

Parashat Balak (Numbers 22:2-25:9)

The title for **Parashat Balak** comes from the first verse of the Scripture portion:

vaiyar Balak, ben-Tzippor, et kol-asher-asah Yisra'el, la'emori.

Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.
Numbers 22:2

This parasha is named for a king of Moab who hired Balaam to curse Israel. Balak and Balaam were just two more in a long line of men who have thought that Israel can be cursed. What we learn in this Scripture portion is that Israel is G-d's chosen - and the machinations of men will not get in the way of His purposes for her. "*Balak*" means "to destroy." So much for ***that*** Balak...

One would think that those who read and study Scripture could easily see this and recognize the futility of separating Israel from the promises and blessings of G-d - and yet the centuries since Messiah walked on earth have been filled with theologies which seek to explain away what this portion affirms: ***that Israel is the focal point of G-d's blessings toward man.***

Every day, in countless synagogues and homes, the morning prayers are preceded with a song called *Ma Tovvu*. The first line from this beautiful song first came from the mouth of a ***pagan wizard*** - but they were the words that the Holy One, blessed is He, put there. Even the intended curses of man bless Israel.

Ma tovu ohalecha, Ya'akov, mishkenotecha, Yisrael!

How good are thy tents, oh Jacob, thy tabernacles Israel!

***Va'ani, berov chasdecha avo veitecha, eshtachaveh el heichal kodshecha
b'yiratecha.***

And in Thy great compassion, I will come into Your house, there I will bow, there
I will fear, Thy holiness...

As believers in Messiah, we of all people should understand the significance of the blessing that G-d has pronounced upon the physical descendants of Jacob. Yet, it seems that throughout our history there has been a persistent drive to curse those to whom G-d has made everlasting promises. When people who *claim* to know the Jewish Messiah seek to remove themselves from under the tents of Jacob they will find out someday that ***there are no blessings outside of those tents*** and those dwellings. Our only hope lies only ***within*** that camp of Israel - and the only way to find your way into that camp is in the ***Jewish*** Messiah. Because He is Messiah and Savior for the nations will never erase the fact that He is the ***Jewish*** Messiah. If you hope to sit at His table in the World to Come, get used to the idea that you will be a part of an Israelite family.

A serious warning is leveled even at those who *claim* that they know the Master when we read the exchange between Balak and Balaam:

"Come, curse Jacob for me, and come, denounce Israel!"

*"How shall I curse whom G-d has **not** cursed? And how shall I denounce whom HaShem has **not** denounced?"*

Numbers 22:7b-8

Even the pagan wizard Balaam knows enough about the truth to understand that to oppose Israel is to oppose the Almighty. Some so-called theologians will have to answer for their theologies and pronouncements against Israel someday. Our own nation will have to answer some day for the support of those who negate or steal the inheritance of the descendants of Jacob. No matter what political party, no matter what religion - denouncing Israel is ***the most serious thing a nation can do***. Add America to the growing list of countries that have made that serious error. Those who follow the Master should be very alarmed at some of the policies of America toward Israel in the quest for "Middle East Peace." We are on very thin ice. If there is one thing sure on earth it is this: ***Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the descendants of Jacob - the place of the Throne of David. Giving it away to terrorists is not only stupid in human terms, in biblical terms, it is fatal.***

No American President, no Palestinian terrorist, no European Prime Minister can oppose G-d in this - and they have been warned not to try. ***If America opposes Israel, you don't want to be an American.***

As well, some who think that "Faith in Jesus" ensures them of an inheritance - and at the same time deny the G-d-given inheritance of the physical descendants of Jacob must think that G-d has different standards for His promises. He does not.

*G-d is **not** a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He **not** do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? Behold, I have received a command to bless; He has blessed, and I **cannot reverse it**. He has **not observed iniquity in Jacob**, nor has He seen wickedness in Israel. HaShem his G-d is with him, and **the shout of a King** is among them.*

Numbers 23:19-21

Beloved, that "Shout of a King" is the shout of King Messiah. If men come against His beloved, the shout is a shout of war. Notice that in these verses the declaration that G-d had seen no iniquity in Jacob or wickedness in Israel. Isn't that odd? As we have seen over the past few weeks, the generation that died in the wilderness certainly did not act faithfully; and now their children are also complaining and acting faithlessly. We will see in next week's parasha that these same Israelites encamped now where Balaam looks down at them will engage in open sexual sin in a disgustingly pagan way - and yet Balaam is unable to speak against them. So much for the false charge of some over the centuries when they disdainfully called the descendants of Jacob "Christ-killers" and claim superiority over "Jews" because, in their words, "We accepted Messiah whereas the Jews *rejected* Messiah."

