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Balak's Dilemma

22: 2-6

Balak's dilemma (DIG): Given the events of the previous chapter, but with no sign that Isra'el is intent on attacking him, why is Balak worried about Isra'el? How is his reaction to Isra'el's "threat" like, or unlike, that of Sihon and Og? What does the fact that Balak sent rulers all the way to Mesopotamia say about Balak's fear? About Balaam's popularity?

REFLECT: What dilemma are you facing right now? Who, or what, are you relying on to resolve it? How far do you have to go to find the answer? How much will it cost? Who is relaying your message? Mo'ab feared the Israelites when they realized that the favor of God was upon them. What is the evidence that God's favor is upon you?

Parashah 40: Balak (Destroyer) 22:2 to 25:9

(See my commentary on **Deuteronomy**, to see link click [Af](#) - Parashah)

The Key People are Balak, Balaam, the rulers of Mo'ab and Midian, the donkey, the angel, Amalekites, Kenites, Isra'el, Moabite women, and Phinehas.

The Scenes are Mo'av, Pethor, the Arnon border, Kiriath Huzoth, Bamoth Ba'al, the field of Zophim on the top of Pisgah, the top of Pisgah, the top of Peor, and Shittim.

The Main Events include Balak buying curses, Balaam's donkey balking and talking, permission to speak only the words of God, three high places visited, altars built, Balaam's blessing Isra'el, saying a prayer, and prophesying the destruction of his enemies, Israelite men having sex with Moabite women and committing spiritual adultery in the camp of Isra'el, the resulting plague sent by Ha'Shem, and Phinehas spearing a couple to stop the plague.

Balaam was not a man of God, but a sorcerer for hire.

Up until **the Israelites** had burst onto the scene, **Balak, the king of Mo'ab** (Judges

11:25), was a vassal under **Sihon, king of the Amorites** (to see link click [Dk](#) - **The Defeat of Sihon of Heshbon**). No wonder **he** dreaded **the Israelites**. **The Amorites** had soundly beaten **the Moabites**. How much more so would **Isra’el** decimate **the land** and **people** of **Mo’ab**.

Balak’s dilemma (22:2-5): Now **Balak** (Hebrew: meaning *destroyer*) **the son of Zippor** (the feminine form of this word, **Zipporah**, was the name of **Moses’** first wife) **saw all that Isra’el had done to the Amorites (22:2)**. As a result, **Mo’ab was extremely afraid of the Israelites, because there were so many of them, and he feared they would attack. Mo’ab was overcome with dread because of the people of Isra’el (22:3)**. However, **Balak’s** fears were unfounded. **ADONAI** had already commanded **Isra’el** not to harass **the Moabites** or provoke **them** to war: **For I will not give you any of their land as a possession, because I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot as a possession (Deuteronomy 2:9)**. **Isra’el** was simply passing through **his** territory. **They** had paused in **Balak’s** back yard for a short while in preparation for the siege of Canaan, but **they** had no intention of going to war with **Mo’ab**. An army of **600,000 (26:51)**, however, would be frightening for any country. Only it was even more so for **Mo’ab**, for there was some bad blood between **Isra’el** and **Mo’ab**.

The Moabites were descendants of **Lot** (see the commentary on **Genesis Fb** - **Let’s Get Our Father to Drink Wine, and then Lie with Him to Preserve Our Family Line**). **The Israelites** were the descendants of **Abraham**. The two had originally separated precisely over these types of matters. In **Genesis 13:5-6** we read: **Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. And the land could not sustain them while dwelling together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to remain together**. So, it seems that the deeds of the fathers were signs for the sons. **Balak**, the descendent of **Lot**, looked out over the children of **Abraham** and declared: **Look, a people have come out of Egypt, and spread over all the land (22:5b)**. Just as the herdsmen of **Abraham** and **Lot** quarreled because the pasture was not sufficient to sustain **them** both; so, too, **Balak** saw that **the land** was covered with **Israelites**. From **Balak’s** perspective, **the plains of Mo’ab** weren’t big enough for both of **them**.

When **Abraham** and **Lot** were contending for pastureland, **Abraham** settled the dispute by letting **Lot** choose **the land he** wanted. **Abraham** was willing to sacrifice everything of value, even the best of **the land**, in order that there might be peace between **him** and **his** nephew. Similarly, since **Isra’el** had not come to oust **the Moabites**, **Balak** should not have worried. On the day that **Abraham** and **Lot** parted company, **ADONAI** gave **Abraham** all **the land** of Canaan. After **Lot** had gone, **the LORD** said to **Abram**, “Look as far as

you can see in every direction - north and south, east and west. I am giving all this land, as far as you can see, to you and your descendants as a permanent possession. And I will give you so many descendants that, like the dust of the earth, they cannot be counted (Genesis 13:14-16 NLT)! These Genesis passages are important background information for the story of Isra'el, Mo'ab, and the "blessings" of Balaam.⁴⁵⁴

Alliance with the Midianites (22:4a): The Moabites communicated **their** concern to **the** rulers of Midian. The Midianites both lived in the Sinai (Exodus 2:15-16; Numbers 10:29-30) and on Mo'ab's border (Genesis 36:35). Both the Midianites and the Moabites had been under the domination of Sihon, which made **their** communication natural at this point. As Balak surveyed the millions of Israelites, they seemed to be an innumerable horde to him. So Balak said to the rulers of Midian "This horde will lick up everything around us, the way an ox (Hebrew: *shor*, meaning a domestic ox) licks up grass in the field (22:4)." The proverbial figure of an ox licking the grass is particularly fitting for a pastoral people. Balak knew how quickly the fragile grasses of the lands of Mo'ab could be eaten by a large number of animals given free range. The image of Isra'el as an ox is an emphatic symbol of her strength and power. And the association of Mo'ab to the Midianites in this verse is more significant than we might first think. There would soon be another plot developed by the Midianites in collusion with Mo'ab that would foreshadow a great disaster on Isra'el (see [Ea - Taking a Stand for God](#)).⁴⁵⁵



