

Treasures of the Torah

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, 46 and upon finding a single pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Matthew 13:45

‘I’m telling you, it’s not going to work’



Chukat- Balak — Numbers 19:1 - 25:9

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Shabbat Shalom Talmadim, and welcome to this week's Parsha study.

Key Events:

The Laws of the Red Heifer.

Laws concerning the contamination of the dead body

Miriam Dies

Moses strikes the Rock

Aaron Dies and the succession of the High Priest Eleazer

Venomous snakes attack the camp

Moses is commanded to make a serpent on a pole

**Moabite King, Balak, fearing the size and prowess of Israel,
seeks to render her defenceless.**

He employs the prophet Balaam to proclaim a curse over Israel.

Balaam will declare only that which YHVH God speaks.

YHVH uses Balaam's donkey to hinder his steps.

Balaam declares the oracles concerning YHVH's blessings on Israel.

Israel turns to worshipping Baal Peor.

YHVH releases a plague over the Hebrews.

In this double Parsha, we first read Chukat. Among the focus of this Parsha, we read about the red heifer sacrifice and the purifying water that must be made from its ashes, Moses striking the rock, Aaron's death and the command from YHVH to make a serpent and place it upon a pole.

These events demand study within themselves, especially the striking of the rock and the manufacture of a bronze serpent, which raise a number of questions for us. In Exodus 17:1-7 Moses is told by YHVH to strike the rock with his staff; in Numbers, which is a priestly rendering, Moses is commanded to speak to the rock. Either way, water issues from the rock. It is considered that Moses forfeited his right of passage into the land because of this lack of adherence to YHVH's command; however, further on in Numbers 12, we read that the reason Moses was not allowed to enter the land was that he did not affirm in the sight of the people the Lord's provision and purpose of the waters.

Numbers 20:9-12

9 So Moses took the staff from the Lord's presence, just as he commanded him. 10 He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" 11 Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.

12 But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."

13 These were the waters of Meribah, where the Israelites quarrelled with the Lord and where he was proved holy among them.

In regard to the making of the serpent, Num 21:6, we are not given any instruction pertaining to its manufacture in bronze or copper. The word 'Nahash', means snake and the word 'nehoshet' means copper. Seraph which means burning, is also linked to the word nahash, and combine to give us the term, 'burning or fiery serpent'. It seems somewhat mystical that by merely looking up to the copper serpent a person suffering from snake bite may recover. This was something that perplexed even the rabbinical teachers. However, our knowledge of medicine provides us with a remedy for snake bite which is extracted from the toxin of the creature.

To further understand the instruction of looking up to the snake, Yeshua gives us this remark in John 3:14-15

14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

We conclude that the cure for snake bite and for our salvation is to simply look upward to our Father in heaven. It was to Him to whom Yeshua pointed when He was himself lifted up upon the pole.

Let us now turn our attention to our second Parsha, Balak,

Balak means to lay waste or devastator. He is King of Moab, who, having heard about the defeats of the Amorites, the Cannanites and Og King of Bashan, tries to employ Balaam, the Midianite prophet, whose name has multiple meanings, and are not dissimilar to those of Balak (Swallowing Up The People, Destroyer Of People) to curse Israel in order to defeat them. The Israelites are camped in the plains of Moab not far from Jericho.

Let us read the opening verse:

22 The Israelites journeyed, and camped in the plains of Moab, on the East side of the Jordan [River] across from Jericho.

2 And Balak [the king of Moab] the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.

3 So Moab was terrified because of the people, for they were numerous. Moab was overcome with fear because of the sons of Israel. **4** Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this horde will lick up all that is around us, just as the ox licks up the grass of the field." And Balak the son of Zippor was the king of Moab at that time. **5** So he sent messengers to Balaam [a famous prophet-diviner] the son of Beor at Pethor, which is by the [Euphrates] River, in the land of the descendants of his people, to call for him, saying, "There is a people who have come out of Egypt; behold, they cover the surface of the land, and they are living opposite me. **6** Now please come, curse these people for me, for they are too powerful for me; perhaps I will be able to defeat them and drive

them out of the land. For I know [your reputation] that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.”

