

BALAK { בַּלָּק } (Destroyer)

Numbers 22:2-25:9, Micah 5:6-6:8, Romans 11:25-32

By Hannah Neshar www.voiceforisrael.net

“And Balak, the son of Zippor, saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.” (Numbers 22:2)



Coastal Landscape with Balaam and the Ass (1636 painting by [Bartholomeus Breenbergh](http://www.bartholomeusbreenbergh.com))

Last week's parashah (Chukat) ended with Israel defeating the Amorites; but this week's Torah study tells of how the people of Israel brought defeat upon themselves - not from an external enemy - but through their own sins. When Balak, King of Moab, commissioned Balaam the Sorcerer to curse Israel, he found that he was simply unable to do so!

Speaking against his own intention and self-interest; and under the compulsion of the Spirit of God, Balaam issued a blessing instead of a curse, saying: **“How shall I curse whom God has not cursed?”** (Numbers 23:8) Many have come against the nation of Israel in the past and in the future all nations will gather against her; but who can curse those whom Adonai Himself has blessed?

Balaam's failure proclaims that all attempts on the part of man to foil the purposes of God are utterly futile. Despite repeated attempts throughout history to annihilate this unique nation of Israel, each attempt has failed. God's word promises that a glorious future yet awaits Israel.

Balak the Destroyer

The name, Balak, comes from a rarely used Hebrew word meaning “waste or to lay waste”. The Moabite King wanted to destroy the nation of Israel but found to his dismay that he was unable to do so because God's blessing upon Israel was stronger than any curse spoken against her.

Why did King Balak feel so threatened by Israel that he felt the need to have her cursed? It is because Balak, along with his elders – those skilled in the ‘occult arts’ - had heard of the stunning victories that the Jews had just won over their mighty enemies (Sihon and Og).

Therefore, deciding that it would be too risky to fight Israel directly, Balak used a strange military tactic: he hired a spiritual mercenary, Balaam, a heathen sorcerer, to put a ‘hex’ on Israel.

Hexes, Curses and Spells

“And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time. Then he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor...saying: “Look, a people has come from Egypt. See, they cover the face of the earth, and are settling next to me! 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.” (Numbers 22:4-6)

By making this statement, Balak had elevated Balaam to the level of the Almighty God; for He is the one who has said (with regards to Israel), **“I will bless those who bless you; and those who curse you I will curse.”** (Genesis 12:3) It is God alone who has the power to bless or curse.

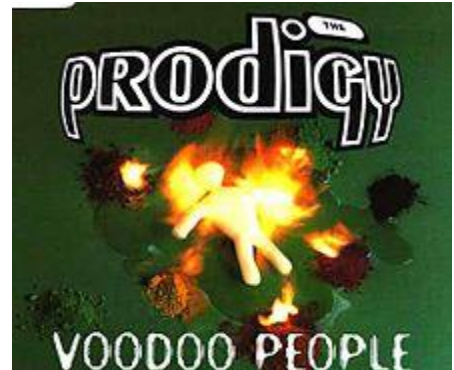
Balaam, well-known throughout the East as a soothsayer whose curse was greatly feared, lived in P'torah a town in Mesopotamia, mentioned in Babylonian and Egyptian inscriptions. It was from this land of magic and sorcery that the ‘great magician’ was to come. At this time, the whole ancient world believed in the very real power of blessings and curses.

We can see from Balak’s statement that he was thoroughly convinced that Balaam had real power to bless or curse people. Although we may consider this merely an ancient, even silly superstition, there are those who practice this kind of black magic ‘voodoo’ against their enemies even today.

In the United States there exists a form of Louisiana Voodoo (also known as New Orleans Voodoo) which was brought over through the West African slave trade. Derived from Afro-American religions, Louisiana



Voodoo is still found in some of the French, Spanish and Creole population of the American state of Louisiana. Voodoo is practiced as a religion in other areas such as Haiti, areas of the Caribbean and regions of Africa. It has also become incorporated into English vernacular such as with songs and movies.



Voodoo altar during a celebration for [Papa Guédé](#) in [Boston](#).

Music CD

Participation in any type of sorcery or witchcraft by the people of God is strictly forbidden in the Bible. We as not to seek guidance from astrologers, sorcerers, psychics or those who consult with the dead (as do the heathens):

“When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you *anyone* who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, *or one* who practices witchcraft, *or* a soothsayer, *or* one who interprets omens, *or* a sorcerer, *or* one who conjures spells, *or* a medium, *or* a spiritist, *or* one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you. You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the LORD your God has not appointed such for you.” (Deuteronomy 18:9-14)

Unfortunately, with the rise in the popularity and acceptance of books and films such as the ‘Harry Potter’ series, even some Christians are breaking this serious commandment to their own peril. As the world becomes darker and more terrifying, many people will seek for guidance from sorcerers and others skilled in the occult arts; but as God’s people we are to ‘Come out from among them and be separate’.¹

As followers of Yeshua, we have the Holy Spirit (Ruach Hakodesh in Hebrew) to lead and guide us into all truth; therefore we do not need to seek for direction within those who serve the kingdom of darkness. God promises that if we seek for Him with all of our heart, we will find Him²; and that those who are His sheep will hear His voice³.

The Power of the Tongue

Even though most people in our modern, Western culture do not purposefully engage in casting ‘spells’ on other people; or putting curses upon them, anyone can (and often does) affect others in a negative and very real sense with malicious or hurtful words.

