

important for us to understand about him. What is much more important for us to understand about this dark character is his *nature*, his *motivation*, his *prototype*, his fear-mongering propaganda, and his *occult-based power base*. The Balak character is going to be *in a prophetic class all by himself*. Before it is over he is going to wind up becoming our most dangerous human adversary of all. Through the medium of the parsha that bears his name we will get to know this king – and his charismatic false prophet - very, very well. Are you ready to get started?

Yet Another Kind of Attack Is On the Way!

For a change of pace this week we will not be reading about the wanderings of the Redeemed Community at all. While the Redeemed Community will be both *in the vicinity of* and *the reason for* the events about which we will read in this 40th parsha we will find that neither Moshe, Aharon, nor any of our number are going to be active participants. In fact it will turn out that ‘our heroes’ have no reason whatever to even know the events about which we will read are taking place. The events about which we will read in the first six aliyot of this parsha will, you see, all take place ‘behind enemy lines’ – beyond our line of sight. These events therefore constitute ‘hidden workings’ of the Almighty on our behalf. The first thing we will read about is *a conspiracy* arranged between the Moavi and the nomadic hordes of Midyan to induce an influential ‘spokesman of the nations’ to pronounce curses concerning the Covenant Community. **Numbers 22:2-4**. As we read these things we will take a deep breath and say with the Psalmist:

***Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together, against the Holy One and against his anointed,
saying, 'Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us'.***

[Psalm 2:1-3]

As our readings continue, we will discover how the Moavi and Midyani coaxed the charismatic ‘spokesman of the nations’ into action. We will then be given a glimpse of what exactly these catalyst groups had to promise the champion of the One-World Order movement in order to induce him to come riding his infamous donkey to their attempted rescue. **Numbers 22:5-21**. At this point in the narrative we should be reminded that the same Psalmist who wrote the above quotation also said: ***He Who sits in the heavens will laugh: the Holy One will hold them in derision.*** Psalm 2:4.

Next we will discover that whatever any of the characters might have expected or hoped, this journey is not going to turn out being to the glory of anyone besides the Holy One. We will find out quickly just how very, very *jealous over His people* - and how very, very *faithful to His covenant* - the Holy One our God truly is. We will learn that whatever the nations conspire and scheme to do to His People it will not come to pass - because *the Divine Bridegroom of Sinai has no intention of*

letting His People be destroyed by the schemes of the nations to do away with them. We will therefore laugh along with Him Who sits in the Heavens as the Holy One arranges circumstances in such a way that the all-wise ‘spokesmen of the nations of the world’ winds up being lectured on spiritual truths by ... of all things, *his own donkey*.

***Be wise now therefore, O you kings, and be instructed, you judges of the earth:
Serve the Holy One with fear, and rejoice with trembling.***

[Psalm 2:10]

We will discover that the mighty Warrior Angel that the Holy One dispatched to accompany Bila’am is determined to keep Israel’s adversary on a *tight leash*. With the Psalmist we will say to this ‘spokesman of the nations of the world’: ***Kiss the Son, lest he anaf*** [i.e. purse His lips and blow heavily], ***and you perish in the way - when His af*** [i.e. His bull-like snort of warning] ***flares His nostrils but a little***. Psalm 2:12a.

Upon his arrival in Moav we will see the ‘spokesman of the nations’ seek out several vantage points from which to try to find something negative to declare about the Covenant people. Each time, however, the fellow will wind up *blessing* the people, households, and bloodlines that he was hired to curse. As the Psalmist said: ***Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him***. Psalm 2:12b.

Bila’am’s first prophetic oracle will be delivered at a place called *Kiryat-Hutzot*. The prophet will take one look at Israel and acknowledge that he cannot curse a people that the Creator has not cursed. He will refer to the Covenant Nation as *a people who will dwell apart* - a people at peace *specifically because* they do not count themselves among the nations. Specifically he will declare: ***Behold - a people that will dwell apart, and not be reckoned among the nations!***

Bila’am’s first oracle will end with him wishing out loud that his end would be like the end the Holy One has planned for His Covenant People: ***O let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!*** Spoiler alert: that is NOT the way this story ends.