Apart from the narrative introducing Balak and his intentions to defeat by means of a curse, he actually plays a minor part in the story, though the story itself serves to remind us that Israel is protected by YHVH and is a blessed nation, despite their consistent failings to worship God in the manner to which they have been taught.

Balaam is a non Israelite prophet. Ch 23: 7 tells us that he was an Aramean. It would seem that YHVH would have been known as a god among his people, though, as we found with Jethro, priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, a god among a cultic pantheon. However, Balaam recognises, it would seem, that YHVH is the God of Israel and it is Him to whom he must direct the focus of his divination.

Ancient acts of divination would often incur the handling of the sacrificed animal's organs. This may help us to understand why Balaam asked Balak to make the altars for sacrifice in order for the oracle to be spoken. The building of the altars and the sacrificial offering are completely futile, however, because they will not serve to get Balak the outcome he desires, what transpires in Balaam's oracles is YHVH's sovereign statements.

Prior to Balaam's meeting with Balak, orders have been given to bring Balaam to him. We see that Israelites are so numerous that they cover the face of the land. By sheer mass they will overwhelm the Moabites.

As we move into the story, we read in V7,

7 So the elders of Moab and of Midian departed with *fees for* divination (foretelling) in hand; and they came to Balaam and told him the words of Balak.

What is most strange, is that YHVH speaks with Balaam regarding the group's visit. Balaam seems unperturbed by YHVH's encounter. But why does God ask who the men are? Surely He knew the circumstances and the message they brought.

We can only assume that this, in part, is to highlight to Balaam what is really going on. Balaam, as a seer, in fact, is pretty much blind to what he is getting himself into. Nonetheless, what is declared to him by YHVH is the fact that Israel cannot be cursed.

Friends, we must understand that Israel is under the protection of YHVH and are beneficiaries of His grace, provision and discipline. Only He can pass any kind of judgement upon her. Israel is the apple of God's eye.

Deut 32: 10

In a desert land he found him,
in a barren and howling waste.
He shielded him and cared for him;
he guarded him as the apple of his eye,

Balaam consents to obey YHVH's direction in not returning with the men, only to receive another contingent of even more prestigious visitors.

They come with offers of considerable wealth for Balak. Now here we have a quandary. Will Balaam go for the money or obey the Lord. On the surface he declares something quite honourable. This is what Balak's begging note reads.

....“Thus says Balak the son of Zippor, ‘I beg you, let nothing hinder you from coming to me.

17 For I will give you a very great honor and I will do whatever you tell me; so please come, curse these people [of Israel] for me.” **18** Balaam answered the servants of Balak, “Even if Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, either small or great, contrary to the command of the Lord my God.”

Balaam asks the men to stay the night whilst he seeks YHVH for further instruction. Now here is where it gets a bit confusing. YHVH comes to Balaam again. It all seems very familiar and matter of fact. Balaam is trusted only to go if the men ask him. Did Balaam mishear God? It seems so, because YHVH stipulates that He must be obeyed.

Despite saying that he can only do what God instructs, Balaam sets off early with his donkey and travels back with the leaders to Moab.

The episode with the donkey is so humorous it almost detracts from the seriousness of the whole narrative. We see this man bouncing on the back of this donkey cracking the whip with frustrating efforts to get this animal to do as it is told. Could it be that God is controlling the situation? Yes, of course.

We have to read the next few verses and try and grab hold of the scene and the conversation that is going on between man and beast.

22. But God's anger was kindled because he was going, and the Angel of the Lord took His stand in the way as an adversary against him. Now he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. 23 When the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way and His drawn sword in His hand, the donkey turned off the path and went into the field; but Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back toward the path. 24 But the Angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path of the vineyards, with a [stone] wall on this side and a [stone] wall on that side. 25 When the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, she pressed herself against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot against it, and he struck her again. 26 The Angel of the Lord went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. 27 When the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam, so Balaam was angry and he struck the donkey [a third time] with his staff. 28 And 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?" 29 Then Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a mockery of me! If there had been a sword in my hand, I would have killed you by now!" 30 The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden all your life until this day? Have I ever been accustomed to do so to you?" And he said, "No."