The bible speaks of the tremendous power of the tongue to bring either life or death. **“The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”**(Proverbs 18:21)

This is why the patriarchal blessing was so significant in ancient days; and why, even today, we must be careful to speak blessing and not cursing over people, especially our loved ones. Our words are so powerful! When the Israelites complained in the wilderness and said (speaking their fears rather than faith) that surely they were going to die in the wilderness, God basically said, *“Okay, you will have what you have said.”* Selah. Pause and think on this. What are we saying? God hears and may bring it to pass.

We can thank God for all the negative things He doesn’t bring upon us that we speak out of our mouths in times of fear, anger or distress. It was through **His words** that God spoke the world into existence, starting with the creation of light: “And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.” (Genesis 1:3)

“Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.” (Psalm 33:8-9)

Just as God created the entire visible universe with His spoken words, we also have power in our words, having been created in the image of God. Like the rudder on a large ship, our tongues are small but can change the entire course of our lives.⁴ If we wonder why we seem to be experiencing the curses instead of the blessings, perhaps the answer is right under our nose!

How often do we speak forth such foolish words as, “I’m just *dying* to go there” or “I could *die* for this” (Israelis use this expression a lot)...or...“I’m so *sick and tired* of this...” Then we wonder why we feel sick and tired! By speaking these and other negative words, we can bring destruction upon ourselves. We have the power to bring forth life and blessing or death and cursing just with the words we speak!

God sets before us life or death, blessing or cursing, and then tells us to **CHOOSE LIFE!**⁵ We need to be so careful that the words we speak about or over other people are constructive and life-giving. Not everyone has been so fortunate to have blessings spoken over their life, especially as a child. Not only parents and teachers, but also other children can be unkind or speak cutting words over another.

¹ 2 Corinthians 6:17

² Jeremiah 29:13

³ John 10:27

⁴ James 3:4

⁵ Deuteronomy 30:19

Oftentimes these negative words can pierce the heart and soul of an impressionable child and become false labels believed to be true: stupid, incorrigible, ugly, bad, lazy, selfish or unlovable.

Even as adults we can speak horribly cruel words to or about others. These comments can stick, like poisonous darts, in our mind and heart, causing a festering wound that never truly heals. It keeps coming to our remembrance – that mean statement that our ex-spouse said about us, or a so-called ‘friend’.

The Bible tells us that our ‘reckless or careless words’ can be used as a sword to pierce and wound; but we can also use our words to bring healing. **“The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”** (Proverbs 12:18)

Unfortunately, name calling, criticism and belittling are common occurrences in our human experience - and I am as guilty as anyone else of this sin. I don’t have to look back very far (just yesterday in fact) to remember a time when my careless words likely hurt someone I love.

Sometimes I am appalled at the words that come out of my mouth; but then this only demonstrates the defilement that yet resides in the dark recesses of my own heart – areas that still cry out for redemption and healing. The root of the problem goes much deeper than our mouth – it is a heart issue. Yeshua tells us that what is truly in our heart will eventually come out of our mouth.

“A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.” (Luke 6:45)

Herein lies the very real problem – we all have areas of our heart that are not yet cleansed or healed; therefore in our own strength, no one can tame this wild tongue of ours.

“No man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the image of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.” (James 3:8-10)

Is our mouth saved?

So if no one can tame the tongue, does that mean we don’t try? Do we just let any foolish and destructive word come out of our mouth? Has v’halila (God forbid!). One of the primary changes that needs to happen after we get saved and have a desire for the Lord to use us is for our mouth to get saved!

When the Prophet Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord and looked upon His holiness, what was his response? **“Woe is me, for I am undone!”** What was it that caused Isaiah such despair in the Light of God’s holiness? It was the state of uncleanness of his lips: **“Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;”** (Isaiah 6:1-5)



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It was his mouth that convicted the great prophet. So one of the **seraphim** (a word which means ‘**burning**’ in Hebrew) flew to him with a hot live coal from the altar and touched Isaiah’s mouth with it, saying, **“Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away and your sin purged.”** (Isaiah 6:6-7)

Only now that God touched Isaiah’s lips was he fit for God’s service. Now God was able to ask, **“Who will go for us and whom shall I send?”** Isaiah answered, **“Hineini Adonai”** **“Here I am Lord, send me.”** And God said, **“Go, and tell this people...”** (Isaiah 6:8-9)

Before I came to faith in Yeshua, I will admit to being a woman of ‘unclean lips’. I grew up in a good home; but as a teenager, began to hang out with a peer group that used curse words just as a matter of course in normal daily conversation.

For me, it became a habit - something I didn’t even think about – it was just the way I spoke. But a curious thing happened after I received Yeshua - I just stopped cursing. I don’t know how it happened. I didn’t try to change how I spoke or struggle with the strength of my will to break this bad habit and refrain from using curse words in my conversation. They just stopped being a part of my vocabulary. Suddenly! By His Spirit, God supernaturally delivered my mouth (while of course there were still sins I needed to deal with of which I was NOT supernaturally delivered). When I ‘got saved’, my mouth got saved as well. 😊

Really, we have nothing much to tell anyone if behind closed doors we are using our mouth in a wrong way for evil purposes, to tear down rather than build up, to divide rather than unify, to dishearten rather than encourage. We cannot be ‘mixed messengers’, bringing forth bitter and sweet waters out of the same mouth. Because the Lord is coming back for a spotless Bride, He is now dealing strongly with the words we speak.

