



Balaq

(Balak)

Bemidbar [Numbers] 22:2-25:9

This entire Parasha is about Balaq and Bala'am, and how they each try to defeat, in some way, YHWH's blessed people Israel.

We do not have the space in this study, to go into depth concerning all the prophetic sayings of Bala'am concerning Israel. Each of the four mashal (parable or oracle) has something to say to our day. It is worth the time and effort to study these chapters.

For today, we are being directed into chapter 22.

Motivated by Fear

Bemidbar [Numbers] 22:2-4

2 And Balaq the son of Tzippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.

3 And Mo'av was sore afraid of the people, because they were many; and Moav was distressed because of the children of Israel.

4 And Mo'av said to the elders of Midyan, "Now will this multitude lick up all that is round about us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field." And Balaq the son of Tzippor was king of Mo'av at that time.

As one reads and studies this entire portion, it is important to keep in mind, that everything that Balaq said and did, had the underlying motivation of fear. This fear was not just his own, but was throughout the entire country and people of Mo'av.

We read what YHWH had done through His people Israel, in the previous chapter (B'midbar 21). That renown had spread throughout the surrounding countries and peoples. YHWH had placed the fear of Him and His people in those that were about to be conquered. In doing this, YHWH guarantees the victory of the Israeli people.

The Request of Fear

Bemidbar [Numbers] 22:5-6

5 And he sent messengers to Bala'am the son of Beor, to Pethor, which is by the River, to the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, "Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt; behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me.

6 Come now therefore, I beg you, curse this people for me; for they are too mighty for me; perhaps I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land; for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.”

Scripture teaches us to bless those who persecute us and not to curse them.

Romans 12:14

Bless them that persecute you; bless, and curse not.

Scripture also teaches us that perfect love casts out fear.

Yochanan Aleph [1st John] 4:18

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has punishment; and he that fears is not made perfect in love.

What we see above, is that fear was the motivating force of Balaq; and as a result of his giving in to that fear, the fear overcame him, rather than his overcoming the fear. So, he sought to curse those that had caused the fear to be manifested in him, rather than turning to YHWH our Elohim, and seeking to overcome fear in the strength of His power.

Balaq desired to drive the mass of people away from his land, his people, and his sight, because of this strong motivating fear.

The First Delegation is Sent

Bemidbar [Numbers] 22:7-8

7 And the elders of Mo'av and the elders of Midyan departed with divinations in their hand; and they came to Bala'am, and spoke to him the words of Balaq.

8 And he said to them, “Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as YHWH shall speak to me”; and the officers of Mo'av abode with Bala'am.

Apparently, when Balaq sent this first delegation to Bala'am, he had them take every conceivable artifact used in divination, witchcraft, and sorcery. He wanted to make sure that Bala'am did not have any excuse whatsoever not to have what he needed, to curse this horde of people whom he perceived as a threat.

Please note that Bala'am told this delegation that he would need to seek YHWH and whatever it was that YHWH would speak to him. He would tell them in the morning the answer he received from YHWH.

Whatever we may think of Bala'am, one thing that we need to understand, is that he was a prophet of YHWH. One of the things that is true about Scripture, is that it records for us not only the good side of people, but their faults as well. What we can learn from this, is that He is sovereign and He will choose whom He will to further His Kingdom.

Discourse Between YHWH and Bala'am

Bemidbar [Numbers] 22:9-12

9 And Elohim came to Bala'am, and said, "What men are these with you?"

10 And Bala'am said to Elohim, "Balaq the son of Tzippor, king of Mo'av, has sent to me," saying,

11 'Behold, the people that is come out of Egypt, it covers the face of the Earth; now, come curse them for me; perhaps I shall be able to fight against them, and shall drive them out.'"

12 And Elohim said to Bala'am, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people; for they are blessed."

YHWH tells Bala'am two things of great importance that will come into play later. One, YHWH tells Bala'am that he is not to go with them. And two, he is not to curse these people because they are already blessed by Him.

So far, Bala'am has acted with integrity as a prophet of YHWH. He has sought Him before doing anything. In fact, He even sought YHWH before he even gave an answer to these men. This is exactly what one would and should expect from a prophet of YHWH our Elohim. However, the lust of wealth had already infected his eye and his response to this delegation would betray what was already festering in his heart.

The Words of Bala'am

Bemidbar [Numbers] 22:13

And Bala'am rose up in the morning, and said to the officers of Balaq, "Get you into your land; for YHWH refuses to give me leave to go with you."

The way in which Bala'am worded his response to this delegation so that they could easily understand his intent, was such that it indicated to those to whom he was speaking, that he, Bala'am, really did want to go, but that it was YHWH who would not allow it. Furthermore, he indicated that he could not go with them personally. But perhaps he would be able to go with a different delegation.

