

פרשת
בלק
Parashat Balak

*Bamidbar / Numbers 22:2-25:9, Micah 5:6-6:8
Mark 11:12-26*

A Man Struggling with God

In this week's Torah portion we read about how Balak contacted Bilam and Bilam's contact with God (22:2-21), when Bilam encounters the Angel (22:22-41), the prophecies of Bilam (23:1-30), the prophecy from Peor (24:1-25), and the sin of Peor (25:1-9). In the opening verses of Parashat Balak we read the following, *Bamidbar / Numbers 22:5-7*, -ה וַיִּשְׁלַח מְלָאכִים אֶל-בְּלָעַם בֶּן-בְּעוֹר פְּתוּרָה אֲשֶׁר עַל- הַנְּהָר אֲרָץ בְּנֵי-עַמּוֹ לְקַרְא־לוֹ לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה עַם יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרָיִם הִנֵּה כֹסֶה אֶת-עֵין הָאָרֶץ וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב מִמְּלִי: ו וְעַתָּה לְכֵה-נָא אָרְה-לִי אֶת-הָעַם הַזֶּה כִּי-עֲצוּמִים הוּא מִמֶּנִּי אוֹלֵי אוֹכַל נֶכֶה-בוּ וְאֲגַרְשֶׁנוּ מִן-הָאָרֶץ כִּי יִדְעֹתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר-תִּבְרָךְ מִבְּרַךְ וְאֲשֶׁר תְּאָר יוֹאֵר: ז וַיֵּלְכוּ זִקְנֵי מוֹאָב וְזִקְנֵי מִדְיָן וַיִּקְסְמוּ בְּיַדָּם 22:5 *So he 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, 'Behold, a people came out of Egypt; behold, they cover the surface of the land, and they are living opposite me. 22:6 'Now, therefore, please come, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me; perhaps I may 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.'* 22:7 *So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees*

for divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam and repeated Balak's words to him. (NASB) we are able to see Balak's faith in Bilam

when he says *“For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.”* Immediately while reading these passages we should be reminded of similar verbiage in Parashat Lech Lecha, *Bereshit / Genesis*

12:1-3, א וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם לְדָ-לְךָ מֵאַרְצְךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבְּיַת אָבִיךָ, אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֹרְאָה: ב וְאֶעֱשֶׂה לְךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וּבְאַבְרָכָה וְאֶגְדָּלְהָ שְׂמִי וְהָיָה בְרָכָה: ג וּבְאַבְרָכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ אֶאָר וּבְבָרְכֶיךָ בְּכָל מְשֻׁפָּחַת הָאָדָמָה: ”
“12:1 Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you; 12:2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 12:3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.’ ”

(NASB) We note how God said to Abram *וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבְּיַת אָבִיךָ* “go out from your land, from the land of your birth, from the land of your father,” here the Lord God is calling Abram from a land of Idolatry and divination to a land where he can walk in God’s ways of holiness and righteousness. This is contrasted to what we are

reading in the Torah portion *עַמּוֹ בְּנֵי-עֶמֶץ* “Pethor; which is near the River, in the land of the sons of his people” a land filled with Idolatry and divination. We note what the outcome would be if Bilam and Balak actually succeeded in cursing the seed of

Abraham (all of Israel). God says *וּבְאַבְרָכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ אֶאָר* “And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse.” Their cursing Israel would lead to the curse turning back upon them! Now Bilam and Balak do not necessarily have knowledge of what God had said, there is some level of ignorance involved here, but that of course is no excuse. So the text states, *וַיֵּלְכוּ וַיִּקְּנוּ מוֹאֵב וְזִמְבָּדִי*

“the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam and repeated Balak’s words to him.” The elders took their money, and went to Bilam to bribe him into cursing Israel. Rashi connects on these verses saying the following:

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Rashi on Bamidbar / Numbers 22.5 Part 3

לקרא לו. הקריאה היתה שלו ולהנאתו, שהיה פוסק לו
ממון הרבה:

לקרא לו *TO CALL HIM* — *the call was for him, for his benefit; for he (Balak) fixed for him (agreed to pay him) a large sum.*

Paul wrote that the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil. (*1 Timothy 6:10*) Paul rationalizes this saying by craving money, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows. Rashi draws out the point of Balak fixing an amount of money that would cause Bilam to come running to his help saying this money was a large sum. The amount of money that Balak was offering Bilam was immense. Based upon the narrative, this money caused Bilam to struggle with God. He wanted the money, but he also wanted to do what the Lord says. Money has a way of warping the truth and what God truly wants for our lives. This is why Paul gave such a warning like he did to Timothy. These things are as relevant for us today as it was back in this day to teach us we are to live and give our lives over to the Lord by believing in Him and walking in His ways in His calling on our lives! This is apposed to the idea of being called to simply acknowledge who God is, who Yeshua (Jesus) is, and then go and live our lives in the way that seems right in our own eyes. We are not called to live at the whim or pleasure and wealth. The point is it takes a lot of effort to humble ourselves and turn from our ways to seek the Lord and His ways for our lives. This is why it is absolutely necessary for us to receive God's help in doing this as left to ourselves we will choose to do what pleases us, just like what we see is going on in Bilam's life according to the Torah!