“Let no corrupt word come out of our mouth but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” (Ephesians 4:29)

Before we speak, we need to consider whether or not our words are imparting grace and mercy to the one who hears it, or judgment and condemnation. If we truly want to be used by God we need to deal with the way we speak; to speak blessing over people (including ourselves) and not cursing.

We must continually seek for the help of the Holy Spirit to control our tongue, otherwise all of our religiosity and supposed spirituality is useless. **“If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his own hear, this one’s religion is useless.”** (James 1:26)

The Blessing Overrides the Curse

It is true that no man can tame the tongue but we must pray that the Holy Spirit will put a guard at the entrance of our lips, so that we may speak forth life and blessings over our own lives and the lives of others.

“Set a guard over my mouth, LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips.” (Psalm 141:3) Or in modern slang we may say, “Lord, help me to ‘zip my lip.’ 😊



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Perhaps we feel that someone has cursed our life by telling us that we were ‘no good’, or ‘stupid’, or would ‘never amount to anything’, or any other such lie. What is the answer to this very real problem? How may we break free of these lies and labels? The answer is found in Yeshua Hamashiach!

Not only do we find unconditional love and acceptance with Yeshua; but also the blood of the Messiah has the power to break every curse that has ever been spoken over us – whether intentionally or out of ignorance. Yeshua became a curse for us so that we could be redeemed and set free from every curse: **“Messiah redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.”** (Galatians 3:13) God has already blessed us; therefore who can curse those whom God has blessed?

Balaam the Sorcerer - Prophet

Balaam is a contradiction in character. On the one hand, he was a self-proclaimed prophet and follower of the one true God יהוה. After God appeared to Balaam, forbidding him from going with the messengers of Balak to curse Israel, Balaam said to the princes of Balak, **“Go back to your land, for the LORD has refused to give me permission to go with you.”** (Numbers 22:13)

Clearly, Balak did not feel he could disobey a direct order of God – not for any amount of money. When Balak’s men tried to entice Balaam with a higher fee, he said, **“Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more.”** (Numbers 22:18)

On the other hand, however; Balaam was also a heathen sorcerer who, in the end, attempted to bring about the ruin of Israel. Balaam demonstrates the complexity of the character of man, which is often fickle and changeable in loyalty. No wonder the Word of God says, **“The heart is deceitful above all things...”** (Jeremiah 17:9)

Because of the fickle nature of the heart of man, we are advised that it is better to place our trust in the Lord, who is absolutely trustworthy, than to place our confidence even in princes!⁶

Of significance is the fact that Balaam’s proclamation of blessing over Israel has now become an opening prayer of most synagogue services: **“How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, thy dwellings O Israel.”** (Numbers 24:5)

“Ma tovu ohaleha Yaacov mishkenotechah Yisrael.”

מַה-טֹבוֹ אֹהֲלֵיךָ, יַעֲקֹב; מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ, יִשְׂרָאֵל



Avi's field trip to Italian Synagogue Museum in Jerusalem

Let Them Curse but God will Bless

Balak, King of Moab, sent messengers to Balaam, asking him to curse Israel, but God forbade Balaam from going with the men to curse Israel, saying, **“Thou shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.”** (Numbers 22:12)

As Believers in Yeshua Hamashiach, we are a people whom God has blessed and no man can reverse it. **“The blessing of the Lord makes one rich and He adds no sorrow with it.”** (Proverbs 10:22) Whereas some worldly blessings can bring with them trouble and sorrow, God’s blessings are not like these. When He blesses us, no man can turn it into a source of sorrow. Is it possible that we are too concerned with what people may be saying about us behind our backs or what people may be doing to harm or cheat us? If God has blessed us, then we are blessed. Period. End of story. God says we are His segulah – His special treasure; therefore we may say, **“Let them curse, but God will bless!”** (Psalm 109:28)

⁶ Psalm 118:8-9

Beware Covetousness

When Balak realized that Balaam would not go to curse Israel, he upped the stakes – promising Balaam heaps of riches and honor if he will comply with the King’s request to curse Israel - but again, Balaam refused. He boasted that even if Balak was to give him a house full of silver and gold, he still could not go beyond the Word of the Lord.

If only more people possessed this attitude towards God’s people, Israel. Instead, some - disregarding the clearly written Word of God– choose to curse the Jewish people instead of blessing them. Balaam should have quit while he was ahead. God had made His will very clear – He did not want Balaam to go with these men and did not permit him to curse Israel.

Why then, did Balaam ask the men to stay the night ‘just in case the Lord had something more to say’? Was the temptation of riches and fame too great for Balaam to give up so easily? Did he hope against all hope that maybe God would give in and change His mind? How often are we like Balaam – we don’t really like the answer to our prayer, so we hang around with it a while longer, hoping that maybe God will give in and give us what our hearts desire.

In the night, God did come again to Balaam and say that he could go with the men but he could only speak the words God allowed him to speak.⁷ Curiously, when Balaam rose up in the morning and went with the princes of Moab, God’s anger was kindled against him. Why? Is it not unfair for God to be angry with Balaam after giving him permission to go? It is because God is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of our hearts. God saw the double-mindedness of Balaam’s heart and knew that he wanted to curse Israel for his own personal gain.

