

פרשת בלק / Parashat Balak

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Selfish traits and obeying G-d are they compatible?

השבועות הזה קוראים / This Week's Reading

תורה: Numbers 22:2-25:9

הפטרה: Micah 5:6-6:8

הברית: Romans 11:25-32

החדשה

- 10 In Parashat Balak the king of Moav is worried about the Children of Yisrael and seeks Bilam to curse the people for him. As we study the text we are reminded of the struggle we have to obey G-d and deny our selfish traits. Additionally we see firsthand how important it is to believe the word of G-d. This week's parsha is especially interesting because the sages have singled out this
- 15 portion of scripture in the Gemara in the Talmud Bavli, Mesecht Baba Batra Daf 14b by mentioning that Moshe wrote his own book (referring to the Torah) and also wrote Parashat Bilam (Balak).

בבא בתרא דף י"ב.

שברי לוחות שמונחים בארון ואי ס"ד ס"ת הקיפו ו' טפחים, מכדי כל שיש בהקיפו שלשה טפחים יש בו רוחב טפה, וכיון דלאמצעיתו נגלל, נפיש ליה מתרי טפחא רווחא דכיני כיני, בתרי פושכי היכי יתיב? אמר רב אחא בר יעקב: ספר עזרה לתחלתו הוא נגלל. ואכתי תרי בתרי היכי יתיב? אמר רב

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לארבעה נביאים שנתנכאו באותו הפרק, ואלו הן: הושע וישעיה, עמוס ומיכה. וליקדמיה להושע ברישא! כיון דכתיב נבואתיה גבי חגי זכריה ומלאכי, וחגי זכריה ומלאכי סוף נביאים הוון, השיב ליה בהדייהו. וליכתביה להדיה וליקדמיה! אידי דזומר מירכס. מכדי ישעיה קדים מירמיה ויחזקאל, ליקדמיה לישעיה ברישא! כיון דמלכים סופיה חורבנא וירמיה כוליה חורבנא, ויחזקאל רישיה חורבנא וסיפיה נחמתא, וישעיה כוליה נחמתא, סמינן חורבנא להורבנא ונחמתא לנחמתא. סידרן של בתובים: רות וספר תהלים, ואיוב ומשלי, קהלת, שיר השירים וקינוח, דניאל ומגילת אסתר, עזרא ודברי הימים. ולמ"ד: איוב כימי משה היה, ליקדמיה לאיוב ברישא! אתחולי בפורענותא לא מתחלינן. רות נמי פורענות היא! פורענות דאית ליה אחרית דאמר רבי יוחנן: למה נקרא שמה רות? שיצא ממנה דוד

שריהו להקב"ה בשירות ותושבחות. ומי כתבן? משה כתב ספרו ופרשת בלעם ואיוב יהושע כתב ספרו ושמונה פסוקים שבתורה שמואל כתב ספרו ושופטים ורות דוד כתב ספר תהלים ע"י עשרה זקנים: ע"י אדם הראשון, ע"י מלכי צדק, וע"י אברהם, וע"י משה, וע"י ידי הימין, וע"י ידותון, וע"י ידי אסף,

The Gemara lists Moshe as the author of the Torah, the book of Job, and then also lists that he is the author of Parashat Balak.

25 The Gemara lists and identifies the 24 books of the bible and the author of
each in the Talmud Bavli Baba Batra Daf 14b. In regard to Chumash (the
Pentateuch or Torah), the Gemara lists Moshe as the author of the Torah, Parashat
Bilam and also the book of Job. Why do you think the Gemara singles out
30 Parashat Balak? Now we could go into the reasons why the sages suggest this
was written in the Gemara however I think it is sufficient to draw our attention to
this week's parsha that there are some peculiarities requiring the sages to
explicitly list Parashat Balak as having been written by Moshe. The fun task now
for us is to figure out what makes Parashat Balak so important to list separately in
the Talmud.

35 The section of verses I would like to look upon are *Bamidbar / Numbers 22:8-24*
(following the triennial cycle: <http://www.matsati.com/TriennialDates.pdf>).
While reading through the section of verses I would like you to keep in mind the
following points.

