



BALAK

Bemidbar/Numbers 22:2 – 25:9

This week we find the children of Israel **camped in the plains of Moab** (modern day Jordan), just across the Jordan River from the Land promised to the Patriarchs. They are in the **final stages** of their journey through the wilderness. Israel will be **oblivious** to most of the incidents we read about this week. **Balak**, king of Moab, considers the **Israelites to be a threat** since their recent victories in battle have earned them the reputation of being **invincible**. Balak decides that instead of warring against this nation, he will attempt to fight Israel by means of **spiritual powers**. He attempts to enlist the help of a well known **prophet** from Mesopotamia.....**Balaam**.

Let's spend some time **identifying** these characters. **Balak** comes from a root which means “**to devastate**” or “**to lay waste**”. We could call him a “**destroyer**.” Hmm....I guess we can see from the outset whose side he's on.

Balaam's name can be read “**without a people**”. If you consider that the Hebrew word for **people** (**am** - אָמ) often refers to the **children of Israel** (Vayikra/Leviticus 26:12), you could say that Balaam's name means “**without Israel**.” We are also told something very important about Balaam...**he calls יהוה** (Yahweh) **his Elohim**:

***Bemidbar 22:18** Then Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of יהוה **my Elohim**, to do less or more.*

Though he knows יהוה, it will be clear that he is not above **compromise**. He appears ready to sell his **spiritual abilities to the highest bidder**. It will be the **love of money** that will corrupt Balaam.

***1 Timothy 6:10** For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

Matthew 6:24** " No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. **You cannot serve God and riches.

Let's follow along with the story to see what insights we can gain:

***Bemidbar 22:5** Then he (Balak) sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying: "Look, a people has come from Egypt. See, they cover the face of the earth, and are settling next to me!"⁶ "Therefore please come at once, **curse this people for me**, 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 bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.**"*

Balak's intention was that Balaam would come and **curse the people of Israel**. He **flatters** Balaam by saying that he knows that **whoever Balaam blesses is blessed**, and whoever he curses is cursed. And **this is exactly what happened!** Yet, it happened **exactly opposite** the way Balak intended. As we will read, when Balaam opened his mouth, **instead of curses came blessings**.

Bemidbar 22:7 So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the **diviner's fee in their hand**, and they came to Balaam and spoke to him the words of Balak.

Thus begins the **temptation of Balaam**.

Bemidbar 22:8 And he said to them, "Lodge here tonight, and **I will bring back word to you, as יהוה speaks to me.**" So the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam.⁹ Then Elohim came to Balaam and said, "Who are these men with you?"

Initially, this doesn't sound so bad. Although he sounds **tempted**, he first decides the **best thing** to do would be to **consult with יהוה**. If Balaam **knew יהוה**, how could he even consider this **proposition**? Remember the **meaning of his name**?

Bemidbar 22:10 So Balaam said to Elohim, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, saying,¹¹ 'Look, a people has come out of Egypt, and they cover the face of the earth. Come now, **curse them for me**; perhaps I shall be able to overpower them and drive them out.' "

Balaam doesn't seem to have a problem with **telling Elohim his mission**, yet this is not surprising since his name reflects the **unimportance of the people of Israel**. But what you see in the **Hebrew** in these verses is very interesting. Balak had asked Balaam to **curse** (אַרַר 'arar) the people. When Balaam speaks to יהוה, he says that he has been asked to **curse** (קָבַח qavah) them. **Same word in English**, but do you see that we are working with **two different Hebrew** words?

There are many Hebrew verbs translated into "curse" in English. We are probably most familiar with the word "curse" in יהוה's **promise to Abraham** in Bereshith (Genesis):

Bereshith (Genesis) 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will **curse** (אַרַר- arar) him who **curse** (קָלַל-qalal) you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

As you can see, now we have run into a **third Hebrew word** translated "curse." Let's compare the three:

- קָלַל qalal – **to make slight, to make less than that deserved by or divinely intended for the object or person**
- אַרַר arar – **to bind, to hem in with obstacles, to render powerless**
- קָבַח qavah – **the act of uttering a formula designed to undo its object or person**

It is interesting to stick these meanings back into **Genesis 12:3**. You can do that on your own and enjoy the insight there. But you can also see that Balaam is asking יהוה to participate with him in some sort of **magic**, indicating that Balaam is into **sorcery**, or **witchcraft**.