Bala'am was moving in a direction which was directly contrary to YHWH. Bala'am was about to find himself on the wrong side of the equation, which is not a good place to be.

The Delegation Reports Back

Bemidbar [Numbers] 22:14

And the officers of Mo'av rose up, and they went to Balaq, and said, "Bala'am refused to come with us."

This delegation clearly understood Bala'am's message. They told Balaq that he would not come with them. And as we will see, Balaq clearly understood the message as well; for he quickly sent off a second delegation.

Perhaps what was in Balaq's mind at this point was that Bala'am was merely negotiating the price of his services.

The Second Delegation is Sent

Bemidbar [Numbers] 22:15

And Balaq sent yet again officers, more, and more honorable than they.

Please note that the delegation that Balaq sent this time was larger and more prestigious than the first delegation.

In the section Bemidbar 22:7-35, there are four different titles used to describe those that Balaq sent to Bala'am; in verse 7 we find "elders of Mo'av"; in verses 8, 14, 21 we find "officers of Mo'av"; in verses 13 & 35 we find "officers of Balaq"; and in verse 18 we find "servants of Balaq."

What we can glean from the use of these different terms, is that the first group that Balaq sent to Bala'am was most likely leaders because of their age; they were elders. They were promoted to the position of officers of Balaq because of this. However, this was a title that they did not keep because of their failure to accomplish the mission upon which they were sent.

The second group started out as servants of Balaq (verse 18), but were promoted to the rank of officers of Balaq (verse 21) because of their abilities. This was a title which they earned and kept because of their success in bringing Bala'am to Balaq (verse 35).

What this shows to us, is that true titles are earned and kept because of ability. The use of the title "elder" in Scripture should not be bestowed upon just anyone who is of an elderly age. Those who work their way up the ladder, do so because of the abilities that He has bestowed upon them. When a person stops earning his way, and stops producing fruit for the Kingdom, then he is in jeopardy of losing his position.

The Sales Pitch

Bemidbar [Numbers] 22:16-17

16 And they came to Bala'am, and said to him, "Thus says Balaq the son of Tzippor, 'Let nothing, I beg you, hinder you from coming to me;

17 for I will promote you to very great honor, and whatsoever you say to me I will do; come therefore, I beg you, curse this people for me.'"

In the first pitch, Balaq used flattery to try to persuade Bala'am to come and curse Israel. It was not enough for him to go against the words of YHWH. While the promise of wealth was not implicitly stated by the first delegation, it was understood by all parties involved.

However, with this delegation it is more to the point. He would receive great honor for doing this favor for the king. All he had to do was show up and curse Israel. The outcome would be that Balaq would make Bala'am a very rich man for his services.

The Plea of Bala'am

Bemidbar [Numbers] 22:18-19

18 And Bala'am answered and said to the servants of Balaq, "If Balaq would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of YHWH my Elohim, to do less or more.

19 Now therefore, I beg you, you tarry also here this night, that I may know what YHWH will speak to me more."

Where was Bala'am's focus? It was not just on doing His will! This is where it should have been. Please take note of his not so subtle hint of wealth from the hand of the king.

Bala'am had a problem. He was trying to serve money and YHWH. And he was trying to do this in that order. He was trying to figure out how it was that he could get his hands on the wealth that was being proffered, all the while claiming to be the prophet of YHWH. Scripture is filled with passages that teach us that we cannot serve YHWH with mixed loyalties; i.e., Elohim and money.

YHWH had already told Bala'am that he was not to go to Balaq and curse the people Israel. So why was he going to go and seek a different answer? No is no!

Instructions from YHWH

Bemidbar [Numbers] 22:20

And Elohim came to Bala'am at night, and said to him, "If the men are come to call you, rise up, go with them; but only the word which I speak to you, that shall you do."

One can almost hear the disappointment and disgust in Elohim's Voice in speaking these words to Bala'am. We need to be sure of this truth: if we want something badly enough, YHWH will give it to us. It will probably not be for our own benefit, but He will not keep it from us if our heart is set on it.

I wonder how many times you and I have been guilty of this very thing: of putting something that we wanted over and above His will and His best for us? When we make choices like this, it is not good. The selfishness that is recorded here for our instruction is so pronounced that it is hard for us to miss it. Yet, we do!

We can see this selfishness in Bala'am, but we have difficulty in seeing that very same selfishness in ourselves.

Right now, YHWH is holding a mirror up to each and every one of us, to show us that element of self in us that is not pleasing to Him. He desires to purge us of it so that we can be molded into the image of His Son, Yeshua.