The scriptures we are looking at for this week are from *Bamidbar / Numbers 22:5-21*.

ספר במדבר פרק כב

ה וישלח מלאכים אל-בלעם בן-בעור פתורה אשר על-

הַנְּהַר אֲרָץ בְּנֵי-עַמּוֹ לְקִרְא־לוֹ לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה עִם יִצְחָק מִמְצָרִים
הִנֵּה כֹסֶה אֶת-עֵין הָאֲרָץ וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב מִמְּלִי: ו וְעַתָּה לֵכֶה-
בְּאֵרֶה-לִי אֶת-הָעַם הַזֶּה כִּי-עֲצוּם הוּא מִמְּנֵי אוֹלֵי אוֹכַל
נֶכֶה-בּוֹ וְאֶגְרָשׁוּ מִן-הָאֲרָץ כִּי יִדְעֹתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר-תִּבְרָךְ
מִבְּרָךְ וְאֲשֶׁר תֵּאָר יוֹאֵר: ז וַיִּלְכוּ זִקְנֵי מוֹאָב וְזִקְנֵי מִדְּיָן
וּקְסָמִים בְּיָדָם וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-בִּלְעָם וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֵלָיו דְּבָרֵי בְּלָק:
ח וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם לִינּוּ פֹה הַלְיִלָּה וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי אֶתְכֶם דְּבַר
כְּאֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלַי וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שְׂרֵי-מוֹאָב עִם-בִּלְעָם: ט
וַיָּבֹאוּ אֱלֹהִים אֶל-בִּלְעָם וַיֹּאמֶר מִי הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה עִמָּךְ: י
וַיֹּאמֶר בִּלְעָם אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים בְּלָק בֶּן-צֹפֵר מְלֵךְ מוֹאָב שְׁלַח
אֵלַי: יא הִנֵּה הָעַם הַיִּצְחָק מִמְצָרִים וַיִּכַּס אֶת-עֵין הָאֲרָץ
עַתָּה לֵכֶה קְבֵה-לִי אֹתוֹ אוֹכַל לְהִלָּחֵם בּוֹ וְגִרְשֹׁתִיו: יב
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-בִּלְעָם לֹא תִלְךָ עִמָּהֶם לֹא תֵאָר אֶת-הָעַם
כִּי בְרוּךְ הוּא: [שְׁנִי] [חֲמִישִׁי כִשְׁהֵן מִחוּבְרִין] יג וַיִּקָּם
בִּלְעָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-שְׂרֵי בְּלָק לְכוּ אֶל-אֲרָצְכֶם כִּי מֵאֵן
יְהוּנָה לְתַתִּי לְהִלְךָ עִמָּכֶם: יד וַיִּקְוּמוּ שְׂרֵי מוֹאָב וַיָּבֹאוּ
אֶל-בְּלָק וַיֹּאמְרוּ מֵאֵן בִּלְעָם הִלְךָ עִמָּנוּ: טו וַיִּסְף עוֹד בְּלָק
שְׁלַח שְׂרֵים רַבִּים וְנִכְבָּדִים מֵאֵלֶּה: טז וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-בִּלְעָם
וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ פֹה אָמַר בְּלָק בֶּן-צֹפֹר אֶל-נָא תִמְנַע מִהִלְךָ
אֵלַי: יז כִּי-כַבֵּד אֶכְבְּדָךְ מְאֹד וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-תֹּאמַר אֵלַי אֲעֲשֶׂה
וּלְכֶה-נָא קְבֵה לִי אֶת הָעַם הַזֶּה: יח וַיַּעַן בִּלְעָם וַיֹּאמֶר
אֶל-עַבְדֵי בְּלָק אִם-יִתֶּן-לִי בְּלָק מְלֵא בֵיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא
אוֹכַל לְעַבֵּר אֶת-פִּי יְהוּנָה אֱלֹהֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת קִטְנָה אוֹ גְדוֹלָה: יט
וְעַתָּה שָׁבוּ נָא בְּזֵה גַם-אַתֶּם הַלְיִלָּה וְאֲדַעַה מֵה-יִסְף יְהוָה
דְּבַר עַמִּי: כ וַיָּבֹאוּ אֱלֹהִים | אֶל-בִּלְעָם לִילָּה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ
אִם-לְקִרְא לְךָ בָּאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים קוֹם לְךָ אִתָּם וְאֵךְ אֶת-הַדָּבָר
אֲשֶׁר-אָדַבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ אֹתוֹ תַעֲשֶׂה: [שְׁלִישִׁי] כא וַיִּקָּם בִּלְעָם
בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּחְבֵּשׁ אֶת-אַתָּנוּ וַיִּלְךָ עִם-שְׂרֵי מוֹאָב:

Bamidbar / Numbers 22:5-21

22:5 So he 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, 'Behold, a peo-

ple came out of Egypt; behold, they cover the surface of the land, and they are living opposite me. 22:6 'Now, therefore, please come, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me; perhaps I may 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.' 22:7 So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam and repeated Balak's words to him. 22:8 He said to them, 'Spend the night here, and I will bring word back to you as the Lord may speak to me.' And the leaders of Moab stayed with Balaam. 22:9 Then God came to Balaam and said, 'Who are these men with you?' 22:10 Balaam said to God, 'Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent word to me, 22:11 'Behold, there is a people who came out of Egypt and they cover the surface of the land; now come, curse them for me; perhaps I may be able to fight against them and drive them out.' 22:12 God said to Balaam, 'Do not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.' 22:13 So Balaam arose in the morning and said to Balak's leaders, 'Go back to your land, for the Lord has refused to let me go with you.' 22:14 The leaders of Moab arose and went to Balak and said, 'Balaam refused to come with us.' 22:15 Then Balak again sent leaders, more numerous and more distinguished than the former. 22:16 They came to Balaam and said to him, 'Thus says Balak the son of Zippor; 'Let nothing, I beg you, hinder you from coming to me; 22:17 for I will indeed honor you richly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Please come then, curse this people for me.' 22:18 Balaam replied to the servants of Balak, 'Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, either small or great, contrary to the command of the Lord my God. 22:19 'Now please, you also stay here tonight, and I

*will find out what else the Lord will speak to me.’ 22:20
God came to Balaam at night and said to him, ‘If the
men have come to call you, rise up and go with them;
but only the word which I speak to you shall you do.’
22:21 So Balaam arose in the morning, and saddled
his donkey and went with the leaders of Moab. (NASB)*

Bilam spoke with God at night, and in the morning spoke with the men Balak sent saying יג וַיִּקָּם בַּלְעָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-שָׂרֵי בָלָק 22:13 *So Balaam arose in the morning and said to Balak’s leaders, ‘Go back to your land, for the Lord has refused to let me go with you.’ (NASB)* It is at this point it seems Bilam started having trouble trusting the word of the Lord because of the amount of money he is being offered. Bilam asks the men to stay another night as he would seek the Lord again to see if the message would change. It is interesting how often this sort of thing goes on today in the lives of the Minim (the believers). We have been given God’s Word, we have this blessing today with the printing press, and bibles available in many languages, both hard copy and digital. We can without a doubt know what God expects of us, but yet many have doubts just like Bilam. In addition to these things, there are additional phenomenon that accompanies doubting God as this is synonymous to not trusting in the Lord which leads to struggles with fear, anxiety, and worry. When this happens, these things lead to dread and hopelessness in almost any situation and at all times, something also known as “*depression.*” Note that doubting and questioning our faith or what God wants for our lives are often part of our journey of faith. However, if these kinds of things remain persistent in our lives they can lead to chronic behaviors such as depression. Considering the Torah portion, this was not the case for Bilam as he was not a part of the family of God right? He was a prophet from a foreign nation, a nation of idolatry and divinations. Because of this it is surprising how he had the ear of God. Notice what the rabbis say concerning this.

Rashi on Bamidbar / Numbers 22.5 part 2

ארץ בני עמו. שָׁלַח בָּלָק, מַשָּׁם הָיָה, וְזֶה הָיָה מִתְנַבֵּא וְאוֹמֵר
לוֹ, עֲתִיד אֲתָה לְמַלְכוּת; וְאִם תֹּאמַר מִפְּנֵי מָה הַשְּׂרָה הַקְּבָ"ה

