



Mordekhi's Drash for Shabbat July 12, 2008 / Tamuz 9, 5768

Parashah #40

Torah: *Balak (Destroyer), B'Midbar (Numbers) 22.2-25.9*

Haftorah: *Mikhah (Micah) 5.6-6.8*

Suggested Messianic Writings: *Romans 11.25-32*

Shalom,

The portion this week is the story of *Balak* and *Bil'am* (Balaam). As we should be aware, in the Hebraic culture, a name was much more than what to call someone, but a person's name described his character, all that he was. Thus when we are told by *Rav Sha'ul* (Rabbi Saul/Paul) in *Philippians 2.10*, referring to *Yeshu'yahu* (Isaiah) 45.23, that "in honor of the name given Yeshua, every knee will bow," this means bowing either in total fear or total adoration to the *Mashiakh* (Messiah) for not only who He is, but for all that He is in word and deed.

As noted in the heading above, the name of *Balak* means "destroyer;" it also means, "waster, devastator." We are reading here of another tribal and regional dispute. Oftentimes in those ancient cultures, to cement an alliance or show favor to an ally, a leader might take his name from the culture of the other group. Balak, king of Mo'av, called for his allies in Midyan to help him because of his dread fear of these people Israel moving through the area. Balak's father's name was Tzippor; this is the masculine form of the same name of Moshe's wife, Tzipporah, who was a Midianite. Tzippor/Tzipporah is a Midianite name, and means, "bird, sparrow". Tzippor was from Mo'av, so his taking a Midyan name had cemented a relationship at some point in the past. Now Balak is calling upon that alliance for assistance.

The people of *Mo'av* (Moab – "from father") were the descendants of the incestuous relationship between Lot and his older daughter (Gen 19); The people of *Midyan* (Midian – "quarrel, strife") were the descendants of a son of Avraham and Keturah (Gen 25), born after the death of Sarah. So as it is now, it was back then at the beginning – the middle-eastern conflict is primarily a family and tribal conflict – the various descendants and/or relatives of Avraham jealous of the "chosen-ness" of Israel. These enemies never stop to realize what it might be like were the shoe on the other foot, for the "chosen" path is not an easy path. Underlying it all, of course, is a raging spiritual battle.

Avraham and Bil'am were both from the same basic area in Mesopotamia, now modern-day Iraq. Somehow the Spirit of HaShem had reached through the darkness of that region and had touched the lives of these two men. Their outcomes were decidedly quite different – Avraham continued to worship HaShem, and from him came the nation of Israel and later the Messiah; Bil'am used the prophetic gifting he had received and turned it into gain for himself. He had "ears to hear" the Word of ADONI, and it seems he started out with the desire to obey HaShem in this instance, for he pronounced only blessings upon Israel, including the well-known blessing of chapter 24, "מַה טֹבו אֶהְלִיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל *Mah to-vu o-ha-leh-kha Ya-a-kov Meesh-k'no-teh-kha Yees-ra-ay!* How lovely are your tents, Ya'akov; your encampments, Israel."

Many writers believe that the Angel of Adoni (מַלְאָךְ *Mal-akh Adoni*), mentioned throughout the Tanakh, to be the pre-incarnate Yeshua. מַלְאָךְ *Mal-akh* means, "a messenger, representative, ambassador, prophet, priest or teacher, specifically of G-d." The root of the word is לָךְ *lakh*, walk. The Ancient Hebrew Lexicon notes that the original Hebrew pictographs of the letters *lamed* and *kaph* are "שׁ ל". The pictograph ל (lamed) is a picture of a shepherd staff, the ש (kaph) is a picture of the palm of the hand. Combined these mean 'a staff in the palm'. A nomad traveled on foot with a staff in his hand to provide support in walking as well as a weapon to defend against predators or thieves." I can see then within this word מַלְאָךְ *Mal-akh* a picture of the Good Shepherd of Israel.

At any rate, the prophet Bil'am headed out to see what HaShem would have him to say about Israel. In B'Midbar 22.21-35 the Angel (מַלְאָךְ *Mal-akh*) of Adoni is mentioned ten times. An enemy of Israel – Balak – had summoned a man with supernatural abilities – Bil'am – to curse the "apple of G-d's eye," and this special "Angel" is sent to confront him. I believe we can gain a lesson here. If HaShem has given any of us a special spiritual gift, we'd be best off to use it for His purposes, rather than our own. Too many leaders of G-d have been enticed by the goods and ways of the world, and have lost their own way. We see in *D'varim* (Deuteronomy) 23 that Bil'am had indeed been hired to curse Israel, but HaShem turned the curse into blessing. In B'Midbar 31, we read that in a later battle Israel had with Midyan, Bil'am was slain. Apparently

Bil'am had done some further consulting with Balak that is not told about in Torah, for as soon as chapter 25 opens we see that the women of Mo'av came and seduced the men of Israel, with the people sacrificing to and worshipping Ba'al-P'or, the false god of the region. Bil'am is mentioned for this sin a few times in the *Messianic Writings*: in 2 Kefa (Peter) 2.15, Kefa wrote that Bil'am "loved the wages of unrighteousness;" Y'hudah (Jude) 11 speaks of those who "for pay have rushed headlong into the error of Bil'am;" and the strongest condemnation of Bil'am is found in Revelation 2.14, in the Mashiakh's own words to the Messianic community in Pergamum, "I have a few things against you: you have some people who hold to the teaching of Bil'am, who taught Balak to set a trap for the people of Isra'el, so that they would eat food that had been sacrificed to idols and commit sexual sin."

A big lesson here is to see how easy it is for our flesh-man, no matter how "spiritual" we may be, to be enticed by sensual pleasure. Bil'am apparently had a channel of communication with HaShem, but obviously not a real relationship, so he slipped from the role of prophet into the role of soothsayer, a fortune-teller. The difference? In *Yirmeyahu* (Jeremiah) 23.21-22, HaShem speaks of the false prophets, saying, "I did not send these prophets; yet they ran. I did not speak to them; yet they prophesied. *If they have been present at my council*, they should let my people hear my words and turn them from their evil way and the evil of their actions" (emphasis added). Bil'am did not stay in HaShem's council. Thus he came into error by violating the command of Torah, D'varim 18.10, where a soothsayer was declared as one who was detestable to HaShem. In *Mattityahu* (Matthew) 7.23, Yeshua says that on that Day, in answer to those who worked miracles in His name, He will tell them, "I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!"

The lesson is that living for Mashiakh is not an easy road of fun and games, something to take lightly. To be sure, there is pleasure in knowing Him, but the world is generally contrary to a Messianic lifestyle. And I personally and most certainly believe that one has to hold on to their salvation daily, for although ADONI will never take it from us, we can of our own choice walk away from such. Why else would Yeshua say over and over in the letters of Revelation, "To him who overcomes... to him who overcomes... to him who overcomes... - he who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death, etc etc"? Rather, let us live in the way that HaShem speaks to us from the Haftorah, *Mikhah* (Micah) 6.8: "You have been told what Adoni requires of you, to act justly, love mercy, and to walk in purity with your God." It's not a matter of having an impressive spiritual gift; it is a matter of right-standing in the will of HaShem.

שְׁאַלוּ שְׁלוֹם יְרוּשָׁלַם – *Sha'alu shalom Yerushalayim* – Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!

B'rakhot v'todah rabbah
(Blessings & thank you very much)

Mordekhi

This Yeshua, who has been taken away from you into heaven, will come back to you in just the same way as you saw him go into heaven.
(Acts 1.11 CJB)