

**Wembley Synagogue**

בלק

Insights from the commentators into the Sidra of Balak

וַיֵּרָא בְלָק בֶּן צִפּוֹר - And Balak ben Tzipor saw. (22:2)

Rabbeinu Bachaye asks why does the Torah not specify that Balak was King of Moav here in the first verse especially when a few verses on, the Torah points out that Balak was King of Moav? He writes that the answer lies in how this opening verse continues. What did Balak see? He saw "what Israel did to Sichon and Og." Kings are usually very self-assured. They are also proud of being king. Israel, though, had just won crushing military victories over Balak's powerful neighbouring monarchs – Sichon and Og. As a result, Balak was terribly frightened and completely lost his self-assurance. Here, by not mentioning that Balak was king, the verse is hinting that when he saw what Israel had done to Sichon and Og, Balak ceased to *feel* like a king! This is why there is no mention that he was king!

The Saba of Kelm answers differently and Rav Chaim of Brisk is said to have answered in almost exactly the same words. By at first leaving out mention that Balak was king, the Torah is hinting to us how he came to be king. "Balak ben Tzipor saw what Israel had done to Sichon and Og." That is, he was the first to appreciate the peril that faced Moav. At first, others in Moav did not recognize the danger. Therefore because of his foresight and concern, the people of Moav made him their king. This explanation somewhat resembles that of Rashi (22:4), where the Torah says that Balak was king "at that time." According to Rashi, the Torah specifies "at that time," because beforehand Balak was not king, and only upon the death of Sichon did the Moabites appoint him king. (Source: The Parsha Anthology)

The Baal Haturim explains that Balak saw Hashem stop the motion of the sun for a period of time for the benefit of Moshe (Taanit 20a) and this is what he feared. However, no reason is offered why this so frightened Balak. The Gemara states (Berachot 7a) that Hashem is angered for one second every day and whoever utters a curse in that time frame will have his wish fulfilled. That second is at sunrise, and is almost impossible to compute. The only one who was able to was Bilaam. Balak depended on Bilaam being able to curse the Jews. If Moshe could stop the sun from setting and rising, Bilaam would not have the opportunity to curse the Jewish people. This is what Balak feared the most (Source: Talelei Orot)

He sent emissaries to Bilaam the son of Beor, to Petor, which is by the river....(22:5)
Why did the Torah find it important to mention that Petor is by a river? Bilaam prophesied even though he was not in Eretz Yisrael. How could that be? Hashem appears to people only in Eretz Yisrael. The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni beginning of the book of Ezekiel) already asked this question about the prophet Ezekiel. The answer given is that Ezekiel prophesied near a river and since a river cannot become defiled, Hashem appears there to his prophets. The Torah is forestalling the above question by mentioning that Bilaam was situated near a river. By being there he was able to prophesy despite being outside the Land. (Source: Shabbat Delights)

וְעַתָּה בָּרְכֵם לִי אֱמוֹנִי - Now come and condemn them (22: 11). Bila'am asked Hashem for permission to go and curse the Jews. At first this was denied. Subsequently he repeated the request and was allowed to go. The question arises: Why did Hashem initially deny him permission only to grant it upon his second request?

Had Hashem immediately allowed Bila'am to go and try to curse the Jews, such permission may have been misconstrued as an endorsement of Bila'am's actions. (In fact, Hashem did not approve at all of Bila'am's cursing the Jews; Hashem just let him try in order to prove that cursing the Jews would not work). On the other hand, if Hashem would have forbidden Bilaam to go, Bila'am may have said that Hashem's refusal to allow him to go implied that his curses were a powerful force to be reckoned with since Hashem saw it necessary to prevent them.

Hashem therefore arranged events so that this distortion could not be made. Initially, permission to go was denied, indicating that cursing the Jews was not a worthy deed. Hashem then told Bila'am that if he so desires he would be allowed to go, demonstrating Hashem's disregard for the potency of Bila'am's curses. (Source: Ohr Hachayim)

וַיָּקָם בִּלְעָם בַּבֹּקֶר... לָכוּ אֶל אֲרָצָם - And Bilaam arose in the morning and said to Balak's officers, "Go (back) to your land (22:13). According to the Ohr Hachayim Hakadosh, the Torah specifies that Bilaam arose "in the morning" to point out that he was a miser. He got up early and sent Balak's officers packing as soon as he could, so he would not have to give them breakfast.