שְׁכִינְתוֹ עַל גּוֹי רָשָׁע? כִּדְי שְׁלֵא יְהִי פְתִחוֹן פֶּה לְאֻמוֹת
 לוֹמֵר, אֵלֹהֵי הַיּוֹ לֵנוּ נְבִיאִים, חֲזַרְנוּ לְמוֹטֵב, הֶעֱמִיד לָהֶם
 נְבִיאִים וְהֵם פָּרְצוּ גְדֵר הָעוֹלָם, שְׁפַתְחֻלָּה הָיוּ גְדוּרִים
 בְּעֲרִיזוֹת, וְזֶה נָתַן לָהֶם יַעֲצָה לְהַפְקִיר עֲצָמוֹן לְזָנוּת:

THE LAND OF THE CHILDREN OF HIS PEOPLE — of Balak's people, for he came from there, and this man (Balaam) had prophesied saying to him, "You are destined to be king". — And if you ask: Why did the Holy One blessed be He, let his Shechina rest upon so wicked a heathen, I reply that in order that the heathen peoples should have no excuse to say, "If we had prophets, we would have changed for the better", He raised up prophets for them. Yet they (these prophets) broke down the moral fence of the world, because at first they (the heathens) were fenced in against (they refrained from) immoral living, but this man (Balaam) counselled them to freely offer themselves to prostitution (Midrash Tanchuma, Balak I; cf. Rashi on Numbers 24:14).

The rabbinic reasoning starts with asking the question why God would allow His Shechina (שְׁכִינְתוֹ) to rest upon a wicked heathen. The conclusion was so the nations have no excuse. The idea isn't a matter of Bilam having a lack of faith. Obviously, based upon what we know according to the Torah, Bilam tells Balak how to cause Israel to be cursed. The way to take upon oneself the curses of God according to the Torah is to walk in the way of the nations, to fall into Idolatry, sexual sin, and unfaithfulness and this was the recommendation of Bilam to Balak. This is also what led to Israel's sin according to Parashat Pinchas (the next Torah portion). The rabbinic conclusion correctly classifies the prophets of the nations as instrumental in the breaking down the moral fence of the world. Bilam wanted to be fully certain about what God had said, and at the same time he was sincerely self-deceived to seek God again because of money, and then to saddle his donkey and go with them!

The struggling with God also remind us of the story of Jacob who

fled from his family history, and of how years alter he decided to return home to the Promised Land. There are several things that differ between these two narratives, Jacob trusted in God, while Bilam seemed to do as he pleased. Jacob wrestled with God as we are told according to *Bereshit / Genesis 32*. Having wrestled with the Angel of the Lord, Jacob's life changes. We are told he walked differently, due to his hip being crippled slightly as the angel touches his hip socket. It was then that Jacob recognized saying, *"I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared"* (*Bereshit / Genesis 32:31*, וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב (שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם פְּנִינְאֵל כִּי־רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים פְּנִים אֶל־פְּנִים וַתִּצָּל נַפְשִׁי: וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב עוֹד שְׁמֹךְ כִּי אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב עַם־אֱלֹהִים וְעַם־אֲנָשִׁים וַתִּכָּל: וַיִּשְׂאֵל יַעֲקֹב (וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּידָה־נָּא שְׁמֹךְ וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶה תִּשְׂאֵל לְשִׁמִּי וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ שֵׁם:). Notice how Jacob's encounter with God changed his life in many ways! Note now how Bilam's encounter with God did not lead to a blessing in his life but a stern correcting to not walk in his own ways, but to say and do only what the Lord tells him to do! Bilam remained a wicked man as instructing Balak on how to cause Israel to sin! This is in contrast to Jacob who prevailed in his faith to overcome the pain of his past. There are a few things that we can learn from this week's Torah portion and paralleling this to Jacob. When Jacob encountered God, his faith overcame the pain of exile, the prison sentence of offending his brother, and fear. And just like what we receive from the story of Bilam and Balak, the struggle is more spiritual as opposed to physical (i.e. note Bilam's disobedience led to he angel standing in the way to strike him down). We note how Jacob prevailed by faith, and God's will prevailed in the life of Bilam as speaking a blessing over Israel and not a curse. It is because of these struggles that we go through, the Lord God Almighty sent His Son Yeshua, to die for our sins, to show us God's mercy through forgiveness, and ultimately as Isaiah states, *"gives power to the faint, and to them that have no might, he increases strength"* (*Isaiah 40:29*) so that we can live our lives for the glory of God! This is the meaning of surrendering our lives to the Lord so that He can live and work in and through us by the power of His Spirit.

Notice how in both the lives of Jacob and Bilam, this was the turning point in their lives as encountering God. This same thing will happen to us when we believe in Yeshua and what he did, and ask our Father in heaven to send His Spirit to come dwell in our hearts! Struggling and resisting God will lead to years and years of pain and hurt. On the other hand, humbling ourselves, repentance, and freely surrendering His will leads to life and life more abundantly!