We must make sure that the intentions of our hearts are pure, even toward those things which are permissible. We must always beware of greed. Even if God prospers and blesses us, we must never make riches the motivation of our hearts. Riches will never deliver us in the day of God’s wrath, but only righteousness delivers from death. (Proverbs 11:4)

Jewish mystics consider Balaam’s name as meaning ‘*without a nation or people*’ (bli – am), suggesting that by going to curse Israel he became excluded or cut off from a place with the community of Heaven (Olam habah). According to the Mishna⁸, Balaam’s sins included such characteristics as “*an evil eye (stinginess and greed), a haughty spirit and a proud soul.... [They] inherit Gey Hinnom (Hell) and descend to the pit of destruction.*”

How many people or nations are cutting themselves off from a place in Heaven by attempting to curse the Jews? God has promised to bless those who bless the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and to curse those who curse us.⁹

By taking upon himself the task of cursing the Jews, Balaam entered into Jewish history books as “*Balaam Harashah*” (Balaam¹⁰ the Wicked). Although he called himself a prophet of God, he seemed to be more motivated by ‘profit’ than ‘prophet’. The book of Jude confirms that Balaam was greedy for riches; he erred in running after profit: “**Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit and perished in the rebellion of Korah.**” (Jude 1:11)

⁷ Numbers 22:20

⁸ quoted in JNTC

⁹ Genesis 12:3

¹⁰ Also spelled Bilam in Hebrew

The sin of Balaam is considered so serious that it is mentioned in the same context with that of Cain (who murdered his brother Abel¹¹) and Korach (who led the rebellion against Moses¹²). Balaam knew that it wasn't God's will for him to go with Balak's shlichim (messengers), but he went anyways, perhaps hoping to return a rich man. **“He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house.”** (Proverbs 15:27)

What is the one thing that can guard our hearts from greed and covetousness? It is obedience to the commandment to tithe the first 10% of our income. This helps keep God in first place rather than money.

Begging God

Just like Balaam, we can keep begging God for something that is not in His perfect will or timing. God may even grant our request, but it may not end up being God's best for our life. This happened with Israel when they kept asking for an earthly King; they ended up with King Saul, which was not the best leader for Israel. We can do this by continually begging God for a husband or wife when it may not be in our best interests at this particular time or situation. Having the Lord our Maker as our only husband (ishi) can be better than getting an earthly spouse for which we have begged God if the man or woman we choose is in the flesh and out of God's perfect will.

When the Israelites kept begging God for meat, He gave in to their request but sent a 'leanness to their soul.' (Psalm 106:15) Sometimes the very thing we want so badly, if we were to receive it, may bring starvation to our soul. An unbalanced love of the world and the things in it can crowd out our love for God.

Angels & Asses

“Then God's anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the LORD took His stand in the way as an adversary against him.”
(Numbers 22:22)

Balaam set off on his journey, but God placed an angel of Yehovah יהוה in Balaam's pathway as an *'adversary'* against him. In the Hebrew, it is called a *'satan'* שָׂטָן to him.

'Satan' is not really the devil's name. In Hebrew he doesn't even have a name but a title – 'the adversary'. We often blame 'the devil' for frustrating our plans and standing in the way of the path we wish to take, but we must keep in mind that this adversary (satan) may be a messenger sent from God to keep us from following our chosen pathway leading to destruction.



Balaam and the Ass (watercolor circa 1896–1902 by [James Tissot](#))

Balaam's donkey, seeing the angel standing with his sword drawn, at first turned aside from the path and went into the field. Balaam (not seeing the angel) struck his donkey in anger. The donkey, seeing the angel again, then thrust herself against the wall, inadvertently crushing Balaam's foot. Balaam struck his donkey in anger again.

¹¹ Genesis chapter 4

¹² Numbers chapter 16

Once more, the angel appeared to the donkey in a narrow place where the donkey could not turn to the right or to the left; and so this time, the donkey lay down under Balaam, who struck the poor donkey with his staff.

Jewish mystics believe that animals can see into the spiritual realm to see supernatural beings such as angels or demons that humans generally cannot see. The supernatural realm is very real; but usually kept well hidden from the human experience unless deemed necessary.



Balaam and the Angel (1836 painting by Gustav Jaeger)

We can read of several instances in the Bible where people saw angels and supernatural beings. In one such account, The King of Syria had sent a great army on horses and chariots to capture Elishah the prophet. His servant, seeing the vast opposition became afraid, but Elishah said, **“Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”** (2 Kings 6:16).

Then Elisha prayed that God would open his eyes to see into the supernatural realm and his servant could see that the mountains were full of horses and chariots of fire all around them.

Even in modern times, there have been instances where the enemies of Israel suddenly stopped their attack and fled – for no apparent reason. In one case, they ran away so fast that they left their sandals strewn about in the Sinai Desert. When they questioned those who were captured and asked them why they fled so quickly, they testified to seeing vast armies coming against them - even though in the natural, the Israeli soldiers were few in number.

When we feel completely outnumbered and under attack, we must remember that God is YHVH Tz’va’ot (Lord of Armies). He has the entire host of Heavenly beings ready to come to our aid. They are there and they are real, even if we cannot see them with our natural sight.

Speaking through Donkeys

The Lord can open the eyes of the blind and in this case, even open the mouth of a donkey to speak: **“Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, “What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?”** (Numbers 22:28)

The donkey was really trying to help Balaam. In fact, if the donkey had not turned away, the angel would have killed Balaam. He was so intent on his own agenda, however, that it left no room for a change in plans.

Sometimes God will frustrate our plans in order to save us from our own foolishness. We must not be stubborn and strike out at the ‘ass’ trying to save us! If we happen to be the ones trying to rescue someone from their own foolishness, we must realize that often all we will receive for all our efforts is a big bruise from where the person we were trying to help has kicked us. Have you ever experienced this? Or perhaps I should ask, rather, ‘How often’?