אִם יִתֶּן לִי בָלָק מִלֵּא בֵּיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב - Even if Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, (I could not go against Hashem's word) (22:18)
The Rabbis say that from this one sentence, it is clear that he was greedy. Bilaam could simply have said "I am sorry but I cannot go against the word of Hashem." Through his manner of speaking he revealed his greed. The words we say give us away! (Source: Parsha Pearls)

וַיַּחְבֹּשׁ אֶת אֲתוֹנוֹ - And he saddled his donkey(22:21)
The fact that Bilaam saddled his donkey by himself instead of letting a servant do it for him shows the great rush he was in to try to curse the Jewish people.
Concerning Bilaam, Rashi tells us that G-d said, "You wicked one! You have already been preceded by Avraham (Abraham) as it states 'And Avraham arose in the morning and he saddled his donkey.'" (Gen. 22:3)
In preparing for the Akeida (sacrificial binding of Yitzchak), Avraham demonstrated his eagerness to fulfill G-d's will by saddling his own donkey. It appears that Avraham's enthusiasm is a response to Bilaam's. How is this a response? Although Avraham had lofty intentions and demonstrated great enthusiasm, Hashem did not allow him to complete that act of sacrifice. In effect, G-d was telling Bilaam that his eagerness to do a wicked act would have no effect on the outcome. (Rebbe of Kotzk - Ma'ayana Shel Torah)

מַלְאָךְ ה' - Angel of Hashem (22:22)
Ten times it says "angel of Hashem" in this Sidra. According to the Vilna Gaon (Aderet Eliyahu), this corresponds to the ten "messages" that Heaven sent Bilaam in the Sidra. Ten times, in ten different ways, Heaven tried to awaken him to his error, though in the end, the evil Bilaam missed every opportunity and failed to understand the "messages."
1) The first time Balak sent messengers, Hashem told Bilaam, "Do not go with them." 2) The second time messengers came, Hashem told Bilaam, "If they have come to call on you, arise and go with them." This implied, "If they seek only to call on you, you can go, but not if they seek that you curse My people. 3) "And the donkey swerved off the way." 4) "And the donkey crushed Bilaam's foot." 5) "And the donkey lay down." 6) "And Hashem opened the donkey's mouth." 7) "And Hashem opened Bilaam's eyes." 8) At the altars at "Bamot Ba'al." 9) At "Rosh HaPisga" 10) at "the top of HaPeor that looked down over the wasteland." Avraham faced ten tests and rose to the occasion each time. Against these, Bilaam was given ten tests, too, and each one he failed.

וַיִּפְתַּח ה' אֶת פִּי הָאֲתוֹן - And Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey (22:28)
This was meant to bring it forcibly home to Bilaam that he had no reason to consider himself exceptional because he had been endowed with prophetic vision. Why, even the donkey, which certainly would not be considered fit to look upon an angel or to speak, was enabled to do both because it was for the good of the Jews. Bilaam was no more fit to be a prophet than the donkey, and was given the gift of prophecy only so that the Jewish people could thereby benefit (Source: Kli Yakar)

וַיִּזְבַּח בָּלָק בְּקָר וְצֹאן - And Balak slaughtered an animal and a sheep (22:40) Balak told his messengers to tell Bilaam that if he would come and curse the Jewish people, Balak would reward him with much wealth and honour. When Bilaam arrived, however, Balak had prepared for him just one ox and one sheep (see Rashi 22:40). By contrast, Avraham told the angels (Bereshit 18:5) that he would give them a bit of bread. In the end, however, he gave them a full meal. Here we see that the wicked promise a lot and do little whilst the righteous promise a little and do a lot (Source: Midrash Tanchuma Chapter 11)

Shabbat Shalom



Shabbat starts 8.00pm



Shabbat ends: 10.27pm