the Temple caused him to overturn the tables of the money-changers? It was because they were using the sacred for dishonest gain! Some refer to Bil'am of ***Pethor/soothsayer*** as a Bil'am of ***Petor/money-changer*** because the kings of the nations rushed to him for counsel in the same way people rush to a money-changer to change their currency.

As we read in Kefa Bet/2nd Peter 2:16, we know Bil'am's own donkey speaks to him with the voice of a man to "restrain the madness of the prophet". There's an interesting parallel here as "the angel of Yehovah" blocks the donkey three times which, some say, corresponds with the three attempts made to curse Israel.

Still, Bil'am refers to himself as "the man whose eye is opened" verse 4 and as the man "who knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty . . . having his eyes uncovered." (verses 15 & 16). He is so full of himself!!! He is the model of spiritual pride. He sees himself as righteous but his donkey disagrees with his self-assessment.

We are told of Bil'am's anger when his donkey veers off course and how he beats this poor animal out of his anger. When we face situations in which we become angry, how do we respond? What does the Word have to say about how to handle our anger? In Ya'akov/James 1:19-20, we read, "My dear brothers, let every person be quick to listen but slow to speak, slow to get angry; for a man's anger does not accomplish Yehovah's righteousness."

Bil'am, the man who "sees clearly the vision of the Almighty with eyes open" does not see as clearly as his donkey. May Yehovah open our eyes and may we avoid Bil'am's error of greed and spiritual pride.

CHAPTER 25

Our Torah portion ends with an incredible story of brazenness and debauchery on one hand and righteous indignation and bravery on the other. The only times the Torah speaks of Yehovah's anger as ***wrath*** is when it is provoked by immorality. Chapter 25:1-9 tells of the "whoring with the women of ***Mo'av/Moab."*** According to Revelation 2:14, Bil'am told Balak he could overcome Isra'el if he could entice B'nei Isra'el to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication. This is exactly what happened and a plague began to spread throughout the camp. The judges were told to kill those who had committed these atrocities. Many of Isra'el came to the Tabernacle and repented, weeping bitterly. About the same time, one of the Israelites, calloused by his sin, in the sight of all who were present, brought one of the Midianite women to be passed around as a sex toy among some of the other men. The new ***Cohen HaGadol/High Priest,*** El'azar's son, (Pink-ahs) ***Pinchas/Phineas***, went into their tent, took a spear and ran it through the bellies of both the man and woman. Without getting explicit, it is apparent these two were in the act of fornication for Pinchas to accomplish this feat. This act of bravery stopped the plague but not before 24,000 had died.

The Apostle ***Yochanan/John*** warned us against "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life" (1st John 2:16). HaSatan uses three temptations to trip up a man: sexual lust, greed for money or the love of power. He might use any combination of those three. The "lust of the flesh" is sexual lust, passion and lack of self-control, which manifests in sins like gluttony and sensuality. The "lust of the eyes" is covetousness, greed, ambition and materialism. The "boastful pride of life" is selfishness and haughtiness, which results in striving for position, abusing power and misusing people. The Apostle John says these things are of the world and perishing with the world. "The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of Yehovah lives forever" (1st John 2:17). The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life may indeed be passing away, but it doesn't diminish their current allure.

This is a common ploy on HaSatan's part. If he can lure a believer into fellowship with worldly people and spark some romantic interest in an unbelieving member of the opposite gender, he can successfully snuff out the flame of faith. The Apostle Peter warns us, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1st Peter 5:8). The devil does not have permission to harm us, but he can trick us into harming ourselves. When we succumb to the "lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life" (1st John 2:16), we do HaSatan's work for him.

We need to show the ruthless zeal of ***Pinchas/Phineas*** in our war against the lusts of our own flesh, lest we step into HaSatan's snares. After all, HaSatan does not have the power to curse us, but we have the power to bring down curses on ourselves.

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I want to draw you back to the three times Bil'am saw **"a portion"** (22:41), **"only some of them, not all"** (23:13) and **"saw Isra'el encamped tribe by tribe"** (24:2). Do you remember back when we studied the placement of the tribes and their marching order? At the time, I told

you Yehovah had impressed upon me the shape of the Star of David for their encampment. As I have been studying this Torah portion, it seems to me this form of encampment is one of the reasons Balak was so fearful. I'm sure the encampment seemed to stretch from sunrise to sunset. And how else would Bil'am be able to see them tribe by tribe? If they were in a straight line, one tribe would stop where another began; there would be no dividing lines. Just some musings on my part.

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In our studies concerning Bil'am, we find the Torah is against Bil'am; the Sages are against Bil'am and the Brit Hadashah is against Bil'am. Though I usually don't give a great deal of weight to Rabbinic/Sage teachings, there are some which make a great deal of sense. As I understand it, the Rabbis observed Bil'am knew much about Yehovah, including His sacred name. However, in spite of this intimate knowledge of Yehovah, Bil'am still resorted to his own demonic idolatrous practices. Granted, he refused to curse Israel upon Balak's request BUT was it because of his love and awe of Yehovah or because he feared Yehovah's power to overcome his own deities to which he still wanted to cling?