“He who rebukes a scorner heaps upon himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man gets for himself bruises.” (Proverbs 9:7)

A good test of whether or not a person is wise and righteous or wicked and foolish is whether or not they receive instruction and correction – and with a good attitude. We can spend years and years out of our life being the donkey for some fool’s abuse, trying to convince a scorner to turn from his or her wicked ways. This is surely a futile waste of words, time, and energy indeed.

There comes a point where we say, *“Enough is enough – I’ve said my piece and paid the price; I have received enough bruises to last me a lifetime trying to help this person. I’m going to shut my mouth and let this person go their own way if they continue to refuse correction.”*

Finally, the Lord opened Balaam’s eyes, and he too saw the angel of the Lord. Balaam realized his error and prostrated himself in repentance. The angel of the Lord asked Balaam, **‘Why have you beaten your donkey, since I am come as a ‘satan’ יָצַו unto you, since “thy way is contrary unto Me.”** (Numbers 22:32)



Balaam and the Angel (illustration from the 1890 Holman Bible)

Balaam then returned to King Balak, proclaiming that fact that he had no power whatsoever to speak anything except the words that God had put into his mouth. Balaam said, **“How shall I curse whom God has not cursed?”** (Numbers 23:8)

God is unchangeable in his purpose to bless His people, Israel. The unconditional covenant God sealed with Abraham and continued through the generations of Isaac and Jacob and his descendants remains unbroken, despite all those who try to curse her. Those of faith in Messiah are also the seed of Abraham¹³, and therefore blessed through Yeshua.

The Futility of Cursing Israel

Although Balaam possessed legendary supernatural powers, God proved Himself to be greater than these. Three times Balaam tried to curse Israel; and three times he involuntarily blessed them instead. Many peoples and nations have tried to destroy Israel over the centuries but none have succeeded to wipe Israel off the map as they have desired. Hamas and other Muslim terrorist groups have written into their charter their stated purpose – to annihilate the state of Israel and drive her people into the sea.



Balaam Blessing the Israelites (illustration from the 1728 *Figures de la Bible*)

¹³ Galatians 3:29

Why has Israel survived against all odds even unto today? It is because of God's covenantal promise to the seed of Israel:

“Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, who disturbs the sea, and its waves roar (The LORD of Hosts is His name):

“If those ordinances depart From before Me, says the LORD, *then* the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever.” (Jeremiah 31:35 – 36)

A confederacy is being formed before our very eyes that has as its proclaimed intention to wipe out the name of Israel forever:

“They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones. They have said, “Come, and let us cut them off from *being* a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more.” (Psalm 83:3-4)

In a recent move that may prove extremely dangerous for the United States, a court ruling declared that any American citizen born in Jerusalem may not declare ‘Israel’ as country of birth. They may try to wipe the name of Israel off of American passports but they will not succeed in causing the name of Israel to be remembered no more.

Blessing our enemies

Every morning when Orthodox Jews recite their prayers, they pronounce a curse over Messianic Jews (Jewish people who believe in and follow Jesus); but how can they curse those whom God has not cursed?

The Bible tells us that, **“An undeserved curse has no effect. Its intended victim will be no more harmed by it than by a sparrow or swallow flitting through the sky.”** (Proverbs 26:2 Living Bible Translation)



What is to be our response to those who do curse us? Yeshua told us to pray for and bless those who curse us, despitefully use us, or treat us with injustice. **“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”** (Romans 12:14) I used to have trouble understanding this scripture. Was the Lord asking me to roll over and be a doormat for anyone who tries to abuse me? God forbid! But I see this in a new way lately.

In returning blessings for cursing, the power of blessing can overcome the evil of the curse they are directing towards us. In the New Testament it says we are to overcome evil with good.

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:21)

This is how we overcome evil with good – by blessing those who curse us. Light overcomes the darkness; we can't beat the darkness with a stick and expect it to go away. Only by turning on the light will the darkness dissipate. We must go beyond forgiveness to actually blessing our enemies and praying for them. Jumping off the Fence!

Balak finally resigned himself to the fact that Balaam would not curse Israel, so he asked if at least he would not bless them! **“Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all.”** (Numbers 23:25)

This is the stance that some people take with regards to Israel. They know enough to realize that they had better not be ‘cursing’ God’s people, but they do not want to go so far as to actively bless them either. And so, they sit on the fence, neither cursing, nor blessing either. But Balaam saw that **“it pleased the Lord to bless Israel.”** (Numbers 24:1)



www.standwithus.com

When he did so, the Spirit of God came upon him. We all want to please the Lord; we all want to be filled with His Spirit. Perhaps we need to get down off that fence and determine to stand with Israel even unto the very end. We must ask ourselves how we can actually bless Israel.

While living in Ariel, a town in Biblical Samaria in 1999, a Christian group from Denver, Colorado, Faith Bible Chapel, brought a group of singer called ‘The Internationals’ to bless Israel with their musical talents. They sang (mostly in Hebrew) encouragement to the Israelis of Ariel through hoping and trusting in our God. It was absolutely wonderful and the Spirit of God definitely came upon them, touching the hearts of the people of Israel in the audience.

The leader of this group also presented the leader of the city of Ariel with a cheque for \$30,000 U.S. to be used toward programs assisting new immigrants integrate into Israeli society. Faith Bible Chapel also supported a kindergarten center for handicapped and disabled Israeli children in Ariel. What a powerful example of people who have taken seriously the exhortation to bless Israel!