At Balak’s insistence the prophet will then travel to the field of *Tzofim*, atop Mount Pisgah, to perhaps deliver another oracle more to Balak’s liking. From this vantage point the prophet of the nations will declare:

***He has blessed, and I can't reverse it.
He has not seen iniquity in Ya`akov; neither has he seen perverseness in Yisra'el.***

***The Holy One his God is with him; the shout of a king is among them.
God brings them forth out of Mitzrayim;***

***He has as it were the strength of the wild-ox.
So surely there is no enchantment with Ya`akov;
and neither is there any divination with Yisra'el:***

*Behold, a people rises up as a lioness, as a lion he lifts himself up:
He will not lie down until he eats of the prey and drink the blood of the slain.*

Balak will then take the prophet up to a third vantage point to give him one more chance. In the course of Bila'am's third oracle, however, things will get even worse for Balak. The prophet will look out on the camp of the Redeemed and proclaim ecstatically: *How lovely are your tents O Ya'akov – Your tabernacles, Yisrael! ... Blessed is everyone who blesses you, and cursed is everyone who curses you.*

Balak will become furious. He will order Bila'am to 'leave at once'. But the prophet will not go gently into the night. A fourth oracle will burst forth from Bila'am's lips. He will prophesy of the coming of a glorious Messiah-King that will transform the fledgling nation encamped on the plain into a world-shaking kingdom: *I see him, but not now; I see him, but not near: a star will come forth out of Ya'akov; a scepter will rise out of Yisra'el ...* The prophet will then announce to the conspirators of the One-World Order movement exactly how and in what sequence the Holy One's Messiah is going to avenge the wrongs done to the Holy One's Covenant people at the end of days. He will begin this part of the oracle by announcing: *He will strike through the corners of Mo'av, and break down all the sons of tumult.* The prophet will declare what the Messiah is going to do to the descendants of Esav [Esau], who were not even part of the conspiracy in Balak's day, but who will one day join the One-World order camp and even provide its funding:

*Edom will be a yereisha – i.e. occupied territory -
Se'ir also will be a yereisha, [who were] his enemies; while Yisra'el does valiantly.
Out of Ya'akov one will take dominion, and will destroy the remnant from the city.*

Bila'am will then turn his attention to our ancient nemesis *Amalek*. Concerning the original and most vehement Covenant-nation haters and stalkers of the world the prophet of the nations will declare: *Chief among nations is Amalek; but in the end he will be destroyed forever.*

The prophet will then focus on a group that Israel would come to mistakenly count as its ally – a people the prophet called the *Kenites*. This group, the prophet says, will *prosper for a time* as other nations are collapsing and will win impressive military victories over both *Assyria* [Iraq] and *Eber*, but will in the end be destroyed forever and cease to exist.

Good stuff, huh? Well ... do not start celebrating too soon. While in my flesh I wish the story of ended there, it does not. Unsuccessful at *cursing* Israel the prophet of the nations will change strategies and turn the attention of his co-conspirators to *seducing* her. He took note that *her shield was her purity* – so he sets out to take her shield. At this, alas, the prophet of the nations succeeds. Israel cannot be

cursed. But she can most definitely be seduced. The prophet counsels the conspiring nations to send beautifully adorned women to the camp of the Redeemed. They do so, and these beautiful women quickly seduce Israel's men and get them involved first in pursuit of *sensual pleasure*, then in *perversion*, then in *blatant idolatry*.

When disgusting and perverse forms of both sensuality and idolatry are brought into the very courts of the *Mish'kan* of the Holy One the Holy One has no choice but to visit the camp in judgment. If His Bride-to-be is to survive and fulfill her purpose on the earth this evil must be stopped. He gives instructions as to how it is to be nipped in the bud. His instructions are ignored. A plague therefore breaks out in the Camp and thousands of lives are snuffed out. The devastation continues until in a moment of zeal for the *Mish'kan's* purity Aharon's grandson Pinechas takes spear in hand and slays a prince of Israel and a princess of Midyan as they brazenly engage in an abominable act of licentiousness within the very courts of the *Mish'kan*.

Ah Beloved - this week is indeed to be a time of testing and trial – and hidden workings of the Almighty - for us.