In these last days, I believe, we will see more and more manifestations of Bil'am. While many will profess to know Yehovah, they will continue to operate with their own spiritual powers calling upon the angels to complete what they have begun. Woe be to those of us who would turn our heads and hearts to the "doings" of man instead of the "still small voice" of the Holy One of Israel.

Balak ~ בלק~ Destroyer, Devastator
<u>Haftarah</u>: Mikhah/Micah 5:6~6:8

Micah's prophecy recalls some of the ways Yehovah protected Isra'el during its forty years in the Wilderness. Enemies of Isra'el will be torn to pieces as a lion tears to pieces forest animals in it's wake (Mikah/Micah 5:7[8]) One of the incidents mentioned by him is Balak's plan to have Bil'am curse Isra'el and Bil'am's advice to use lewdness as the bait to lure Israel into idolatry. Quite an appropriate Haftarah for our Torah portion. Specifically, Micah 6:5 makes a direct connection to the corresponding Torah reading.

Micah urges his listeners to remember the episode of Balak and Bil'am. Instead of Bil'am placing a curse on Isra'el, as much as he may have wanted to, he could do nothing but bless Yehovah's people. Micah recites this story to encourage (Ahm Yisra'el) ***Am Yisra'el/people of Israel***. Despite the stiff sentence of trials and tribulation levied on these people, Yehovah will, in the end, carry out His promised blessings for them and to them.

But being special carries with it a price tag, a responsibility. As the (nah-vee-ee) ***Naviy/Prophet*** instructs them in Chapter 6:8, "Human being, you have already been told what is good, what Yehovah demands of you – no more than to act justly, love grace and walk in purity with your Yehovah." What is interesting is the responsibilities take the form of verbs! ACT . . .

LOVE . . . WALK . . . This is the heritage of Yehovah's people: obediently living out the Torah in our lives! As we read in the latter part of the Torah portion, some of the people broke obedience with Yehovah and allowed themselves to be carried away with their lustful passions in committing harlotry! Oy vey!

Balak ~ בלק~ Destroyer, Devastator
B'rit Hadashah: Kefa Bet/2nd Peter 2:1-22;
Y'hudah/Jude 11; Revelation 2:14-15

Kefa Bet/2nd Peter 2:1-22 Specifically, verses 15 & 16 address the very issues addressed in B'midbar/Numbers 22:6 and 23:7. Bil'am was rebuked for his sin when Yehovah spoke through Bil'am's donkey. Then Bil'am spoke a blessing on Israel which included the Messianic promise of the "star out of ***Ya'akov/Jacob***" (B'midbar/Numbers 24:17).

According to the Mishna . . . "The characteristics of the (tahl-m'deem) ***talmidim/disciples*** of Bil'am the wicked, are an evil eye (i.e. stinginess or greed), a haughty spirit and a proud soul . . . (They) inherit Gey-Hinnom and descend to the pit of destruction." (Avot 5:19)

Y'hudah/Jude 11 This verse speaks specifically about the "error of Bil'am", who was willing to curse the ***people of Israel/Am Isra'el*** for money. Furthermore, Jude gives several examples of the worst type of godless people which includes ***Kayin/Cain, Korach/Korah*** and ***Bil'am/Balaam***. These, he says, are godless!

Revelation 2:14-15 Very boldly these two verses refer to our Torah portion entitled Balak. As mentioned earlier, Bil'am was unable to curse Isra'el as Balak hired him to do, Bil'am made up for it by counseling the king of ***Mo'av/Moab*** to engage Israel in idolatry and harlotry by setting a trap for the children of Israel so they would eat food which had been sacrificed to idols and commit sexual sin.

An alternative understanding of these verses and verse 20, based on the Tanakh's frequent figurative use of the word translated "sexual sin"; the Israelites ate food sacrificed to idols, joining in idolatrous worship, consequently "committing adultery" against Yehovah – that is, they became apostate. Is this any different from those who refuse obedience to the book Yeshua taught from . . . the Torah? Remember, He changes not! What was idolatry then is still idolatry today . . . to Him!

The designated Psalm for this Torah portion is: Psalm 79

Next week's lesson: Parashah #41

Pinchas ~ פינחס ~ Phinehas

Torah: B'midbar/Numbers 25:10~30:1 (29:40)
Haftarah: M'lakhim Alef/1st Kings 18:46~19:21
B'rit Hadashah: Mattityahu/Matthew 26:1-30; Mark 14:1-26; Luke 22:1-20; Yochanan/John 2:13-22; 7:1-13; 7:37-39; 11:55-12:1; 13:1; 18:28, 39; 19:14; Acts 2:1-21; 12:3-4; 20:5-6, 16; 27:9-11; 1st Corinthians 5:6-8; 16:8; Ivrim/Hebrews 11:28

Who fills his mind with Torah clears it of fear and folly.
Rabbi Chanina Sgan HaKohanim

The giving of Torah happened at one specific time, but the receiving of Torah happens all the time, in every generation.
Meir Alter, the Gerer Rebbe

Organize yourselves into classes for the study of Torah, since it can best be acquired in association with others.
Talmud: Berkot 63b

Shavuah tov (have a good week)!!!