



Why Has Israel Survived Against All Odds? Praying at the Wailing Wall, holding up the Torah.

Shabbat Shalom, Hans!

Welcome to our study of Parasha **Balak (Destroyer)**, the weekly Torah portion that will be read in every synagogue around the world during this week's Shabbat (Saturday) morning service.

May you be blessed as you read along with us!

BALAK (Destroyer)

Numbers 22:2–25:9; Micah 5:6–6:8; 2 Peter 2:1–22

“And **Balak [Destroyer]** the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.” (*Numbers 22:2*)

Last week's Parasha (Torah portion) ended with Israel seeking to pass through the land of the Amorites on their way to the Promised Land. The Amorites responded with war, but with God's help, Israel defeated them.

In this week's Parasha, we see the overpowering strength of God's blessing on Israel. When Balak, the king of Moab, sent a sorcerer named Balaam to curse Israel, he found that he could not do so.



Balaam Prophecies the Glory of Israel, by James Tissot

Although Balaam was commissioned to pronounce a curse over Israel, he found that he could only issue a blessing instead, saying, “How shall I curse whom God has not cursed?” (Numbers 23:8)

Many might come against the nation of Israel, but no one can curse those whom Adonai Himself has blessed!

The Moabite King **Balak**, whose name means **waste** or **to lay waste**, wanted to lay waste the nation of Israel. To his dismay, he found that he was unable to do so because of God’s blessing upon her.

Why did King Balak feel so threatened by Israel that he felt the need to have her cursed?

It is because Balak, along with his elders, had heard of the Israelites stunning victories over the mighty enemies of Sihon and Og.

Therefore, deciding that it would be too risky to fight Israel directly, they hired a “spiritual mercenary,” Balaam, who was a heathen sorcerer, to put a “hex” on their enemies. Although we may consider this an ancient superstition, many practice such magic even today.

For instance, in the United States there exists a form of Louisiana Voodoo (also known as New Orleans Voodoo). It is rooted in West African Dahomeyan Vodun, which came to the American south through the slave trade.

The Bible strictly forbids the people of God to practice such sorcery; neither are we to seek guidance from astrologers, sorcerers, psychics, or those who consult with the dead:

“When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his

daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.

“For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you. You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. **For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the LORD your God has not appointed such for you.**” (*Deuteronomy 18:9–13*)



All Torah scrolls are handwritten

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Sadly, the rise in the popularity and acceptance of books and films such as the Harry Potter series has led some Christians to break this serious commandment at their own peril.

As the world becomes darker and more terrifying, many people seek guidance and comfort from sorcerers and others skilled in the occult arts, but as God’s people we are to “come out from among them and be separate.” (*2 Corinthians 6:17*)

The adversary of humankind seeks to deceive and enslave us through a variety of methods: false doctrines mixed with true doctrines, false religions, and fleshly temptations through spiritists, books, TV, and more.

But those who follow Yeshua (Jesus) actually have an advantage that is superior to any of those methods. Believers have the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) to lead and guide them into all truth; therefore, they do not need to stumble around in the kingdom of darkness looking for direction from those who serve the evil one.

God promises that if we seek Him with all of our heart, we will find Him (*Jeremiah 29:13*), and that those who are His sheep will hear His voice (*John 10:27*).

He has not left us to our devices wondering which way we should go.



People walk down a narrow street in the Old City of Jerusalem.

The Power of the Tongue

Even though most people in today's modern, Western culture do not purposefully engage in placing curses on others, people frequently and unknowingly **affect others in a negative sense with their words**.

The Bible tells us that the power of life or death is in our tongue (*Proverbs 18:21*); therefore, we need to be deliberate when we speak about or over other people, **ensuring that our words are constructive and lifegiving**.

Not everyone has been so privileged to have blessings spoken over their life, especially as a child. All too often we hear parents, teachers, children, even pastors speak appallingly ungodly words over others.

These negative words can pierce the heart and soul. False labels are taken to heart and believed to be true, such as loser, stupid, lazy, hopeless, ugly, bad, worthless, inept, idiot, jerk, brat, or unlovable.

What is the answer to this very real problem? How can we escape the multitude of word curses spoken over us?

The answer is found in Yeshua HaMashiach (Jesus the Messiah)!

Not only do we find unconditional love and acceptance with Yeshua; but also the blood of the Messiah has the power to break every curse that has ever been spoken over us — whether intentionally or out of ignorance.

Yeshua became a curse for us so that we could be redeemed and set free from every curse:

"Messiah redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.'" (*Galatians 3:13*)



Two four-year-old Israeli boys discuss football (soccer).

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Blessing and Cursing the Jewish People

By taking upon himself the task of cursing the Jews, Balaam entered into Jewish history books as **Balaam HaRashah** (Balaam [or Bilam] the Wicked).

Although he called himself a prophet of God, he was motivated more by earning a profit with his gift than edifying, warning, teaching, and blessing others with it.

In Judaism, some consider his name to mean **without a nation or people (bli- am)**, suggesting that by going to curse Israel, he became excluded or cut off from a place in **the World to Come (Olam haBah)**.

The reality that Balak and Balaam ignored is that God has promised to bless those who bless the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and to curse those who curse us. (*Genesis 12:3*)

How many people or nations are cutting themselves off from a blessing and a place in Heaven by attempting to curse the Jews?

Although Balaam possessed legendary powers, they were tiny compared to God's power.

Three times Balaam tried to curse Israel, and three times he involuntarily blessed them instead.