***It Is All a Script For the Great Prophetic Play
That Will Play Itself Out on the World Stage in the Latter Days***

Torah's narrative of the *Balak-Bila'am Episode* has a very different feel to it than the rest of the written material in *Sefer B'midbar* – or for that matter the rest of Scripture². First of all, all the main human actors in the Bila'am Episode are pagans. Secondly, while the prototypical great conspiracy of the Nations of the earth against the Covenant People of the Holy One shares a genesis of historicity with the events of the original season of Wilderness-wandering, the primary focus of this parsha is clearly prophetic of events that will occur in the distant future. This fascinating drama provides a prophetic picture of critical end-time events yet to come – events of the Great second-Exodus period regathering/harvest which will involve a cast of characters with who-knows-what actual names but who we who are familiar with this story will recognize clearly as actors playing the ancient roles of Balak, Bila'am, the elders of Moav, and the elders and princesses of Midyan.

The Literary Structure of the Great Prophetic Play

The great prophetic play we read this week consists of nine Acts, as follows:

² The closest book of the Canon in storyline and narrative style is the book of *Esther*. There are several parallels between Torah's Balak-Bila'am Narrative and the Megillah we read each year at *Purim*. The Balak-Bila'am team is in many respects comparable to the Ahasuerus-Haman team.

- Act I: Balak Rides a Wave of Fear and Ethnic Hatred to Power**
Act II: The Great Conspiracy of Nations is Hatched
Act III: A Charismatic False Prophet is Enlisted in the Enterprise
Act IV: The Angel of the Holy One Intervenes and Takes Authority
Act V: Oracle 1 – *Kiryat Hutzot – A People Who Dwell Apart ...*
Act VI: Oracle 2 – *Sadeh Tzofim – He sees no iniquity in Ya’akov ...*
Act VII: Oracle 3 – *Pe’or – How Lovely/a Star will come forth ...*
Act VIII: The Nations Discover and Exploit Our Achilles Heel
Act IX: One Zealous for the Holy One Arises and Stops the Plague

The Major Themes of the Great Prophetic Play

Within the boundaries of this literary structure the Holy One will develop several *key prophetic themes*. First of all the Holy One will once again confirm the theme that *all of prophetic history revolves around the reaction of the nations and every individual person in the world to the presence on earth of His Covenant People*. The ultimate challenges the Holy One has designed to test the hearts of all people and all nations involve coming to grips with [1] the stunning magnitude of the undeserved blessings the Holy One has bestowed and will continue to bestow upon the people descended from Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov, and [2] the idea - so insulting to the mind of man - that the Holy One intends for all blessings on all nations and people on earth to come *through* Israel.

For all time Israel has been blessed of the Holy One, and for all its generations Israel has been called and empowered to be a fountain of all blessings from which the rest of the world is called to acknowledge and treasure³. *But wait a minute . . . some argue. Israel is no more righteous than any other nation . . . they say*. And if righteousness is to be judged through the lens of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and judgment is to be made according to the flesh instead of the Spirit, those who argue such things are 100% correct. But fortunately, in the Holy One’s redemptive plan, righteousness is never judged through the lens of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, nor is judgment ever made according to the flesh. And in the All-Wise and All-Good plan of the Holy One it does not ultimately matter to what extent Israel is ‘righteous’ as men with biases and agendas view it in any given season in time or not – for the Holy One is more than faithful enough to both cover and atone for the unrighteousness of Israel. And because Israel’s redemption story is an essential part of His Grand Plan of Restoration for Mankind and Creation, the Holy One is committed to redeeming and restoring Israel to her assigned place no matter how

³ In Genesis 12:3 the Holy One told Avram “*I will bless those who bless you and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*” See also Romans 11:11-32 and Isaiah 49:3-26.

low - or how many times - she falls. That is, you see, what the COVENANT the Creator of the Universe made with Avraham is all about. The Holy One *says exactly what He means and means exactly what He says*. He will bring to pass everything He promises. Anyone who wishes to be engrafted into His Covenant with Israel is accepted by the Holy One whatever his or her national origin and is welcomed to a full rights of participation therein. But those who allow the Deceiver to plant in their hearts either jealousy or disdain toward the Holy One's chosen people, and therefore insist on doing things their own way, elect thereby to forever remain outside the Covenant and strangers to the blessings of the Holy One that flow through the Covenant.