This is just hilarious, but once again Balaam is unperturbed by a talking donkey. Perhaps it was something he was used to, however, I can't help but think about how YHVH created man and animals to communicate once a while ago before the fall. In this case, is it possible that if the entrails of a dead animal could provide signs, that a live one could too?

Once again, the great prophet and seer cannot see until his eyes are opened. The Angel of the Lord, appears to Balaam and his immediate reaction is to bow his head and lie on his face. This is something we do not see even with His first two encounters with YHVH.

The Angel of the Lord is considered to be the manifestation of the pre-incarnate Yeshua, and is first mentioned in Genesis 16.

Gen 16: **7** But the **Angel of the Lord** found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, on the road to [Egypt by way of] Shur. **8** And He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where did you come from and where are you going?" And she said, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai." **9 The Angel of the Lord** said to her, "Go back to your mistress, and submit humbly to her authority." **10** Then the **Angel of the Lord** said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count." **11 The Angel of the Lord** continued,

"Behold, you are with child,
And you will bear a son;
And you shall name him Ishmael (God hears),
Because the Lord has heard *and* paid attention to your persecution (suffering).

"He (Ishmael) will be a wild donkey of a man;
His hand *will be* against every man [continually fighting]

And every man's hand against him;
And he will dwell in defiance of all his brothers.”

Now hear what He says to Balaam:

31 Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the **Angel of the Lord** standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand; and he bowed his head and lay himself face down. **32 The Angel of the Lord** said to him, **“Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because your behaviour was obstinate *and* contrary to Me.**

On closer inspection, we see that the **Angel of the Lord**, repeats the question the donkey asks.

There is an irony throughout scripture that relates Israel to a powerful and strong woman, who seems to have everything through a relationship with YHVH, and who declares she is His. This is a marriage covenant partnership. However, not all is as rosey as it looks; she is powerful outwardly but weak spiritually. Both aspects must mirror one another. Her outward appearance must reflect her inward character. What is strange in the narrative, is that the story ends quite abruptly. Balak rubs his hands of Balaam and rebuffs him, telling him that it's because of Adonai, that he won't get his reward. They depart and the episode ends.

But we must ask the question, 'Why did Balak not seek an alliance with Israel, or perhaps look to becoming part of her nation?'

The answer lies in the historic attempt of all the enemies of Israel, to destroy her and wipe her people off the face of the earth.

Balaam the bad.

Despite failing to pronounce the curses upon Israel, Balaam, however, shows how the people can be defeated in another way. They must be tempted to sin against their God, and this is something the scriptures confirm.

Micah 5 prophecies the Messiah that will come from her and ch 6, reminds us of God's blessings upon her and how Balak and Balaam failed in their task to curse her.

2 Peter opens, reminding the believer that because faith has been imparted to them, they are now receivers of the divine nature.

2:3 For His divine power has bestowed on us [absolutely] everything necessary for [a dynamic spiritual] life and godliness, through true *and* personal knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. **4** For by these He has bestowed on us His precious and magnificent promises [of inexpressible value], so that by them you may escape from the immoral freedom that is in the world because of disreputable desire, and become sharers of the divine nature. AMP.

Chapter 2 of 2 Peter, warns that many false prophets will arise and that many people will be led to follow them.

2 But [in those days] false prophets arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will subtly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction on themselves. **2** Many will follow their shameful ways, and because of them the way of truth will be maligned. **3** And in *their* greed they will exploit you with false arguments *and* twisted doctrine. Their sentence [of condemnation which God has decreed] from a time long ago is not idle [but is still in force], and their destruction *and* deepening misery is not asleep [but is on its way]. AMP

2nd Timothy 4, echoes the theme. Jude recounts the historic reminder of those who seek to deny God and come against Him.