Next we have Elohim's response:

***Bemidbar 22:12** And Elohim said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse (אָרַר arar) the people, for they are blessed."*

That should have been the **end of it** if Balaam was truly a **follower** of יהוה. He was not allowed to **curse** the people. And Elohim did not want him to go with them. Elohim used the word for **curse** that **Balak** had used. This should have been a **hint to Balaam to let it go**. But the story continues:

***Bemidbar 22:13** So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, "Go back to your land, for יהוה has refused to give me permission to go with you."*

For the next few verses, try to pay attention to **what's NOT being said**, and things will make more sense. Balaam chose to **NOT** tell the princes that the reason why יהוה was not allowing him to curse the people was **because "they are blessed."** Balaam had chosen **"selective hearing."** We do the same thing when we take **verses out of context** and use them **for our benefit**.

Now, we'll see that the **princes of Moab** also have **selective hearing!**

***Bemidbar 22:14** And the princes of Moab rose and went to Balak, and said, "Balaam refuses to come with us."*

The princes of Moab have **NOT** told Balak that the reason why Balaam is refusing to come with them is because **"יהוה refused to give him permission."** Let's continue...

***Bemidbar 22:15** Then Balak again sent princes, more numerous and more honorable than they.¹⁶ And they came to Balaam and said to him, "Thus says Balak the son of Zippor: 'Please let nothing hinder you from coming to me;¹⁷ for I will certainly honor you greatly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Therefore please come, curse this people for me.'"*

Balaam is about to be overcome by his **selfish desire to get rich**. At first it appears that he is going to respond appropriately, but then he can't quite put an **end** to his desire:

***Bemidbar 22:18** Then Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of יהוה my Elohim, to do less or more.¹⁹ "Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more יהוה will say to me."*

"What more" is he hoping to hear from יהוה?! Let's consider that **Balaam is not an Israelite**. Although Balaam calls יהוה **his Elohim**, and although he **does hear** from יהוה, he has still **NOT** connected himself with the **children of Israel** (remember the meaning of Balaam's name). We must understand that he also has some **very pagan ways mixed in with his beliefs**.

Based on his actions, Balaam reflects the **existing pagan belief system** of Mesopotamia. Balaam saw יהוה as nothing but an **arbitrary force**, with **no bearing on the values of good and evil**. Since the **commands** of such a god are **not founded in moral values**, there is no reason to expect

this god's **decisions to be consistent**. Balaam believed a god had **the right as a supreme being** to "say one thing one day and say another thing the next day." Balaam did understand יהוה's answer the first time (22:12). In fact he understood that **he could not disobey this order**. But Balaam could not understand the **reasoning** behind the answer. The Almighty had told him that he could not go **because "they are blessed."** **This was beyond Balaam's understanding**. Instead he interpreted יהוה's answer to be "you cannot curse them this time." Balaam heard this as just a **random answer** from a **very powerful god**. But according to **Balaam's mindset**, in the **future.....pressing Elohim might cause him to change his mind!** Balak believed this also, and so he continued to encourage Balaam by **upping the ante**.

Bemidbar 22:20 And Elohim came to Balaam 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 shall do."

Now this picture fits right into **Balaam's way of thinking**. He considers that he has just been **successful** in the first step of **getting this Elohim to change His mind**. Notice Elohim tells him that **he may go**, but he must **ONLY speak the word which He gives him to speak**. We should learn a lesson from this. Sometimes, when a **door opens** that we know or suspect is **contrary to the Word of יהוה**, we are tempted to think that the Almighty has **blessed our plans**. Instead, He is allowing us to exercise **our free will**. And along with that may come **just enough rope to hang ourselves!** When we know and follow Torah, many **answers are right before us** and not meant to be **open for debate**.