The second theme the Holy One will use the Bila'am Episode to develop is the stunning revelation of both the root and the fruit of anti-Semitism. All anti-Semitism is rooted in prideful rebellion against the Holy One, His Will, His Ways, and His Plan of Redemption. The fruit of Anti-Semitism is spelled out in Bila'am's oracles against people groups like Edom [Numbers 24:18-19], Amalek [Numbers 24:20], the Keni, etc. [Numbers 24:21-24].

Thirdly the Holy One will use the prophetic end-times drama we study this week to develop the theme of His careful watchfulness over Israel and His personal commitment to intervene against the schemes of those who insist on rebelling against His Will and plotting harm toward His chosen people. He will demonstrate in this episode that He not only knows exactly who His enemies are but also knows exactly *what they have planned and why and exactly when and by what means they plan to accomplish it. And He will demonstrate in this parsha how He is always one step ahead of His enemies, and that He is ready, willing and able to employ both indirect and direct means, as He deems will bring Him the most glory, to not only confuse, throw off, and thwart their schemes but to actually bring those very schemes right back upon the heads of those who concocted them.* As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Holy One surrounds His people - from this time forth and forever. **Psalm 125:2**; see also **Zechariah 14:2-19**.

The Cast of Characters For the Final Great Prophetic Play of Sefer Bamidbar

Now let's take a quick look at the cast of characters which will participate in our drama *ha-shavua*. Our usual heroes – Moshe, Aharon, Y'hoshua, Kaleb and company - are not going to be directly involved. Torah will instead introduce us to *a new set of players*, namely:

1. Balak, son of Tzippor;
2. The people of Moav;
3. The elders of Midyan;
4. The elders of Moav;

5. The princes of Moav;
6. Bila'am, son of Be'or, of Petor by the River;
7. A very famous donkey;
8. the Angel of the Holy One;
9. the judges of Israel;
10. a Midyani princess; and
11. Pinechas, son of Aharon.

In this *shiur* we will only have time to discuss the first two new characters – *Balak*, son of Tzippor, the Moavi, and enigmatic villain *Bila'am*, son of Be'or.

Getting to Know Balak - Historically and Prophetically

The first new player that the prophetic stage of Torah introduces us to this week is *Balak* of *Moav* (Moab). ***Balak*** the Moavi shares with *Yitro* the Midyani [Moshe's father-in-law] the distinction of being the only two persons from nations other than Israel after whom a parsha of Torah is named. We have discussed Yitro, and the stunning prophetic implications of his approach to the Camp of the Redeemed, in some detail in these studies⁴. It is now our time to turn our attention to his end-time counterpart – *Balak*. *Who is this man Balak* that Torah deems him so important? Why did the sages who 'mapped out' and named the parshot choose to give him such a prominent position? Why did they think it was so important that we always remember his name? What if we are all, individually and collectively, destined to encounter Balak in the course of our journeys? What if the sages – following the lead of the Holy One – want to be very sure that we will be able to *recognize* - and *deal appropriately with* - Balak when he comes up on our radar screen?

1. Balak's Cultural Identity and Identification

As alluded to previously Balak is not a Hebrew. Neither is he one of the 'mixed multitude' who came forth with us from Egypt. He is not a part of our camp at all. So . . . is he *friend*? Or is he *foe*?

Balak was a part of an ethnic group most English speakers have come to know as the "*Moabites*". Hebraically these people are called *Moav'im*. They are one of two groups of people who came forth from the line of Avraham's nephew, Lot⁵. Lot, of course, split with Avraham over a squabble concerning grazing land. He chose the fertile "cities of the plain" [the Jordan River Valley's "West Bank"], leaving Avraham the mountains and the desert. Lot eventually settled in *S'dom* [Sodom], in the midst of the most perverse society on earth. As you will recall he hand his two daughters were the only survivors of that city, and only escaped alive because of

⁴ See the Rabbi's son's studies for parsha *Yitro* – particularly the introductory study the studies for Yom Sheni [Monday] and Yom Sh'lishi [Tuesday].

⁵ See Genesis 19:20-37.

their relationship with Avraham. After the destruction of S'dom and G'morah Lot settled in the area to the East of what in the fallout of fire and brimstone which destroyed those cities became what we know as the "Dead Sea". Today the area in which Lot and his daughters settled is called "Jordan"⁶. That country is now populated primarily by Arabs [95% of whom are Muslim], not by descendants of the ancient Moav'im.