Jude 8 Nevertheless in the same way, these dreamers [who are dreaming that God will not punish them] also defile the body, and reject [legitimate] authority, and revile *and* mock angelic majesties. **9** But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil (Satan), and [f]arguing about the body of Moses, did not dare bring an abusive condemnation against him, but [simply] said, “The Lord rebuke you!” **10** **But these men sneer at anything which they do not understand; and whatever they do know by [mere] instinct, like unreasoning *and* irrational beasts—by these things they are destroyed.** **11** **Woe to them! For they have gone the [defiant] way of Cain, and for profit they have run headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of [mutinous] Korah.** **12** These men are hidden reefs [elements of great danger to others] in your love feasts when they feast together with you without fear, looking after [only] themselves; [they are like] clouds without water, swept along by the winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted *and* lifeless; **13** wild waves of the sea, flinging up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of deep darkness has been reserved forever.

The rebuke of the Lord to the church at Pergamum.

12 “And to the angel (divine messenger) of the church in Pergamum write: “These are the words of Him who has *and* wields the sharp two-edged sword [in judgment]: **13** ‘I know where you dwell, [a place] where Satan sits enthroned. Yet you are holding fast to My name, and you did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed (martyred) among you, where Satan dwells. **14** But I have a few things against you, because you have there some [among you] who are holding to the [corrupt] teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, [enticing them] to eat things that had been sacrificed to idols and to commit [acts of sexual] immorality. **15** You also have some who in the same way are holding to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. **16** Therefore repent [change your inner self—your old way of thinking, your sinful behaviour—seek God’s will]; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war *and* fight against them with the sword of My mouth [in judgment].

Before we leave this journey into the Parsha, we are made aware that Israel is now at the end of their journey too. Forty years have passed. They have been fed and watered by the Lord and their spirituality has changed. But this is what we need to know; A spiritual man can still make physical mistakes and decisions that can conflict with the spiritual nature. This is what happened to Israel as we conclude our reading. The doctrine of Balaam influences spiritual people to commit spiritual acts that manifest in the physical realm. His doctrine causes one to focus upon extremes of sensuality and carnal pleasure. Some practices of Baal worship included some disgusting lavatorial antics before the effigy of Peor.

The judgement of YHVH is to hang the chiefs of the people, facing the sun. This is interesting because the Arameans worshipped their pantheon ‘Shimash’, the sun god. Perhaps YHVH was trying to teach the people something.

Finally, YHVH releases a plague which kills 24000 people. Is this number significant?

Friends, Israel’s turning toward Peor is truly beyond belief, especially having spent so long in their journey of change and discovery. We must also be aware that their sin will bring great judgement from God simply because of the amount of light that had been shown to them. This is a warning to every believer.

As we mature in our faith, we are expected to act in accordance to what we have learned. There has to be evidential change. Our lesson from this story is that the spirit of rebellion, which directs us to idolatry and infidelity, away from God, is a continuous and present force at work in this world. It works upon all, believer and unbeliever alike.

We also learn that YHVH, who is Sovereign God Almighty and creator of Israel, is always watching over her and all His children. Sometimes, YHVH may create the most unusual of events to speak with us. He is concerned about how we live our lives in relationship with Him.

Before we finish. I want us to consider the term 'Mediator'. A mediator is defined: *'a person who attempts to make people involved in a conflict come to an agreement; a go-between. (See 1 Timothy 2:5)*

5 For there is [only] one God, and [only] one Mediator between God and mankind, the Man Christ Jesus,

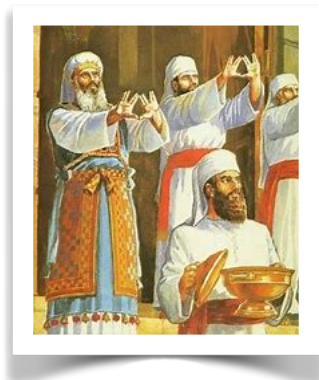
When communications and conversations breakdown, when there seems no way to resolve even the smallest of problems, the mediator is the one who is skilled in establishing the link and bringing to resolution the final word'. However, a mediator is not an intercessor. The word 'Palal' is used for one who mediated between two people. The word 'Hitpalal', is used when intercession is needed because of sin committed against God.