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Points to think upon

- Bilam speaks to HaShem about Balak's request to curse Yisrael. *Bamidbar / Numbers 22:10-11* HaShem told Balak not to curse the people and not to go with Balak. *Bamidbar / Numbers 22:12* In Bilam's response to the princes he does not say that he cannot curse them rather Bilam says he cannot leave with them to go to Balak. *Bamidbar / Numbers 22:13* In This short little discourse, why do you think Balak chooses to send more princes as a way to entice Bilam to come and curse Yisrael? *Bamidbar / Numbers 22:15-16*
- Note the use of different Hebrew words to describe "curse." See verses in *Bamidbar / Numbers 22:6, 22:11* and *22:17* Why do you think different words are used to describe the action of cursing Yisrael?
- The Lord comes to Bilam and says if the men come to call you raise up and go with them. Now note in *Bamidbar / Numbers 22:21*, that Bilam raises in the morning and saddles the donkey and goes with the princes ... but it does not say the men came to him. Bilam goes with the princes and G-d's anger is flared against Bilam and the angel of the Lord stands as an adversary against Bilam. Notice how the word for adversary is the Hebrew word for "Satan." *Bamidbar / Numbers 22:22* why do you think G-d became angry with Bilam?

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לאמר הנה עם יצא ממצרים הנה כסה את עין הארץ והוא
 ישב ממלי: ועתה לכה נא ארה"י אתה עם הזה כירעצום 6
 הוא ממני אולי אוכל נפחזפו ואגרשנו מן הארץ כי ידעתי
 את אשר תבדוק מבדוק ואשר תאר יואר: וילכי זקני מואב
 וזקני מדין וקסטמים בידם ויבאו אל בלעם וידברו אליו ודברי
 בלק: ויאמר אליהם לינו פה הלילה והשכנתי אתכם דבר
 כאשר ידבר יהוה אלי וישבו שרי מואב עם בלעם: ויבא
 אלהים אל בלעם ויאמר מי האנשים האלה עמך: ויאמר
 בלעם אלהי אלהים בלק בן צפור מלך מואב שלח אלי:
 הנה העם היצא ממצרים ויבס את עין הארץ עתה לכה
 קבה"י אתו אולי אוכל להלחם בו וגרשתיו: ויאמר אלהים
 אל בלעם לא תלך עמהם לא תאר אתה עם הזה כי ברוך הוא:
 ויבס בלעם בבקר ויאמר אל שרי בלק לכו אל ארצכם
 כי מאן יהוה לתתי להלך עמכם: ויקמו שרי מואב ויבאו
 אל בלק ויאמרו מאן בלעם הלך עמנו: ויסר עוד בלק שלח
 שרים רבים ונכבדים מאלה: ויבאו אל בלעם ויאמרו לו
 בה אמר בלק בן צפור אלינא תמנע מהלך אלי: כי יבדוק
 אכבדך מאד וכל אשר תאמר אלי אעשה ולכה נא קבה"י
 את העם הזה: ויען בלעם ויאמר אל עבדי בלק אסיתן לך
 בלק מלא ביהו כסף וזהב לא אוכל לעבר את פני יהוה אליו
 לעשות קטנה או גדולה: ועתה שבו נא בזה גם אתם הלילה
 ואדעה מה יסר יהוה דבר עמך: ויבא אלהים אל בלעם
 לילה ויאמר לו אסלקרא לך בא האנשים קום לך אתם ואך
 אתה דבר אשר אדבר אליך אתו תעשה: ויבס בלעם בבקר
 ויחבש את אתנו וילך עם שרי מואב: ויחראף אלהים
 כיהולך הוא ויתעב מלאך יהוה בדרך לשטן לו והוא רכב
 על אתנו וישני נערו עמי: ותרא האתון את מלאך יהוה
 נצב בדרך וחרבו שלופה בידו ותט האתון מן הדרך ותלך
 בשורה ויד בלעם את האתון להסתה בדרך: וישמד מלאך
 יהוה במשעול הפרמים גדר מזה וגדר מזה: ותרא האתון

Bilam tells HaShem about Balak wanting him to curse the children of Israel

HaShem said not to curse them for they are blessed.

Bilam reports what HaShem said to him that he cannot go with them.

Balak sends more princes, more honorable than the previous.