Balaam, doctor of sorcery (22:5a): So, Balak sent messengers to Balaam Hebrew:

meaning *devourer of the people*) **the son of Beor (22:5a)**. **Balaam** is never referred to in the Hebrew text as a prophet. Not once. Not even a seer. **He** is always referred to as a **sorcerer (Joshua 13:22)**, and this word is never used in the TaNaKh for a true **prophet of God**. In fact, **ADONAI** forbid **sorcery (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19:31)**, and the word **sorcery** is always used in a negative sense in the Hebrew bible (**First Samuel 15:23; Second Kings 17:17; Ezekiel 13:23**). It is always the mark of a false prophet (**Isaiah 3:2; Jeremiah 14:14; Ezekiel 13:9; Numbers 22:28**). Furthermore, in **Numbers 24:1** we find **Balaam** using **divination**, which was also forbidden in **Deuteronomy 18:9-14**. Now obviously, **Balaam** had knowledge of **YHVH**, yet just because **Ha’Shem** spoke to **him** directly, did not make **him** a true **prophet**. **YHVH** also talked directly to **the Adversary (Job 2:1-6)**.⁴⁵⁶ When **Balaam** set out, **he** had every intention of cursing **Isra’el**, and did **his** best to do so. **The blessings he** spoke over **Isra’el** were unintended. **God** placed **them** in **his** mouth against **his** will.⁴⁵⁷ Therefore, **Balaam** was **the enemy of God (James 4:4b)**, and must have thought that **YHVH** was like any other deity **he** could manipulate by **sorcery**.⁴⁵⁸

The B’rit Chadashah also condemns **Balaam**. **Peter** compares false prophets with **men** like **Balaam**. **They have wandered off the right road and followed the footsteps of Balaam son of Beor, who loved to earn money by doing wrong. But Balaam was stopped from his mad course when his donkey rebuked him with a human voice (Second Peter 2:15-16 NLT)**. A more remarkable passage comes from **Jude**, who gives several examples of the worst kinds of godless people: **Cain, Korah, and Balaam**. **He** says that these godless people . . . **serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire (Jude 7)**.⁴⁵⁹

The call (22:5b-6): **Balak** knew the forces of **Mo’ab**, even with the help of **their** allies **the Midianites**, would never withstand **Isra’el’s** army and **Isra’el’s God**. Conventional warfare was out of the question. **Mo’ab** and **Midian** needed help from **the Devil**, and **Balaam** was in touch with **the Devil**. This would be an invisible war, the conflict between **ADONAI** and **Satan** that began when **God** cursed **the serpent in the Garden (Genesis 3:13-15)**.⁴⁶⁰ Therefore, **Balak** sent rulers from **Mo’ab** and **Midian** to **Balaam** at **Pethor, his native land, near the Euphrates River** in Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq). **Pethor** was about 420 miles north of **Mo’ab**, and probably took about twenty-five days in each direction. So, even with only a brief time in between each trip, it meant that the correspondence process would have taken nearly four months at a minimum to complete.

When **the rulers** finally reached **Balaam**, **they** said: **Look, a people have come out of Egypt, spread over all the land and settled down next to us (22:5b)**. Therefore,

please come, and curse these people for us, because they are stronger than we are. The distance from **Mo’ab** to **Pethor** was a serious journey. The fact that **Balak** even heard of **Balaam** suggests that **he** was famous throughout the Ancient Near East for **his** powers. **Balak** hoped that **Balaam** would **be able to defeat the Israelites and drive them out of the land**, relaying the message through **his rulers**, declaring: **For I know that whoever you bless is in fact blessed, and whoever you curse is in fact cursed (22:6)**. As the reader, we are meant to hear the irony in **Balak’s** confidence. We already know that **Isra’el** was, and is, under **the blessing** that **God** gave to **Abraham** (see the commentary on **Genesis Dt - I Will Bless Those Who Bless You and Whoever Curses You I Will Curse**). Therefore, as **Balak** positioned **himself** to **curse Isra’el**, we know that **he** was actually inviting **a curse** upon **himself** and **his** own **people**.⁴⁶¹

*Dear Heavenly Father, Praise you for your great “Chesed” steadfast love! No one, no matter how strong, can **curse** those whom you want **blessed**! Thank **You** that **Your** love is a mighty and protective love that will harm those who try to harm those who love **You**. **You** are always right there with me at all times. **For God Himself has said, “I will never leave you or forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5c).***

***You** are the perfect **Heavenly Father** who sees into each person’s heart and **You** wisely pour out justice. In fact, **righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Lovingkindness and truth go before You. (Psalms 89:14)**. In your heavenly Kingdom, what is important is **the fruit** that someone produces from a pure and loving heart. **Every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will recognize them by their fruit (Mathew 7:19-20)**. Someone’s good deeds may look very impressive to their friends, but you see clearly what their motive is when they do good deeds. **“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord!’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in Your name, and drive out demons in Your name, and perform many miracles in Your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Get away from Me, you workers of lawlessness’ (Matthew 7:22-25)!”** Lord, I love **You** and desire to please **You** with all my hearts. In **Messiah Yeshua’s** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*