All believers are meant to be in close communication with Him, and for this, we can enter His presence through the redemptive act of Christ Jesus, Messiah of Israel whose blood was shed upon the tree for the remission of sin. He is our only bridge and in this He is both mediator and intercessor to the Father.

In this story of Balak and Balaam, we do not hear anything about the position of the Hebrews. The story is about how YHVH will deal with unruly and wicked people, who are simply in apostasy above all things. So, we are led behind the scenes where YHVH is planning His judgement upon their sin through their enemies. That is a lesson for us all.

Haftarah Micah 5 -6:8

B'rit Hadashah suggested readings: Mt 21:1-11, 2 Peter 2:1-22, Jude 11, Revelation 2:14-15.



Numbers 6:

24 'Y'varekh'kha Adonai v'yishmerekha.

[May Adonai bless you and keep you.]

25 Ya'er Adonai panav eleikha vichunekka.

[May Adonai make his face shine on you and show you his favour.]

26 Yissa Adonai panav eleikha v'yasem l'kha shalom

[May Adonai lift up his face toward you and give you peace.]

Until next time.

Shabbat Shalom

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Glossary

*Midrash: In Judaism, the **Midrash** is the genre of rabbinic literature which contains early interpretations and commentaries on the Written Torah and Oral Torah (spoken law and sermons), as well as non-legalistic rabbinic literature (Aggadah) and occasionally the Jewish religious laws (halakha), which usually form a running commentary on specific passages in the Hebrew Scripture (Tanakh)*

*Targum: **Targum Onkelos** (or **Onqelos**), is the official eastern (Babylonian) Targum (Aramaic translation) to the Torah. However, its early origins may have been western, in Israel. Its authorship is attributed to Onkelos, a famous convert to Judaism in Tannaic times (c. 35–120 CE)*

Targum Jonathan: **Targum Jonathan**), otherwise referred to as **Targum Yonasan/Yonatan**, is the official eastern (Babylonian) Targum to the Nevi'im/Prophets. Its early origins, however, are western (i.e. from the Land of Israel), and the Talmudic tradition attributes its authorship to Jonathan ben Uzziel of Jerusalem in the time of King Herod

Tannaim: Tannaim were the Rabbinic sages whose views are recorded in the Mishnah, from approximately 10-220 CE. The period of the Tannaim, also referred to as the Mishnaic period, lasted about 210 years.

Talmud: The **Talmud** means "instruction, learning", "teach, study") is a central text of Rabbinic Judaism. The term "Talmud" normally refers to the collection of writings named specifically the **Babylonian Talmud** (*Talmud Bavli*), although there is also an earlier collection known as the Jerusalem Talmud (*Talmud Yerushalmi*) or Palestinian

The Talmud has two components:

1. The Mishnah (c. 200 CE), the first written compendium of Judaism's Oral Law;
2. The Gemara (c. 500 CE), an elucidation of the Mishnah and related Tannaitic writings that often ventures onto other subjects and expounds broadly on the Hebrew Bible

'Antiquities of the Jews' 1st century historian Flavius Josephus wrote around AD 93 or 94. The 20 volumes contain an account of history of the Jewish people.

Jubilees: The Book of Jubilees claims to present "the history of the division of the days of the Law, of the events of the years, the year-weeks, and the jubilees of the world" as revealed to Moses (in addition to the Torah or "Instruction") by angels while he was on Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights. The chronology given in Jubilees is based on multiples of seven; the jubilees are periods of 49 years, seven "year-weeks", into which all of time has been divided

Vulgate: This is the Latin Bible. Translated from the Hebrew and Aramaic by Jerome between 382 and 405 CE, this text became known as the 'versio vulgata', which means 'common translation'.

Rashi , whose real name is Shlomo Yitzchaki was born in France in the 11th century. Rashi wrote a comprehensive commentary on the Talmud and commentary on the Hebrew Bible.

Moses ben Maimon, also known as Maimonides became better known by the acronym Rambam. He was born in 1138 in Cordoba, Spain. He was a Sephardic Jew and influential philosopher. He is considered to be among the greatest of Torah Scholars.

Nachmanides- 13th century French Jewish Philosopher, commonly known by the acronym; Rambam.