

Parasha Balak

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



The Torah Portion at a Glance

Balak, the King of Moab, summons the prophet Bi'l'am to curse the people of Israel. On the way, Bi'l'am is berated by his donkey, who sees the angel that YHWH sends to block their way before Bi'l'am does. Three times, from three different vantage points, Bi'l'am attempts to pronounce his curses; each time, blessings issue instead. Bi'l'am also prophecies on the end of days and the coming of Moshiach.

The people fall prey to the charms of the daughters of Moab and are enticed to worship the idol Peor. When a high-ranking Israelite official publicly takes a Midianite princess into a tent, Pinchas kills them both, stopping the plague raging among the people.

(adapted from chabad.org)

The Messiah in the Torah Portion

This portion is named after the king Balak who does all he can to hurt the people of Israel. Part of his plan was to get the prophet Bi'l'am to curse the set apart ones. Little did he know it, but it is impossible to curse something that YHWH has blessed! The power of YHWH turned the curses of Balak into the blessings of Bi'l'am. The same is true for how Y'shua turned the curses of sin into the blessings of YHWH. What was meant for evil turned out for good at the high place of Bi'l'am and at the Messiah Y'shua's execution stake.

Bi'l'am was powerless to do harm to Israel as he said, "How shall I curse, whom Elohim hath not cursed? or how shall I defy whom YHWH hath not defied? For from the top of the rocks I see Him, and from the hills I behold Him." Balak the king couldn't hurt Israel because they were in line with YHWH's will. "As the sparrow for flitting about, as the swallow for flying, so a curse undeserved shall not come," says Proverbs 26:2. This verse from the book of Mishlei explains that a curse undeserved shall absolutely, positively not have any affect. The curses spoken against a believer can actually become blessings, just as Y'shua became a curse for us so that we might become righteous. Messiah "redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us," Galatians 3:13. YHWH turned the curses of the world into a blessing for Israel with Bi'l'am and he can do the same today with you! Nehemiah 13:2, "The Moabites did not meet the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Bi'l'am against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our Elohim turned the curse into a blessing."

Applying the Portion to Life Today

The destruction of the nation of Israel was the desire of the evil King Balak, who went as far as using divination to curse the chosen people. Our Torah portion states that Balak and Bi'lam ascended a high place so that Bi'lam could pronounce a curse on Israel. The place where Bi'lam spoke is just as important as what he said. Bi'lam spoke from a high place, which is a hill, our mount from where pagans offered sacrifices. On a high place is where asherah poles were erected and where Molech offered human sacrifices. High places originate with the original rebellion of the satan and are still play today.

Isaiah 14:12-17, "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of Elohim I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.' But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit. Those who see you will stare at you, and ponder over you: 'Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world like a desert and overthrew its cities, who did not let his prisoners go home?'" This passage shows how the enemy tried to exalt himself into a high place. In the King James translation, verse 12 reads: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!"

The enemy wanted to go up. He wanted the attention, the praise, the power and the place of the exalted one. This is the pattern the enemy started and millions follow everyday.

One prime example of high place worship occurred in 1 Kings 12 when the kingdom of Israel was torn in two. The wicked king Jereboam encouraged the nation of Israel to ascend the high places of false worship. 1 Kings 12:27-33 relates how Jereboam set up high places with false worship heights, including false days, false places, and false ways. High place worship is a false system that rebels against the Almighty's call to go up to Jerusalem.

High place worship feels real, looks real, and tastes real but it is not the Biblical worship experience that is based on spirit and in truth.

Throughout the Older Testament, the people of Israel built more and more high places of rebellion. "And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the YHWH their Elohim, and they built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city," 2 Kings 17:9.

Even the people of Judah did the same as they "built high places, and images, and groves, and on every high hill, and under every green tree."

It is from a high place in Numbers 22:41 that Balak took Balaam to curse Israel. The same happens today. The enemy seeks to enthrone himself upon the high places of the world. The Hebrew word that is often used to describe a false place of worship and honor is very interesting. It is the same Hebrew term used in Isaiah to describe the heights from which Satan fell. This is the Hebrew term "bama." A "bama" is anything that exalts itself over the wisdom, power, or knowledge of YHWH.

Now, you might think that the high pagan places today do not apply to you. Well, think again. There are high places that work in each of our lives everyday in the way we think. A high place is anywhere that a thought or emotion exalts itself over the knowledge of YHWH. The spirit of Balak and Bi'lam is alive today and operating behind the thoughts of the mind.

2 Corinthians 10:3-6, "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of Elohim, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete."

This section of Scripture from 2 Corinthians is key to understanding high places. These aren't just places of pagan idolatry worship BUT strongholds in our very thought patterns. There are high places everywhere! Ezekiel 16:24, "That thou hast also built unto thee an eminent place, and hast made thee an high place in every street."