Bala'am Makes YHWH Angry

Bemidbar [Numbers] 22:21-22

21 And Bala'am rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the officers of Mo'av.

22 And the anger of Elohim was kindled because he went; and the Messenger of YHWH placed himself in the way as an adversary (satan) against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him.

When YHWH tells us “no”, is that good enough for us? Or do we keep on going back to Him until He gives in and lets us have what is more important to us than the commandment given to us by His Voice?

This is one of those passages that really makes me sit up and take notice. Verse 22 above and verse 32 below both say about the same thing. It brings a question to us that must be asked.

Just how angry was YHWH?

Both of these verses contain the same word that indicates to us just how angry YHWH was with Bala’am. The English word “adversary” is translated from the Hebrew word *satan* (שָׂטָן). Yes, this is the very same word from which the name Satan comes.

Now we are not saying that YHWH is Satan. YHWH forbid! Please just bear with us for a little bit.

What this teaches us, is that we can put YHWH in such a position through our own selfish manipulation to get our own way, that He becomes angry with us. So much so, that He comes against us as if Satan, the adversary, had personally come against us.

The difference is that Satan needs permission to sift us; whereas, YHWH needs no permission. Also, YHWH can, and often does, deliver us from the fiery darts of the enemy Satan. However, who can deliver from His hand? No one!

It is not a good thing to make YHWH this angry! We need to be careful how and what we petition Him for; we might just get it. But at what cost?

Sometimes It Takes an Ass to Point Out the Truth

Bemidbar [Numbers] 22:23-30

23 And the ass saw the Messenger of YHWH standing in the way, with His sword drawn in His hand; and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field; and Bala’am smote the ass, to turn her into the way.

24 Then the Messenger of YHWH stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side.

25 And the ass saw the Messenger of YHWH, and she thrust herself to the wall, and crushed Bala’am’s foot against the wall; and he smote her again.

26 And the Messenger of YHWH went further, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left.

27 And the ass saw the Messenger of YHWH, and she lay down under Bala’am; and Bala’am’s anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with his staff.

28 And YHWH opened the mouth of the ass, and she said to Bala’am, “What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?”

29 And Bala’am said to the ass, “Because you have mocked me, I would there were a sword in my hand, for now I would have killed you.”

30 And the ass said to Bala'am, "Am I not your ass, upon which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Have I ever done so to you before?" And he said, "No."

Lest we be lifted up in our own estimation, YHWH is perfectly capable of delivering His truth to a person via an ass. So, just because He uses us sometimes to deliver His message, we need to be careful that we do not get puffed up, because He could just as easily have chosen to use an ass for the job.

I find this passage quite intriguing. Here is a man that apparently has had this ass for a very long time. It is a well trained ass and always obeys its master. But on this day, the ass does not obey its master. In fact, on three different occasions, the ass went its own way, contrary to what its master wanted it to do. And each time it was struck by its master.

Then on the third time, YHWH opened the mouth of the ass so that it could speak to its master. It is not the ass speaking that I find so unusual in this passage. Rather, it is the fact that Bala'am did not find it out of the ordinary. It seems from the way that this is recorded, that from his reaction, one gets the idea that this may have been an everyday occurrence, which we do not believe that it was.

Perhaps one of the thoughts that was in this prophet's mind was the fact that he knew that he was going with these men against YHWH's will. And each time the ass went contrary to his will, he was pricked in his heart thinking that as the ass was going against his master's will, so too was he, Bala'am, going against his Master's will in going to Balaq.

The Eyes of Bala'am are Opened

Bemidbar [Numbers] 22:31

Then YHWH opened the eyes of Bala'am, and he saw the Messenger of YHWH standing in the way, with His sword drawn in his hand; and he bowed his head, and fell on his face.

In the verse above, we see YHWH opening the eyes of Bala'am so that he could see the Messenger of YHWH. This is one of those places, where YHWH through Scripture, is revealing two YHWHs (also see verse 22).

Bala'am's reaction was quick and immediate; he fell on his face.

One wonders what all those Bala'am was traveling with were doing at this time?

The Messenger of YHWH Speaks to Bala'am

Bemidbar [Numbers] 22:32-33

32 And the Messenger of YHWH said to him, "Why have you struck your ass these three times? Behold, I have come out as an adversary (satan), because your way is reckless before Me;

33 and the ass saw Me, and turned aside before Me these three times; unless she had turned aside from Me, surely now I would have slain you, and saved her life."

It is not a good thing to make YHWH angry enough to come out to kill. If He does this, who can deliver?