Such ones may find that the "messiah" they "accepted" is not **the** Messiah at all if He is not the Defender of the physical descendants of Jacob.

Instead, those who claim to love Messiah should stand beside the descendants of Jacob - first and foremost because HaShem is their Shield and Defender. Next because we have a vested interest - it is *our family* that we are standing with. Beloved, **there is no family of G-d outside of Israel**, for we have been grafted into her - not the other way around. The root supports the branches. Without the root, there are no branches.

We who claim to know the Master Yeshua should never claim a greater revelation if that revelation discounts the very special place that G-d has given to the physical descendants of Jacob.

*The utterance of him **who hears the words of G-d, who sees the vision of the Almighty**, who falls down, with eyes wide open: 'How lovely are your tents, O Jacob! Your dwellings, O Israel!*

*Like valleys that stretch out, **like gardens** by the riverside, **like aloes** planted by HaShem, **like cedars** beside the waters.'*

Numbers 24:4-6

I cringe when I hear people who say that they follow the Jewish Messiah and yet discount any commentary that is Jewish unless it is "messianic." Maybe such people have not read Romans? Maybe they need to put aside their own arrogance and read the Scriptures?

*What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? **Much in every way!** Chiefly because **to them** were committed the **oracles of G-d**. For what if some did not believe? **Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of G-d without effect? Certainly not!** Indeed, let G-d be true but every man a liar. As it is written:*

*"That you may be justified in your words,
And may overcome when you are judged."*

Romans 3:1-4

If you have ever had the occasion to hear someone say something akin to "Jews just don't understand the Scriptures," you heard what this passage is speaking about. The oracles of G-d were not entrusted to some man-made entity called "the church" - they were entrusted to "the Jew" - when we forget that, we are liars and our theology is arrogant.

Do we who know Messiah see the Scriptures *unveiled*? Yes indeed - but if we, in the process of discerning those same Scriptures, arrogantly *put down* the very ones to whom those Scriptures were entrusted, we are not seeing them unveiled at all. This should be a matter of utmost concern. I for one would rather read the comments of an ancient Rabbi whose reverence for the Scriptures is unparalleled in this age than the comments of a modern commentator who is confused as to "who was grafted into whom." Surely, we should always be like the Bereans who tested what was said against the Scriptures - but to discount something because it wasn't from a messianic Jew is as foolish as listening to Christian commentators who discount G-d's special purposes for Israel.

Boasting is a dangerous thing. Here is a Bereans Online **paraphrase** of what Paul wrote to the Ephesians.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of G-d, not of works, (and not by your supposed creeds), **lest anyone should boast**. For we are His workmanship, created in Messiah Yeshua for the purpose of obedience seen in good works, which G-d prepared beforehand that we do them.*

*Because of that fact, you who were once considered Gentiles (even though you may not be accepted as family members by some of your Jewish brothers), before you repented you were without Messiah. Remember that at that time you were outside of the family of Israel. You were completely removed from the covenants of promise. You had **no hope at all** - and were completely without G-d because you were not a part of His family Israel.*

*But now **in Messiah Yeshua** you who were kept away from Him **because you had no family ties**, have been brought right up to the Place where His Name will always be. You have been brought right up to His Presence - all because of the blood of Messiah. For He Himself is our peace, Who has made a single family, and has symbolically broken down that man-made wall in the Temple that kept Gentiles out of His Presence, that wall that in effect said that Gentiles could never be a part of His family. By His own work He has negated what kept Gentiles from being a part of the family of Israel - namely the man-made stipulations that kept them out. By that work, He has joined Gentiles into the family of Jacob - and now all is made right. Through Messiah's death, all can be reconciled to G-d. And He came and preached peace to you who were previously kept out of the Presence of G-d, and as well to those who already had access to Him. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.*

*Now, because all of that is true, **you need to remember that you are no longer strangers and foreigners** - no longer a part of a different family, but you are brothers and sisters **with** the descendants of Jacob; and you are now members of G-d's house, having been built on the foundation of the those who taught repentance, with Yeshua the Messiah Himself being the capstone. This House, **this family**, is being fitted together and it is growing into a holy temple in HaShem - a dwelling place of HaShem.*

Ephesians 2:8-22 (Bereans Online paraphrase)

Remember, blood is thicker than water. Family always defends family. Although you may be Gentile - because of "A Jew," you are now a part of the family. If you are Jewish, welcome your Gentile brothers and sisters as full members of the family, as if they too are descendants of Jacob.