City of Ariel

Not everyone can fly to Israel and sing in Hebrew, nor raise \$30,000, but the Lord was pleased even with the widows’ mite. If you ask with a sincere heart, I am certain that He will be faithful to show you how you too can bless Israel; but do not forget that our priority in giving is to be towards the household of faith - the Believers in Yeshua.¹⁴

At the same time we were new immigrants, Messianic Jews trying to survive in Israel, living without even some of the basic necessities, but we could not find any such assistance from either the city of Ariel, the government of Israel, or Christian ministries. At the time, the law in Israel was that only those from 2nd or 3rd world countries such as Russia or Ethiopia could receive financial assistance. Coming from a ‘rich country’ like Canada disqualified us from any financial help. Since then this inequality has been rectified but at the time, it was tough. We were new and ‘green’, not knowing where to turn – but God provided.

I am certain that God will bless anyone who blesses Israel, for God’s promise to Abraham is re-affirmed to his descendants (in this parashah) through Jacob, **“Blessed be every one that bless thee, and cursed be every one that curseth thee.”** (Numbers 24:9, Genesis 12:3)

¹⁴ Galatians 6:10

Mocking the Jews is a form of Cursing

Several years ago, I attended a children's service at a Christian Church in Canada where the children's teacher gave them a Sunday school lesson using the story of Rahab and the Israelite spies in Jericho. All was well until the teacher identified himself as one of the Israelite spies, telling the children that since he was a Jew, you could tell by his '*weird-looking and crooked nose*'.

I could feel my body beginning to tremble in what I perceived as righteous anger of the Lord. Such stereotyping of Jewish people or any other racial or ethnic group is disgraceful in the house of God. I confronted him for teaching the children such false things about the Jewish people and reminded him that Yeshua, our Lord and Saviour is also a Jew; therefore by mocking the Jews' appearance, he also dishonored the Lord.



An 1873 caricature depicting the stereotypical physical features of a Jewish man

This kind of Christian anti-Semitism also re-builds that dividing wall of hostility standing between Yeshua the Messiah and his Jewish brethren. Christians must be especially careful what they teach children about the Jewish people, remembering that those who teach others will be judged even more harshly. May the Lord have mercy on those who revile (mock) God's chosen.

Messianic Prophecies

This parashah also contains several Messianic references: **“There shall step forth a star out of Jacob,”** (Numbers 24:17)

The fulfillment of this prophecy is found in Matthew 2:2: **“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship Him.”** Yeshua is our ‘bright and morning star’.



Venus and Jupiter as seen in the sky June 30th 2015

Bar Cozeba, leader of the last Jewish War of Independence, changed his name to Bar Cochba, which translates as '*son of star*', referring to this Messianic prophecy; and thus proclaiming himself the Messiah. Although he had many followers, he was proven to be just one more false messiah when he was slain in 135 A.C.E. to the great disappointment of his followers.

This war split those who followed Yeshua from the rest of the Jewish community, since the believers in Yeshua knew that Bar Cochba was not a true Messiah and therefore refused to take part in the rebellion and fled to the mountains, while those who followed Bar Cochba perished. The Messianic Jewish believers were therefore perceived as traitors.

Another Messianic reference is the next line, **“and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.”** In Genesis 49:10 the word says, **“The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.”**

This is clearly referring to the Messiah, the son of God, who has already come as the Lamb of God in order to die as atonement for our sins (Isaiah 53) and will come again as the Lion of Yehudah to defeat the enemies of God and Israel and to rule the nations with justice and righteousness.

The Psalms also refer to this Messiah, the Son, who will rule the nations: **“You are my son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”** (Psalm 2:7-9)

A warning to revere God’s son, the Messiah, and a promise of blessing to those who take refuge in Him follows these verses. **“Kiss the son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”** (Psalm 2:12).

If you have not yet taken refuge in the true Messiah of Israel, I urge you to do so now, as the time is short until his second coming.

Prophecies against Edom

In the last parashah, Chukat, we discussed Edom (Adom means ‘red’ in Hebrew and is the ‘nickname for Esau’) and their territory is Mt. Seir. This parashah promises that **“Edom shall be a possession of Israel and Seir also... while Israel doeth valiantly.”** (Numbers 24:18)

It may look as though it is all over for Israel, surrounded by enemies, but it is “through our God, that we shall do valiantly. It is He who will strike down our enemies.” (Psalm 60:12)

Of Israel, the Word says **“he shall eat up the nations that are his adversaries.”**(Numbers 24:8)

This stands as a warning to all nations today who will come against Israel in the future, especially Jerusalem.

“On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves.” (Zechariah 12:3)

Knowing that all the nations are prophesied to come against Jerusalem and be destroyed by the Lord Himself should serve as a challenge to the people of God within these nations to pray for mercy as never before. There are some whose pride prevents them from acknowledging Israel as the prophesied leader amongst the nations, but the Word of God states,

“For the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined.” (Isaiah 60:12)



Jerusalem Western Wall Plaza

Peter used Balaam as a bad example in his warnings to the church – may the people of God today take heed:

“They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey--a beast without speech--who spoke with a man’s voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.” (2 Peter 2:15-16)

What is this warning about Balaam to which we need to pay attention even today? Balaam, even after failing to curse Israel directly, continued to associate with those who sought Israel's destruction (the Midianites).