Almost, But Not Quite

Bemidbar [Numbers] 22:34

And Bala'am said to the Messenger of YHWH, "I have sinned; for I knew not that You stood in the way against me; now therefore, if it displeases You, I will go back."

Well, Bala'am understood that he had sinned. What is not clear is what he thought his sin was. Did he understand his sin to be that he was even there? Or, did he understand his sin to be that he had struck his ass those three times?

Both were wrong, to be sure. However, the greater sin was the fact that he was there in the first place.

Notice that Bala'am says, "...if it displeases You..."

Hello?!

Here is the Messenger of YHWH standing before him, sword drawn, stating that he came to kill him. What in that picture speaks of being pleased?

Even in all this, Bala'am was still focused upon, and desiring all that wealth. He clearly loved money more than doing His will!

YHWH's Instructions

Bemidbar [Numbers] 22:35

And the Messenger of YHWH said to Bala'am, "Go with the men; but only the word that I shall speak to you, that you shall speak." So Bala'am went with the officers of Balaq.

One wonders if this warning fell on deaf ears.

When one considers that Bala'am was there when he should not have been in the first place, and that his focus was all wrong, as it was on wealth rather than upon hearing and obeying His Voice and doing His will, it seems likely that His Voice was heard, but not totally heeded.

Considering this whole context, it seems that from the moment that Bala'am heard His Voice, he began trying to figure out a way to get that money and stay alive. He doesn't seem all that interested in doing His will only. Rather, he was interested in doing His will as a means to gaining wealth for himself. This is not a good combination. In fact, Yeshua taught us that one cannot serve two masters. And He was speaking specifically of YHWH and wealth.

The Way of Bala'am

Kepha Bet [2nd Peter] 2:15-16

15 forsaking the right way, they went astray, having followed the way of Bala'am the (son) of Beor, who loved the hire of wrong-doing;

16 but he was rebuked for his own transgression: a dumb ass spoke with a man's voice and stayed the madness of the prophet.

In the Brit HaChadasha (New Testament) there are three passages that speak of this concept, the way or error of Bala'am. It is important that we understand what this error is so that we may avoid falling into it. (see also Yehudah [Jude] 11 and Revelation 2:14)

Let us continue on with the passage above.

Kepha Bet [2 Peter] 2:17-22

17 These are springs without water, and mists driven by a storm; for whom the blackness of darkness hath been reserved.

The context of this whole passage is speaking of teachers and prophets who claim to know the truth, but in fact are teaching a mixture of His truth with their own vain imaginations.

The verse above teaches us that these men are empty and unstable.

18 For, uttering great swelling (words) of vanity, they entice in the lusts of the flesh, by lasciviousness, those who are just escaping from them that live in error;

They are focused upon the here and now and take no thought for the coming judgment. Their motto seems to be: if it feels good do it.

19 promising them liberty, while they themselves are bondservants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he also brought into bondage.

Please note that these preachers of the Way of Bala'am promise their followers freedom and liberty by doing away with the Torah. But this does not bring freedom; it brings bondage.

20 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Master and Saviour Yeshua Mashiach, they are again entangled and overcome by sin, therefore, the last state has become worse for them than the first.

When YHWH saves a person through the shed Blood of Yeshua, that person has been freed from the bondage of sin. If that person listens to the wrong teacher and goes back into a life of sin, they are actually worse off than before.

21 For it were better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to turn back from the set-apart commandment delivered to them.

When we become saved, we need to live like it. We need to keep and do His commandments.

22 It has happened to them according to the true proverb, The dog turning to his own vomit again, and the sow that had washed to wallowing in the mire.

That is not really a very pretty picture. However, it is the truth and right on target.

The Way of Bala'am is full of empty promises that appeal to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. His Kingdom cannot be built pursuing material possessions.

Bala'am taught Balaq how to make YHWH's people to stumble by introducing mixed worship.

Brothers and sisters, it is time for us to put away the things of this world, which are passing away, and pursue the things of the Set-apart Spirit. We need to learn, study, and do His commandments. All of them!

The rebelliousness that we have seen in Bala'am needs to be put to death in each and every one of us. His truth must have supreme authority in us and in our lives. We need to stop making excuses and finding reasons why we can't do His Word and step out in faith and obey His Voice in all matters.

We do not want to be assigned to the "blackness of darkness" as Scripture speaks of above, that is reserved for those who go the Way of Bala'am.

The only cure for this error is true repentance.

ABBA YHWH, please purify us that we may seek Your Face and turn from all unrighteousness, and listen to and obey Your Voice. Teach us to crucify our flesh every single day, that we might be effective workers in Your Kingdom; in the Name of Yeshua our Mashiach. Amein.

Shabbat Shalom

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