Ma tovu ohalecha, Ya'akov, mishkenotecha, Yisrael!

Come now beloved, let's *rest* in those tents. Let's eat together, let's pray together, let's sing together, and let's worship together - not as participants of a new religion - but as members of **the family** to whom the the Holy One, blessed is He, gave this blessing through the lips of pagan Balaam as he looked down at **us** encamped in the plains of Moab.

Haftarat Balak 'Devastator' (Micah 5:6-6:8)

The word "Balak" and it is the name of the wicked anti-Semitic king of Moab. The name comes from the root verb which means "to devastate, to lay waste." It is Balak that conspired with Midian to employ the false prophet Bala'am to curse Israel. Of course, the Torah tells us the outcome of that attempt to curse Israel. Every time the false prophet opened his lips, out came blessings and praise for Israel and her G-d. It is the very words of the false prophet Bala'am that give us a profound glimpse of Messiah and His soon coming redemption of all Israel. The Scepter is Messiah. The Star is Messiah. He comes out of Israel - not some man-made entity.

I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult.

Numbers 24:17

OK, so Balak, how'd that "curse" thing work out? Not too well. In fact, by the very attempt of cursing Israel... you sealed your fate. And herein is the lesson of Parashat Balak: when you seek to curse Israel, Messiah, the Kinsman Redeemer of Israel, will oppose you **with all His might**. It is laughable that some whose theology "curses" Israel think that they know the Redeemer of Israel, Messiah Yeshua. No, it is sad.

Our haftarah portion from the Prophets comes from Micah 5:6-6:8 and was selected by the Sages because of it tells us to remember Balak. How odd. Why remember Balak? Why remember these wicked men like Balak, Bala'am, Pharaoh, Haman, the Roman General Titus, Adolph Hitler, and Iran's Ahmadinejad? Why? Because beloved, in our remembering them and what they did to Israel, the righteousness of HaShem will be revealed. That is what our haftarah teaches us.

*O My people, remember now what Balak king of Moab counseled, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, from Acacia Grove to Gilgal, that **you may know the righteousness of HaShem.***

Micah 6:5

So, what did Balak counsel? How does that help me know the righteousness of HaShem?

Therefore please come at once, curse this people for me [Balak], for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I know that he whom you [Bala'am] bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.

Numbers 22:6

There you have it. Pick a side. Balak chose poorly. He chose to side against Israel and to curse her. He hired the false prophet Bala'am to do it. Bala'am's curses became blessings - and Balak's

counsel was true... for all eternity: "...whom you bless is blessed, and whom you curse is cursed."

There are countless throughout the ages that have chosen poorly. Maybe you have. If so, it is time to repent. Get on the right side of Balak's and Bala'am's blessings and curses. The curse against Israel will become your devastator. Looking for the righteousness of HaShem? Looking for the blessings of Messiah? You will never find them in the "Devastator's" camp. No matter what your theology, your statement of faith, your doctrine, your affiliation - if it is not with blessing Israel, you are against Messiah. Choose wisely. Choose to bless Israel.

And when you come before the King of Israel and seek Him, you need to know what is required of your faith. It is found in the last verse of our haftarah this week.

*He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does HaShem require of you
but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your G-d?*

Micah 6:8

The key words are *mishpat* [justice], *ahavah* [love], *chesed* [lovingkindness], and *yalak* [walk]. These are Torah words. You are not your own. You have been bought with a price. Walk humbly before your G-d. Live out Messiah's life, as He lived and lives it. It is your duty. Take His yoke upon yourself...

Prayer Focus for Balak - "Ma Tov" [How lovely...]

In synagogues and study halls for thousands of years, prayer services have begun with a prayer that repeats the words of a false prophet. They are the words that Bala'am spoke with the intent of cursing Israel - but are the words of ultimate Messianic blessing. *Ma Tov* is one of the most ancient blessings, so it is right we begin prayer services with it. It comes from Numbers 24:5; Psalms 5:7; and Psalms 69:13:

Ma tovu ohalecha Ya-akov, mishk'notecha Yisrael
How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your habitations, O Israel!

*Va'ani, berov chasdecha avo veitecha,
eshtachaveh el heichal kodshecha b'yiratecha.*

And in Thy great compassion, I will come into Your house,
There I will bow, there I will fear You.