

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	RENEWED
Balak	20 July 2019	17 Tammuz 5779	Num. 22:2-25:9	Mic 5:7-6:8	Matt 21:1-11

We learned that Balak was a descendant of Yitro who broke away from the family and chose to follow the customs of pagan religion. We also learned that Bilaam was a descendant of Lavan, the brother of Rivkah who practiced divination. When she was leaving her home to marry Yitzchak, her brother, Lavan blessed her saying, "Let our sister become the mother of thousands of ten thousands, and let your seed possess the gates of those who hate them." (B'resheet 24:60) The sages taught that the nations would refer to this verse to show that the success of Yisrael was due to the blessing of Lavan and not by Hashem. Another major theme is that the nations would claim that if they had a prophet like Moshe, they would have an opportunity to do *teshuvah* (return, repentance) from their sins and return to Hashem.

Therefore, Hashem gave Bilaam to the nations to refute any chance of accusations toward Him. It is said that Bilaam was or greater than Moshe. We find such clue as it is written, "That he [Balaam] whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed." (Bemidbar 22:6)

However, like all prophets, Hashem came to Bilaam in a dream. Whereas Hashem spoke to Moshe face to face while he was awake. Another difference is that when Bilaam was visited by Hashem, He came without any preamble. Such evidence is found in Bemidbar 22:9 and verse 20 as it is written, "And Elohim came to Bilaam." Moshe and the other prophets favored by Hashem was called upon. For example, Hashem would say, "Moshe, Moshe," or "Avraham, Avraham." Then Hashem would wait until the person acknowledges His Presence before He spoke.

Now, Bilaam said, "Go back to your land, for YHWH has refused to allow me to go with you." (ibid, v. 13) However, this is not what Hashem said as it is written, "Do not go with them. You do not curse the people, for they are blessed." (ibid, v. 12) Bilaam was being careful what he said. He is implying that the first emissaries were not too dignified or too low for him or the gifts he received was not enough. If it is the case of not receiving enough gifts, he is telling them, rather implying that the gifts were not enough. Therefore, he said, "with you." Thus, Balak sent "more numerous and more esteemed than they [first emissaries]." (ibid, v. 15)

Then, Bilaam, being greedy, said, "Though Balak were to give me his house filled with silver and gold." (ibid, v.18) Bilaam stipulates that if Balak gave "his house filled with silver and gold", then he would come. When Bilaam arrived at Balak's house, he was greeted with only one cattle and one sheep "And he [Balak] sent some to Bilaam and to the heads who were with him." (ibid, v. 40)

Bilaam thought he would be greeted with a great honor. When this did not happen, he decided to take revenge against Balak. Thus, he said, "Build seven slaughter-place for me...and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me." (Bemidbar 23:1) He extorted 21 bulls and 21 rams from Balak. Why did Bilaam not ask for sheep? Because, the bulls and the rams were more expensive than the sheep.

Returning to verse 2, the Hebrew word *tzipor* (צִפּוֹר) means bird. Where did he learn his magic? He learned from his ancestor, Yitro who was once an advisor to the Pharaoh while the Children of Yisrael were enslaved. Tzippor earned his name as "bird" because Yitro fled "like a bird" from the Pharaoh. As we know, Yitro was a priest of Medyan. Even though, his daughter Zipporah married Moshe and he accepted Hashem as his Elohim, Tzippor did not accept Hashem and broke away from his family, and practiced divination which was passed on to his son, Balak. Therefore, Balak son of Tzippor as it implies he became an expert in bird divination.

Therefore, Balak would take a bird, shake some grass, or whispered incantation, and it would inform him of certain things. For example, he would start a sentence, and the bird would finish it for him. The word “divination” in Hebrew is *na•chash* (נִחָשׁ). It is interesting that the primordial serpent in Hebrew is also *na•chash* (נִחָשׁ) in B’re sheet 3:1.

Some historical facts:

The biblical calendar shows today (July 21, 2019) is 17th day of Tammuz. On this day, in the year of 2448, Moshe broke the tablets when he saw the children of Yisrael worshipping the Golden Calf.

The daily sacrificial offerings in the First Temple were discontinued on this day – three weeks before the Babylonian’s destruction in 423 BCE.

The walls of Jerusalem were breached (69 CE) by the Romans. General Apostomus burned the Torah and place an idol in the Temple. The fighting in Jerusalem continued for three weeks until the 9th of Av when the Second Temple was set aflame.