Balim says even if he was given silver and gold that would fill his house he is not able to pass the face of the Lord G-d to do small or great.

HaShem comes to Bilam and says if the princes ask him to go, say and do only the words I give you.

Bilam in the morning goes with the princes and G-d's anger is against Bilam.

The angel of HaShem stands before Bilam as an adversary against him.

70 What we know about Bilam is that he was a resident of the town of Pethor on the river Euphrates. He was a prophet of HaShem and it appears he sold his spiritual abilities to the highest bidder. The love of money corrupted Bilam but

yet HaShem controlled his tongue and Bilam could not help but speak the truth. In chapter 22, Balak King of Moav was trying to hire Bilam to curse Yisrael. While reading through the section of verses I asked you to keep in mind three points. Let's look at these points now:

Point #1

- Bilam speaks to HaShem about Balak's request to curse Yisrael. *Bamidbar / Numbers 22:10-11* HaShem told Balak not to curse the people and not to go with Balak. *Bamidbar / Numbers 22:12* In Bilam's response to the princes he does not say that he cannot curse them rather Bilam says he cannot leave with them to go to Balak. *Bamidbar / Numbers 22:13* In This short little discourse, why do you think Balak chooses to send more princes as a way to entice Bilam to come and curse Yisrael? *Bamidbar / Numbers 22:15-16*

While reading through *Bamidbar / Numbers 22:10-16*, HaShem tells Bilam to not go and to not curse the people for blessed is he. When Bilam speaks to the princes he neglects to mention that HaShem told him to not curse the people. Bilam said G-d will not allow him to go with them. Then the princes return to Balak and say: "Bilam will not come." Naturally if Balak heard that Bilam will not come is it not surprising he concludes he needs to send more princes more honorable than the previous. In this case, Bilam chose not to tell the princes all of what G-d had to say. Having received the Word of G-d Bilam picked only part of what G-d had told him (to not go with them) and failed to explain that G-d has blessed these people. How important it is for us today to receive the entire word of G-d and to proclaim it in its entirety.

Question:

- Think about the Torah, is there any picking and choosing going on over what is and is not acceptable today in our life?
- Are there any areas in your life where you have compromised what G-d has said for you to do in the Bible?

Point #2

- Note the use of different Hebrew words to describe "curse." See verses in *Bamidbar / Numbers 22:6, 22:11-12* and *22:17*. Why do you think different words are used to describe the action of cursing Yisrael?

In verses *22:6, 22:11, and 22:17* we find the use of different words to describe the act of cursing Yisrael:

אָרַר (root אָרַר)= to curse

קָבַח (root קָבַח)= to curse, to blaspheme

The Chain of events

- 120 1. In verse **22:6** the princes ask Bilam to curse these people using the word אָרַהּ.
2. HaShem asks Bilam who these men are, Bilam describes what is going on and uses the word קָבַהּ making a reference to cursing the people, see **22:11**.
- 125 3. Then G-d responds and uses the word אָרַהּ to say you will not curse the people because blessed is he, see **22:12**.
4. Later on the more honorable princes come and use the word קָבַהּ to invite him to come and curse the people again, see **22:17**.

130 As you can see these two groups of people (Bilam and the princes of Moav) use two different Hebrew words; the question is why the use of two different words? Is this an example of semantic manipulation? (*Semantic = the study of the meaning and use of words and phrases*) I believe it is, let me explain. When the princes come to ask Bilam to curse the people they speak directly about their intended purpose, they used the word used specifically for cursing someone. Now
135 if you think about it sometimes when we want to weaken the significance (or impact) of something we choose another word that would be less aggressive. The question we have before us now is whether קָבַהּ is used here as a less aggressive word as compared to אָרַהּ. I believe the word קָבַהּ is used for this very purpose, to blaspheme sounds less imposing as compared to אָרַהּ curse. Bilam knew better when he approached G-d to ask Him about cursing these people. Bilam
140 uses קָבַהּ to lessen the impact of the matter. G-d on the other hand knew Bilam's heart and uses אָרַהּ. Also note the more honorable princes come to Bilam and attempt to do the same thing playing this game of semantic manipulation using the word קָבַהּ.