יהוה knew Balaam's **heart**. He knew that he was not about to take "no" for an answer. He just **allowed him to take the path that he wished to go**. Paul tells us that we have **liberty**, but not all things are **profitable**:

1 Corinthians 10:23 "Everything is permissible"-- but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"-- but not everything is constructive.

Now, let's see what happened when **Balaam apparently obeyed Elohim's instructions**:

Bemidbar 22:21 So Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab. ²² Then Elohim's anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of יהוה took His stand in the way as an adversary against him. And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him.

Did Balaam **completely** follow instructions? Something else has been **left out again**. Bemidbar 22:20 says that Balaam could go "if the men come to call you." Instead, it appears that Balaam got out of bed, saddled his donkey and left with the princes. יהוה had given him the **order** of permissible events, and it appears that he **violated** it. As a result, Elohim's **anger** flared up. Plus יהוה knew the **intent of his heart**. We see that when we take a second look at Balaam's words in Bemidbar 22:18:

*Bemidbar 22:18 But Balaam answered them, "Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, **I could not** do anything great or small to go beyond the command of יהוה my Elohim.*

His reason for not being able to go **LOOKS innocent enough**, but “**I could not**” is not the same as telling them “**I won’t**.” Balaam’s heart was full of **greed**. יהוה isn’t finished with giving him **warnings**, but He’s also not going to **prevent him** from traveling down the road to his own **destruction**.

***Bemidbar 22:23** When the donkey saw the angel of יהוה standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, she turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat her to get her back on the road.*

It’s kind of ironic, don’t you think? Balaam, who is **supposed to be the best “seer”**, is not able to “see” what a simple donkey “sees.”

***Bemidbar 22:24** Then the angel of יהוה stood in a narrow path between two vineyards, with walls on both sides.*

This verse indicates that they are standing on a “**narrow path between two vineyards**.” This is a rather interesting detail because in this **desert** area there are **no vineyards**. For this reason we can assume that the Almighty wants you to **take a good look at this detail**. In Isaiah 5, יהוה tells us who the **vineyard** is:

***Isaiah 5:7** The vineyard of יהוה Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight.*

Continuing on, we see more of the same:

***Bemidbar 22:25** When the donkey saw the angel of יהוה, she pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat her again.²⁶ Then the angel of יהוה moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left.²⁷ When the donkey saw the angel of יהוה, she lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat her with his staff.*

Next we read one of the most **curious** details in Scripture:

***Bemidbar 22:28** Then יהוה opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?"*

Did this really happen? It’s hard to say. Many of the sages look at this story as a **parable**...not so different than the stories that **Yeshua** told. If so, then there has to be some **symbolism** and a **point** to be made. Let’s see if we can dig down to **other levels of insights**.

In 2 Peter, Balaam's example is used as a means to **illustrate the destructive influence of insincere teachers**:

***2 Peter 2:14** having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in greed, and are accursed children.¹⁵ They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;*

Okay, so **who or what could Balaam be a picture of?** I'll give you some clues. Balaam **knew יהוה**. He was **involved with pagan ways**. He was **caught up in what the world had to offer**. He **didn't understand the eternal promises given to Israel**. He thought the Almighty could **"change"** and **forsake His chosen people**. I don't want to **generalize**, but there is a **part of the church system** that sees itself as **having replaced Israel**, is **caught up with wealth**, and has **mixed in paganism with Yah's ways**.