Our thought life is the battle ground of worship and the place of high places. We must go up to the high places and tear down the devil's kingdom. The enemy is enthroned upon the feelings and emotions. High places include thoughts of selfishness, unloving spirits, ridicule, unforgiveness, impatience, jealousy, anger, doubt, and fear. These are high places in each of our lives that must be recognized, removed, repented for, and replaced with YHWH's truth. Ha Satan is enthroned upon high places of thought that exalt themselves over the knowledge of YHWH. The solution to such evil is recognizing that YHWH is enthroned upon the praises of his people. Strongholds may abound – high places are all around – yet they can be defeated!

We must tear down the devil's high places. We do this by going up to be with YHWH. Leviticus 26:30, "YHWH said, "I will destroy your high places, and cast down your images, and cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols and my soul shall abhor you."

To defeat the high places, the strongholds that the enemy has in our lives, we must change the way we worship. We need to be like the angels in their worship of YHWH that circle the throne of YHWH twenty four hours a day and seven days a week proclaiming "holy, holy, holy." They don't worship YHWH because of what he has done. Instead, they worship YHWH for WHO he is! There is a difference in worship and praise when it comes to reflecting on just who YHWH is. Praise is thanking YHWH for what He has done in our lives and in the Scriptures. We should enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Then as we ascend we are to begin changing our words and our thoughts to be totally directed to HIM. We need a few minutes each day to just reflect on YHWH's nature and character. This time of true worship can change the rest of our day and week as it empowers us to rely upon YHWH greater. "I will bless YHWH at all times, His praise will continually be on my mouth," Psalm 34:1.

Sometimes our high places are things that YHWH has done with Israel or in the Torah that we focus on MORE than Him! We must get to the place in our worship that its is about WHO

YHWH IS and NOT just about what YHWH can do OR has done for us or Israel! This is intimacy.

Think about the plague of snakes and the pole that was lifted up in the desert to save the people from the sickness. This stake was to represent Y'shua as He was lifted up but it came to be a high place. 2 Kings 18:4 explains, "He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan." The past moves of YHWH don't matter if YHWH isn't moving in your life today!

When was the last time you prayed and got an answer or saw miracles or witnessed and had someone accept the Messiah before your very eyes? So what if YHWH saved you when you were 12 – what are you doing now?

So what if the red sea parted if you don't have victory in your life today?

So what if there are 613 commandments if you can't get the unforgiveness and bitterness out of your life? So what if an image of a snake saved people if it was later going to be worshipped?

False high places are destroyed through coming closer to YHWH by ascending up to Jerusalem in intimacy. High places have no power if we listen to YHWH! Get that! Even Bi'lam couldn't curse Israel at a high place because Bi'lam listened to YHWH.

"Who shall ascend into the hill of YHWH or shall stand in his holy place?" Psalm 24:3
An open heart will be acceptable to the call of YHWH to go UP to Jerusalem! An open heart will lead people to the top of His mountain and into intimacy with YHWH.

We must learn to go up to Jerusalem through praise and through prayer if we will overcome the strongholds in our lives and in the lives of others. The thought patterns of the world, of the satan, of evil need to be torn down through the spiritual weapons of warfare. Our weapons are mighty in Y'shua for the pulling down of high places as we go up to Jerusalem with YHWH.

Micah 4:2, "And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of YHWH, and to the house of the Elohim of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of YHWH from Jerusalem."

Portion Points to Ponder

1. What does the Hebrew name of this Torah portion mean?
2. Read the Haftarah portion of Micah 5:6-6:8. How does this relate to this week's Torah portion?
3. Read the Newer Testament section of Romans 11:25-32. Why were these passages chosen to correspond to this week's reading? What did you learn from these words?