There are some within the Christian Church who not only associate with, but also financially support charities and causes with an anti-Israel and even anti-Semitic agenda. From the example of Balak and Balaam, we can see that being drawn into despising Israel is a dangerous path – and it seems that talking donkeys are in short supply these days!



Protest against Israel's Gaza Blockade and raid on [Mavi Marmara](#) – Melbourne 5 June 2010.

May God's people disassociate from those who curse Israel and teach anti-Semitic lies. May the followers of Yeshua, both Jews and Gentiles, choose to stand with Israel unto the very end.

Cursed by our own sins

At the end of this parashah, we see that it was not Balaam who cursed Israel; but their own compromise with the heathen nations. They took on the ways of the nations around them, sacrificing and bowing down to their gods, thus evoking the wrath of God.

There is only one way that Israel may be defeated; and that is through her own sins – by turning away from God and adopting the ways of the Gentile nations. This is what happened to the people of Israel in this parashah. Although Balaam failed in bringing a curse upon Israel, they brought destruction upon themselves by committing sexual immorality with the Moabite women and worshipping their god Baal-peor.

“Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.” (Numbers 25:1-3)

This enraged God and resulted in a plague which killed 24,000 Israelites. Scripture reveals that it was Balaam, who counseled the Midianites to ruin Israel through association with their women.¹⁵ The Rabbis also discern another meaning of the name of Balaam as '*bilu-am*' – one who confused the nation.

Today, Israel is in grave danger of making the same mistake of imitating the nations in accepting sexual perversions that are an abomination to God as stated in His Word.

In a disastrous move, the U.S. Supreme Court just passed a law making homosexual marriages legal in all fifty states.¹⁶



Obama Flaunts 'Rainbow White House' after Same-Sex Marriage Ruling
<http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/06/26/>

¹⁵ Numbers 31:16

¹⁶ June 2015

More than 21 nations have already legalized same sex marriage; but God has called Israel to be holy and set apart for Him – not to be like all the other nations.

Ignoring this high calling and bowing to the perverse world culture, Israel's Defense Minister, Moshe Ya'alon, has announce that he hopes Israel will follow the American example, making homosexual marriages legal here in Israel. At a time when Israel desperately needs God to be on our side, this is NOT the time to rebel against God and His Torah. If the Jewish people of Israel fall into this sin, then we may not expect YHVH God to bless and protect us from our enemies.

Let us thank God for Benjamin Netanyahu and his wisdom in calling for a new election and thereby gathering to him those of the political right wing who do not support the legalization of same sex marriage.

The relevant point for us is that even when someone cannot curse us directly, if we willingly break God's commandments, this removes the hedge of God's protection from our lives so that the enemy can gain access.

Balaam's Legacy

What happened in the end to this great sorcerer - prophet? After being ridiculed by God through a talking donkey, and then counseling the Midianites to bring about Israeli's ruin, Balaam was finally killed by the Israelites in battle.¹⁷ So ended the life of one who was motivated by greed and selfish ambition rather than by God's righteousness.

Balaam was one of the only Gentile Prophets mentioned in the Bible. He is not the only one, however, who began by serving the one true God, YHVH; but ended up being destroyed by love of money and wickedness.

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” (1 Timothy 6:10)

Notice it is not money in itself that is evil; but only making it our 'first love' instead of God. Many of the great Biblical characters, including Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, were very wealthy men. They were also called 'righteous' and faithful servants of the Lord; so certainly God is not against His people prospering materially. We can do a lot of good with the abundance God gives us. The problem comes in when money becomes our master rather than our servant.

Yeshua also referred to Balaam, saying: **“Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.”** (Revelation 2:14)

Although Balaam was not allowed to curse Israel directly, he obviously did not have Israel's best interests at heart. Even if people seem to be blessing us, we must discern the true motives of their heart – do they really have our best interests at heart or are they just covering up their evil intentions? For this we need the discernment of the Holy Spirit.

Balaam, probably the only Gentile prophet mentioned in the Tanach, suffered a terrible death in the end for his sins against Israel. **“Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword.”** (Numbers 31:8) It was

¹⁷ Numbers 31:8

Balaam’s counsel that caused the children of Israel to self-destruct. Whose counsel are we receiving? We must be careful that, after escaping from someone’s evil intentions against us, by God’s grace, we don’t bring a curse upon ourselves by our own fall into sin.

Let us pray that God will save Israel from all those external enemies who try to curse her; and instead turn that curse into a blessing for Israel. However let us also pray that the people of Israel will seek after God with all of their hearts and will walk in righteousness before Him.

HAFTORAH BALAK (MICAH 5:6-6:8) Cutting off Witchcraft and Sorcery

God says **“I will cut off witchcrafts out of thy hand; And thou shalt have no more soothsayers;”** (Micah 5:12) Israel, in this respect no different than other nations, is full of witchcraft, divination, New Age religions and philosophies. Isaiah spoke of this same sinful condition of Israel in ancient times.

“They are full of superstitions from the East; they practice divination like the Philistines.”(Isaiah 2:6)

Today in Israel, almost every home, car, and shop contains some form of a hand with a representation of the ‘eye of God’ as an amulet to protect them against the evil one.



hamsa



Hannah standing in front of shop in Israel selling demonic masks & costumes on Purim

The prevalence of using the hamsa as an amulet is one example of ‘superstitions from the East’ that Israel is full of. Kabbalistic sects of Judaism focus on the mystical and its center, Tzfat, even offers courses on Jewish mysticism and astrology. One day, God will cleanse the land of this spiritual defilement – it is His promise.

What Does God Require of Us?