Balaam rides on a **donkey** and ends up **beating her**. The Hebrew word for **donkey** is aton (אָתוֹן). Technically, it is a **female donkey**. The **etymology** of the root of this word means **"to be reliable and strong"**. It is also associated with being **"ancient"**. Following are a couple of verses which contain this word. The first verse was a part of a **blessing/prophecy** spoken by Jacob over his son, **Judah**. Note all the Messianic implications:

Bereshith (Genesis) 49:11 Binding his donkey (male donkey - עֵי) to the vine, And his donkey's (aton - אָתוֹן) colt (בֵּן - word for son) to the choice vine, He washed his garments in wine, And his clothes in the blood of grapes.

This second verse is a Messianic verse describing how Yeshua will ride into Jerusalem:

Zechariah 9:9 " Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey (עֵי - a male donkey), A colt (עֵי - a male donkey), the foal (בֵּן - word for son) of a donkey (female donkey - אָתוֹן).

We'll summarize, but first let's take a closer look at the Hebrew word for **donkey** - אָתוֹן. Reading from right to left, you'll notice that the first two letters are the **א** and the **ת**. That is, **the first and the last letters** of the **Hebrew alphabet**. We know that Yeshua used these letters to point to Himself (Yeshua would have spoken Hebrew):

Revelation 22:13 "I am the Aleph (א) and the Tav (ת), the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last."

We still have two letters left. The **vav** (ו) is a picture of a **nail**, and the **nun** (ן) is a picture of a **seed**, or an **offspring**, or a **son**. With all these pictures in just the **letters**, I think you can see that the **female donkey** is very connected to the **Messiah**. In John 1:14, we are told that the **Word of Elohim** was made **flesh**. For now, let's consider that the **female donkey** (אָתוֹן) symbolizes the **Word of Elohim or the Torah**.

Now on to the **Angel of יהוה**, who has a **sword** drawn. A **sword** is often used in the defeat of nations. But ultimately, what is the **sword**?

Ephesians 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of Yah;

And ultimately, how are the **nations** who come against the Almighty **defeated**?

Revelation 19:11 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war...¹⁵ Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations.

The **sword** is the **judgment** aspect of the **Word** of יהוה, and the **Angel** of יהוה is **Yeshua**! Let's see if we can put some of this together. **The church (Balaam)** is riding on the **Torah (donkey)** until the **Torah (donkey)** sees **Yeshua (angel)** with the **Word of Judgment (sword)** in His hand. Out of **mercy**, the **Torah (donkey)** leads the **church (Balaam)** into the field so he won't be killed by **judgment (sword)**. The **church (Balaam)** does not see **Yeshua (angel)** for who He truly is, and instead the **church (Balaam)** beats up the **Torah (donkey)**.

Earlier we saw that the **vineyard** is a picture of **Israel** and in Bemidbar 22:24 the **narrow path** goes **between the two vineyards (two houses of Israel)**. The **Torah (donkey)** crushes the **foot (symbolizes his walk)** of the **church (Balaam)** there in the **vineyards**. Then **Yeshua (angel)** stands in another **narrow (Hebrew root of Egypt) place** where the **church (Balaam)** will again lash out at **Torah (donkey)**. This **location (Egypt)** is where **Torah (donkey)** will open its mouth and speak. **Egypt** (symbolizes this **world** where we are currently in **exile**) is also where יהוה **opens the eyes** of the **church (Balaam)**!! The **church (Balaam)** will have the opportunity **to see Yeshua (the angel)** for who He really is and **understand the Torah (donkey)** on which they were **riding**!

There are even other details. **Three times**, Balaam struck the donkey:

Bemidbar 22:28 Then פתחה פה פרה and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these **three times** (שלוש רגלים)?"