4. How does this portion speak of Messiah Y'shua?
5. Why does the Torah tell us this story?
6. How does Bi'lam prophecy of the coming Messiah?
7. Give two reasons why Moab was so afraid of Israel.
8. What was Balak's tribe and with which other tribe did he align himself?
9. When he sent messengers to fetch Bi'lam, what was Balak asking Bi'lam to do?
10. When Elohim first came to Bi'lam in the night, what did He tell him to do?
11. What did Bi'lam's donkey see as they rode along the way?
12. The donkey tried to get the message to Bi'lam three different ways before she finally spoke. What were the three ways?
13. Bi'lam had struck the donkey several times, and finally the donkey asked him why. What did Bi'lam give as his reason?
14. At Bi'lam's instructions, Balak built altars for sacrifices. How many times did he do this and how many altars were there?
15. What did Balak sacrifice on each altar?
16. What did Bi'lam say and do after each set of sacrifices?
17. When the Israelites began to live with the Midianites, they started taking on their evil ways. A Midianite woman and an Israelite man were cavorting in front of all. For this, and other gross sins committed by the people, many were put to death by a plague. Who saved them and how?
18. If YHWH gave Bi'lam permission to go, saying to him, "If these men have come to invite you, you may go with them" (Num. 22:20), after he goes how can Scripture say, "But YHWH was incensed at his going; so an angel of YHWH placed himself in his way as an adversary" (Num. 22:22); for did he not go by YHWH's leave and at His word?
19. Regarding the words, "The donkey, seeing the angel of YHWH" (v. 25), how could it be that the donkey saw the spiritual angel of YHWH with her eyes, when Bi'lam, the human and prophet, did not see him? And how could the donkey see him?
20. If seeing the angel of YHWH was a miracle, just as the donkey's speaking was a miracle, what was the purpose of this miracle? For YHWH does not work new wonders except when absolutely necessary, and we can find no other purpose here except for the angel talking to Bi'lam, and that could have been accomplished simply by his speaking to him; what need was there for the donkey to see the angel and to speak at all?
21. Regarding the angel's question to Bi'lam, "Why have you beaten your donkey?" (v. 32), his response was clear, since she had swerved from the road, squeezed Bi'lam's foot against the wall, and lay down under him. Thus the angel should have asked him why he had gone to damn Israel and should not have taken him to task for beating the donkey, since that had been legitimate.
22. Regarding the angel saying, "Unless she had shied away from me, you are the one I should have killed, while sparing her" (v. 33), he should have said, "If she had not shied away from me." Furthermore, how could killing or sparing his life depend on swerving from the road; for if Bi'lam deserved to die for going on the errand, then even if the donkey upon which he was riding were to swerve off the road that would not exonerate him. And if he did not deserve to die, why did the angel say, "you are the one I should have killed"? What had he done to deserve being put to death?
23. How was it that the Moabite dignitaries accompanying Bi'lam, and his two servants alongside, did not see the angel? If the angel appeared in concrete form as a human

being, as the mystics maintain, then they should have all seen him; and if the angel appeared in a prophetic vision, then how did the donkey apprehend him?

24. Why did the angel of YHWH set out to intercept Bil'am along the way? After all, he said no more to him than YHWH had already said; for He had said, "If these men have come to invite you, you may go with them. But whatever I command you, that you shall do" (v. 20), and the angel himself said likewise, "Go with the men. But you must say nothing except what I tell you" (v. 35). Thus, the angel's coming seems to have been to no purpose.
25. The elders of Mo'av and Midyan bring "kesamim" with them to Bil'am. What are they, and why are they brought? Where else in the parasha is this word mentioned, and how does that reflect back on the "kesamim" here?
26. When the elders come to Bil'am and solicit his sorcery, he invites them to stay the night so he can consult YHWH about the matter. YHWH asks him, "Who are these men with you?" Why does YHWH ask a question, since He certainly already knows the answer? Where else does YHWH ask questions like this, and what is the significance of the connection between this story and that story?
27. Our parasha is a great place to look at the ways in which people play "telephone" in real life. YHWH tells Bil'am one thing, but Bil'am reports something slightly (but significantly) different to the elders of Mo'av; they in turn report something slightly (but significantly) different to Balak. What are these subtle differences, and what accounts for them? Are they important to the theme of the parasha, or are they just an interesting side comment on the nature of communication? How is Balak's understanding of Bil'am's response reflected in his comments to Bil'am in 22:37 and later in 24:11?
28. Bil'am responds to Balak's second group of emissaries by consulting YHWH again about going with them. YHWH tells Bil'am to go (22:20). But, incredibly, just two pesukim later (22:22), YHWH "was angry because he was going." Well, does YHWH really want him to go or not?
29. Next comes the story with Bil'am and the donkey. But what is the point? Why is this story in the Torah? What are we supposed to get out of it?
30. Why does the angel show up to threaten Bil'am at all, if in the end he is going to tell Bil'am to keep going with Balak's men anyway? And what is the point of delivering to Bil'am again the same instructions YHWH had already given him in 22:20?
31. When Bil'am meets Balak, they embark on their joint effort to curse Bnei Yisrael. Why does Bil'am say nothing about himself in the first two "meshalim" he offers, but in the third and fourth "meshalim," he prefaces his words with extensive self-description? And what is the significance of the content of the self-description?
32. Bil'am makes several theological statements in the course of the "meshalim" he delivers. How does this theological information contradict his own behavior?
33. Finally, a very basic question which should have been on our minds all this time: who is this Bil'am, anyway? Is he a close friend of YHWH's who is believed to have power to bless and curse, or is he a sorcerer, a devotee of darker powers than YHWH? Or is he something else?
34. Bil'am was not able to curse Israel, but Israel did curse itself at the end of our Torah portion. How?
Who was Pinchas? What did he do? Why should this behavior be studied and applauded?

The Open Bible is a teaching series written by Daniel Rendelman of Emet Ministries. Find more teachings, audio messages, videos, and music at www.emetministries.com.

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