God actually pleads with His people, Israel, reminding them of how He redeemed them from Egypt and how He caused Balaam to foil the evil that Balak, king of Moab had devised. The people turn to the Prophet Micah with the question, **“What does God really require of us?”**

Many of us, at times, struggle with this question as well – what is it that God really wants from us? Some who believe in the sacrifice of Yeshua consider this enough – that their behavior makes no difference to God whatsoever. ‘I’m saved by the blood of Jesus. Period. End of story.’ Yes, we need to always depend upon the grace of God demonstrated in the sacrifice of His Son, Yeshua, to atone for our sins, but there is more that God requires of us than this faith.

Jewish people are often criticized for their emphasis on ‘works’ – doing good deeds or mitzvot in order to please God. Christians are often criticized for their attitude that their ‘deeds’ don’t count, and that they can therefore sin and not be penalized. We must, however, mature into a balance of faith and deeds that harmonize one with another. Even the New Testament proclaims that **“faith without works is dead.”**(James 2:17)

What is true religion according to the Word of God?

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” (James 1:27)

In this parashah, we find the same answer. The Old and New Testaments must harmonize if they are inspired by the same God. The prophet Micah answers the people in the same spirit as James.

“It has been told to you, Adam (Man), what is good, and what the Lord requires of you; Only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.” (Micah 5:8)

In Hebrew, mercy is translated as ‘Chessed’, meaning “kindness to the lowly, needy and miserable, as shown in all charitable acts, especially such as go with personal service.”

In case anyone considering himself or herself a ‘New Testament Believer’ thinks this kind of religion belongs only to the Jews of the Old Testament, compare this scripture to the 25th chapter of Matthew. The Lord, in His own words, described the criteria for judging the sheep from the goats in the final judgment. Who will be directed to the Lord’s right-hand side, to take his or her inheritance, which is eternal life? Who will be declared righteous? Those who practiced ‘chessed’ towards the poor, the hungry, the sick, the stranger, and those imprisoned – the least of the brethren of the Lord.

Who will be sent to the left, cursed, to eternal punishment? Those who refused to answer the call of what the Lord requires of us – to ‘do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God’. A more correct translation of the Hebrew ‘walking humbly’ is to walk in personal holiness or purity. What a challenge for us to strive to live up to the Lord’s requirements. Thankfully, He has given us His grace that enables us to do so by His Spirit.

A beautiful example of someone walking in this justice, mercy and humility that God requires of us is Linda. Directed by the Holy Spirit to come to the mountains of Israel, I met Linda in the settlement of Ariel several years ago. I often noticed her, not only in prayer, but also in acts of personal service towards the people of Ariel. She actively sought out ways to do ‘good deeds’ such as cleaning the apartment of elderly people after a break-in, and acting as chauffeur to a woman when her husband, the driver in the family, was away for a month. I once caught her on her knees, in rubber gloves, scrubbing the toilet in the home of a working Mom who lacked the time to properly clean her house.

What a beautiful testimony she is of a ‘righteous Gentile’, one who truly loves justice and mercy, and walks in personal holiness and purity. It was at least partially because of Linda’s faithfulness in prayer and intercession that my daughter, Liat, was born in Ariel after several miscarriages before her birth. She also initiated a day per week devoted to fasting and prayer for victory in our battle for Israeli citizenship after making aliyah (immigrating to Israel).

Thank you to Linda, and to the many, many righteous Gentiles who have sacrificed so much to be a blessing to Israel and especially to the household of faith. Thank you to all the intercessors who lift us up in prayer; to all the volunteers who come to serve in the Land, to those who help Jewish people come home.

Todah rabah (thank you so much) to all our ministry partners who give so generously in order that the Word will continue to go forth from Zion to the nations. We love and appreciate you so very much! May you receive your full reward from the God of Israel under whose wings you have taken refuge.

Shabbat Shalom & Love in Yeshua,

Hannah Neshet

Balak Study Questions

1. Who was Balak and who was Balaam?
2. Why did Balak send Balaam to curse Israel? Why was he not successful in his mission?
3. How is this parashah relevant to the situation with Israel and her enemies today? How is it personally relevant to each one of us?
4. Do you believe that blessings and curses are real? Can someone put a curse, hex or spell on another?
5. Do you know of brothers or sisters in Yeshua who consult astrology or psychics or allow their kids to read or watch Harry Potter or other books or films involving the occult? What would you say to them? Why do you think God calls this an abomination?
6. Have you ever felt that someone has 'cursed' your life by their words? How have you dealt (or how are you dealing) with this issue?
7. If no man can tame the tongue, what hope do we have of keeping our words wholesome?
8. How could Balaam have been both a prophet and a sorcerer? What character trait was his downfall?
9. Do you think it is ungodly to be materially prosperous or wealthy? What is the one thing that can guard our hearts from the love of money? Share and discuss.
10. Have you ever personally experienced Christian anti-Semitism or anti-Zionism? Have you heard a pastor or someone in a Christian church mock the Jews? What would you say to these people (from a biblical perspective)?
11. If we are God's covenant people, how can His covering of blessing and protection be removed?
12. In light of recent ungodly political decisions that have taken place in the United States, increasing anti-Semitism around the world, and terror attacks in Israel, perhaps this would be a good time to gather in prayer and intercession.

About the Author:

Hannah Neshher grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior. She now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, teaching the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

If you appreciate these teachings, your donations are greatly appreciated. It is through your generous financial and prayer support that we can continue to send the Word forth from Zion and Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:3).

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