145 Point #3

- The Lord comes to Bilam and says if the men come to call you raise up and go with them. Now note in *Bamidbar / Numbers 22:21*, that Bilam raises in the morning and saddles the donkey and goes with the princes ...
150 but it does not say the men came to him. Bilam goes with the princes and G-d's anger is flared against Bilam and the angel of the Lord stands as an adversary against Bilam. Notice how the word for adversary is the Hebrew word for "Satan." *Bamidbar / Numbers 22:22* why do you think G-d became angry with Bilam?

155 From a direct reading of the text, I would say G-d became angry because Bilam did not do what He has said. G-d said "if the men come to call you ..." however, Bilam rises in the morning and saddles the donkey. It appears that Bilam did not wait for the men to come to him and ask him to go again rather that
160 Bilam took it upon himself to go ahead and go with the princes. As a result G-d's

anger flared because he went and the angle of HaShem stood in the way **for an adversary** against him (22:22). What also grabs our attention here is the word for adversary used is לְשׂוֹן. The word שָׂטָן (Satan) is used here to show the seriousness of Bilam's sin against G-d.

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שָׂטָן = adversary, opponent, accuser, enemy

What do we know about שָׂטָן (Satan)?

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Satan is the adversary, accuser; he is the constant enemy of G-d. The distinct personality of Satan and his activity among men are easily recognized. Satan tempted Yeshua in the wilderness (*Matthew 4:1-11*). He is the prince of devils (*Matthew 12:24*). He is the constant enemy of G-d and of all truth. In the Cetuvei Shelachim (Apostolic Writings) it says he is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (*1 Peter 5:8*). It is said that men are taken captive by him (*2 Timothy 2:26*). It also says that Yeshua redeemed his people from him that had the power of death that is the devil (*Hebrew 2:14*). Satan has the "power of death," not as the Lord but simply as an executioner. We can also see this in the book of Job (*Job 1:6-12, 2:1-7*).

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I believe it is in this sense the angel of HaShem is acting in the role of executioner. לְשׂוֹן is used here to show the angel of HaShem is standing as executioner to slay Bilam. The use of שָׂטָן also portrays that HaShem stands in total opposition to Bilam as an enemy.

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Conclusion

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It is interesting to see the manipulative character of man in this week's parsha. While reading we found the princes of Moav and Bilam both using words to manipulate the severity of what it means to curse Yisrael. We can see the carelessness of Bilam in his response to the princes by neglecting to tell them HaShem said not to curse the people. Bilam finally disobeys G-d by saddling his donkey and going with the princes. Either Bilam isn't very good at discerning G-d's will or he has so often sold his talents and has forgotten what it means to be a prophet of the Most High God because of his selfish desire to get rich.

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I don't know about you but for me it is difficult sometimes to set aside my own personal selfish desires in favor for what G-d says in the Bible. This constant struggle if we are honest about it is something everyone deals with daily. The desire of every believer should be to know the truths of G-d's word and this includes discernment (being able to distinguish between true and false teaching). We need to first and foremost know what G-d's says so that we can recognize false doctrines (this is where Bilam seriously failed). You have probably heard this before, the best way to recognize a counterfeit dollar bill is to know what a real one looks like. In the same way to be able to detect a spiritual counterfeit

requires we master the truth of G-d's word. The scriptures repeatedly warn us to be aware of false teaching and then to avoid it (*Colossians 2:8; 2 Timothy 2:16*).

So the question of the title of this parsha, "selfish traits and obeying G-d, are they compatible?" What do you think? Let's look at what Yeshua says about selfishness:

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Mark 8:34

8:34 And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. (NASB)

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Yeshua taught us to live a life that is absent of selfishness. When we place our faith upon G-d's Messiah Yeshua, He sends us his Ruach haKodesh (Holy Spirit) and G-d instills in us the character quality that Yeshua demonstrated every day of his life while here on earth, that is a servant attitude. As a fellow believer, can you describe your life as one that reflects the teachings of Yeshua, or one that reflects that of Bilam?

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Be Blessed in Yeshua our Messiah!

הללויה לאדוננו מורנו ורבינו ישוע מלך המשיח לעולם ועד:

Hallelujah for our Lord, our Teacher, our Rabbi,

"Yeshua" King Messiah forever and ever

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