A Jewish father holds his child close as he prays at the Western (Wailing) Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Over the centuries, many peoples and nations have tried to destroy Israel, like Balak, but none have succeeded in wiping Israel off the map as they have desired.

Hamas and other Islamic terror groups have written into their charters the goal of annihilating Israel and driving her people into the sea. This desire to wipe out the Jewish People has been shared by Nazi Germany, the Spanish Empire, Byzantine Empire, Assyrian Empire, Philistines, ancient Persia (see Book of Esther), and more.

Why has Israel survived against all odds even till today?

It is because of God's covenantal promise to the seed or offspring of Israel:

“Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, who disturbs the sea, and its waves roar (The LORD of Hosts is His name): ‘If those ordinances depart from before Me,’ says the LORD, ‘then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever.’” (*Jeremiah 31:35–36*)

God has blessed the Jewish People, and they are as secure as the stars in the sky.



The Milky Way Galaxy over Israel's Negev Desert

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Even though God has made the survival and ultimate salvation of Israel secure, Psalm 83 prophesies that in the Last Days, a confederacy will be formed before our very eyes that intends to wipe out the name of Israel forever:

“They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones. They have said, ‘Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, **that the name of Israel may be remembered no more.**” (*Psalm 83:3–4*)

There is only one way that Israel may be defeated; that is, through her own sin — by turning away from God.

This is what happened to the people of Israel in this Parasha. Although Balak and Balaam failed in bringing a curse upon Israel, they brought destruction upon themselves by committing sexual immorality with the Moabite women and worshiping their god, Baal-Peor.

“So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.” (*Numbers 25:3*)

Seeing His Chosen People worship pagan gods enraged God and resulted in a plague that killed 24,000 Israelites. Scripture reveals that it was Balaam, who counseled the Midianites to ruin Israel through association with their women. (*Numbers 31:7–16*)

The Rabbis, therefore, also discern another meaning of the name of Balaam as **bilu-am** — one who **confused the nation**.



An illustration from *The Bible and Its Story* (1908) depicting the Midianite women seducing the Israelite men as a means to bring them under a curse.

What happened in the end to Balaam?

After being ridiculed by his own donkey, who miraculously tried to save him by telling him about the end that lay before him, Balaam finally died in a battle with the Israelites. (*Numbers 31:8*)

So ended the life of one who was motivated by greed and selfish ambition rather than by God's righteousness.

The Book of Jude underscores the error of false prophets like Balaam:

"Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in **the error of Balaam for profit**, and perished in the rebellion of Korah." (*Jude 1:11*)

What was this grave error of Balaam that was serious enough to be included alongside Cain, who murdered his brother (Genesis 4) as well as Korah, who led a rebellion against Moses that resulted in the deaths of many Israelites (*Numbers 16*)?

We can glean the answer in the ancient Jewish text *Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers)*, which contrasts Balaam's sins with Abraham's righteousness:

"Whoever possesses the following three traits is of the disciples of our father Abraham; and whoever possesses the opposite three traits is of the disciples of the wicked Balaam:

"The disciples of our father Abraham have a good eye, a meek spirit, and a humble soul.

"The disciples of the wicked Balaam have an evil eye [greed/envy], a haughty spirit and a gross soul. ...

"The disciples of our father Abraham benefit in this world and inherit the World To Come, and as is stated, 'To bequeath to those who love Me there is, and their treasures I shall fill' (*Proverbs 8:21*).

"The disciples of the wicked Balaam inherit purgatory and descent into the pit of destruction, as is stated, 'And You, G-d, shall cast them into the pit of destruction; bloody and deceitful men, they shall not attain half their days. And I shall trust in you' (*Psalms 55:23*)."



Ultra-Orthodox Jewish men in Tel Aviv show a passerby how to put on tefillin (phylacteries) and pray.

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Yeshua also referred to Balaam, saying to the Believers at Pergamum:

“Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to **the teaching of Balaam**, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.” (*Revelation 2:14*)

And Peter referenced Balaam in his warnings to Believers; may the people of God today take heed:

“They have left the straight way and wandered off to **follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness.** But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey — a beast without speech — who spoke with a man's voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

“These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For they mouth **empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error.**” (*2 Peter 2:15–18*)



A woman hikes in the Hittin Region of Israel. (Israel Tourism photo by Tal Glick and Amir Moran)

Why are there so many warnings about Balaam, and how are they relevant today?

Balaam, even after failing to curse Israel directly, continued to associate and cooperate with those who sought Israel's destruction.

Some within the Christian Church not only associate with, but also financially support people, charities, and causes with an anti-Israel and anti-Semitic agenda.

From the example of Balak and Balaam, we can see that being drawn into despising Israel is a dangerous path — and “talking donkeys appear to be in short supply these days!” (Wild Olive)

May God's people disassociate from those who curse Israel and teach anti-Semitic lies. May the followers of Yeshua, both Jews and Gentiles, choose to stand with Israel to the very end and continue in holiness.

Let us bless Israel and pray that God will save her from all those enemies who try to curse her. Let us also pray that the Jewish People will seek after God with all of their hearts and will walk in righteousness before Him. It is then they will find Him.



Many have falsely said that God is finished with His Chosen People; however, Bible prophecy clearly states that this will never be so. In fact, in these Last Days, God is moving among His people to physically and spiritually restore them.

You can be part of this end-time move of God, Hans, by contributing to our work among the Jewish People.

"Hear the word of the LORD, you nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: 'He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over His flock like a shepherd.'" (*Jeremiah 31:10*)

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