“**Three times**” is an unusual phrase in the Hebrew. Literally it means “**three feet**” (שלוש רגלים). This phrase can be found in another verse in Shemot/Exodus **describing the three occasions during the year when all men are to come up to Jerusalem for a feast to יהוה**:

Shemot (Exodus) 23:14 " **Three times** (שלוש רגלים) you shall keep a feast to Me in the year

Kind of interesting, isn't it? The donkey had **paused three “feet” (times – connects to festivals)**, and each time **Balaam (church) beat the donkey (Torah)**. Now Elohim **retaliates by crushing the foot** of Balaam. You may have also noticed the “**narrow path**” that the donkey is on:

Matthew 7:13 " Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.¹⁴ "Because narrow is the gate and narrow is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Balaam turns out to be a **slow learner**. As the donkey followed the **straight and narrow road** of **faithfulness**, it was **an attempt to teach Balaam that the ways of יהוה are constant and firm**. For one moment, in a flash of illumination, it seems that Balaam **understands**:

Bemidbar 22:34 And Balaam said to the Angel of יהוה, "I have sinned, for I did not know You stood in the way against me. Now therefore, if it displeases You, I will turn back."

Yet sadly, **Balaam's heart has not changed.** He's already been told that his way is **contrary to the Almighty.** Because **he still wants to go,** יהוה allows him to squeeze the noose a little **tighter:**

Bemidbar 22:35 Then the Angel of יהוה said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak." So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

Now let's look at "one more thing" that's very interesting. Balaam had two **significant** encounters with **individuals.** The first was with the Angel of יהוה when he left on the donkey:

Bemidbar 22:32 And the Angel of יהוה said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because your way is perverse before Me.

Compare יהוה's words up above with **Balak's** when Balaam arrives at the border of Moab:

Bemidbar 22:37 Then Balak said to Balaam, "Did I not earnestly send to you, calling for you? Why did you not come to me? Am I not able to honor you?"

Two messages...one from the **Angel of יהוה,** and one from **Balak the destroyer.** And they truly are messages from the **light and the darkness!**

- The message of **light** is....your way is perverse. I am standing against you in **judgment!**
- The message of **darkness** is....(though you are disobedient) **I will honor you!**

This **promise of honor is a lie from satan!** יהוה did not stop Balaam. He allowed him to travel the road to his own **destruction.** Through the rest of our Parasha, Balaam will continue to work with **Balak, the destroyer.** Though יהוה **prevents him from cursing Israel,** he continues to **rationalize and find loopholes.** He is not able to believe in the **unchangeableness** of the Almighty:

Malachi 3:6 "For I am יהוה, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

Things end **badly** for Balaam. Because he was not able to **verbally curse** the Israelites, the following was likely the **result of the plan he presented to Balak:**

Bemidbar 25:1 Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab.² They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.³ So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of יהוה was aroused against Israel.

The evidence for this is **written** for us in **Revelation:**

Revelation 2:14 "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

Though he may have been **paid generously for his advice**, his demise is noted without fanfare:

Bemidbar 31:8 They killed the kings of Midian with the rest of those who were killed -- Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian. **Balaam the son of Beor they also killed with the sword.**

The book of Revelation also speaks of a **rider** on an **animal**:

Revelation 17:3 So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy....⁴ **The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.**⁵ And on her forehead a name was written: **MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.**

This **beast** is the epitome of **evil**. Balaam's desire for **riches** is portrayed in this **woman** and her **adornment**. Balaam's **advice** to Balak is also hinted at through the mention of her **harlotries**. The **name on her forehead** stands in sharp contrast to what will be found on the **foreheads** of the righteous in Revelation 22:4 (They shall see His face, and **His name shall be on their foreheads**.)

This picture in Revelation, my friends, is the **goal** of satan. **He desires for you to be riding on that beast**. His agenda is to **tempt you** with what the **world** has to offer. Temptation begins in a **subtle** way:

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by Elohim"; for Elohim cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.¹⁴ But **each one is tempted** when he is **drawn away by his own desires and enticed**.¹⁵ Then, **when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.**

Once we have come to **know Yeshua**, we now have what it takes to **resist evil and choose the good** He has given us through His **Torah**. **Ride the donkey**. You won't have to fear the Angel of מַלְאָכִים who stands in the **narrow path between the vineyards**. He is there for your **protection** and to **continue to show you the way along the narrow path**. **Baruch HaShem!**

Shabbat Shalom,
Ardelle