As you will remember, in the aftermath of the destruction of S'dom Lot's oldest daughter seduced him into an incestuous encounter, became pregnant by him, and called the child born of the union 'Moav', meaning 'of/from father'. As the Torah account reveals it: *The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moav; he is the patriarch/progenitor of the Moav of this day.* Genesis 19:37.

Moav's descendants thereafter were constantly fighting with the *Emori* [Amorites] and *Ammoni* [Ammonites] for supremacy – and for control of the Eastern bank of the Dead Sea and Jordan Rift Valley. At the time of the historical figure Balak the Emori were pre-eminent, and the shoreline areas on the East bank of the Jordan and the Dead Sea were all Emori-controlled. Moav's descendants had meanwhile been pushed Eastward into the less fertile mountainous areas.

2. Balak's Strategic Myopia

The narrative of Torah first introduces Balak to us simply as the 'son of Tzippor'. Numbers 22:2[a]. He is not introduced to us *king* of Moav until several verses – and some very interesting narrative - later. It is possible therefore, and some sages of Israel have taught, that Torah is trying to tell us that when the Redeemed Community first arrived in Balak's world, Moav - which as aforesaid had of late been subjugated to the Emori - *had no king*, and that up to that time Balak had just been an ordinary, albeit probably wealthy, influential, and political, citizen.

The next thing Torah tells us about Balak – and the apparent key to his ascendancy to the throne of Moav - is that he '*saw all that Israel had done to the Emori*'. Numbers 22[b]. This particular phrasing says a ton about Balak if we just look at it carefully. Balak, you see, *saw only what he wanted to see*. He saw what Israel had done to the Emori – but he chose not to see what brought the whole crisis about. He chose not to see what the Emori had done to Israel that led to the wars that left the trans-Jordanian Emori kingdoms in tatters and their cities and pastures in Israeli control. He chose not see that the Emori had been the unprovoked

⁶The country known today as Jordan is relatively young. After World War I the British enacted a Mandate creating a country called *Trans-Jordan* to be run [under English supervision and control, of course] by the minority of Arab groups who assisted the allies during the course of the war. The official establishment of the country took place May 15, 1923. The country became independent in 1946, at which time the name was officially changed to *Jordan*.

aggressors and initiators of all the wars the Hebrews fought with them. He chose not to see that the first Israeli-Emori war occurred when Israel sought simply peaceful passage along an established trade route that ran through the land of the Emori king Sichon, Sichon not only refused them passage but also brazenly *‘mustered his entire army and marched out into the desert to attack Israel.’* Numbers 21:21-23. He chose not to see that the second Israeli-Emori war occurred when the Emori king Og of Bashan ‘and his whole army marched out to attack [the Hebrews] at Esdrei. Numbers 21:33. All Balak saw – probably because all he wanted to see - was *‘what Israel had done to the Emori’*.

3. Balak’s Opportunistic Advance

Did what Balak saw Israel do ‘to the Emori’ make him personally afraid? Torah does not tell us. All Torah tells us is that somehow when Balak saw whatever he chose to see, the result was that *‘Moav was terrified’* and *‘Moav was filled with dread’*. Numbers 22:3. Balak apparently seized the moment. “Never waste a good crisis”, political sorcerers today say⁷. But the advice is nothing new. After all, from a political viewpoint, what is a good crisis for if not to be used by those seeking power as a means to manipulate people through casting blame, stirring up anger, whipping up old prejudices, spreading lies, and laying the seeds for fear?

If Balak was not everybody’s choice for king of the Moav’im before the ‘crisis’, he sure was after the seeds of hate and fear he sowed in the people based upon what he ‘saw’ Israel do to the Emori began to sprout, blossom, and bear fruit. Hence in verse 5 of the narrative we are told that when the fear and hate mongering was all done, Balak was at THAT TIME king of Moav. Could it be that Torah is trying to tell us that Balak had ridden the very wave of fear and ethnic hatred he created with his myopic vision to the position of ultimate leadership over his nation? Perhaps it is time we also got to know Balak’s choice of weapons against the Covenant. Let me introduce you to the world’s most famous prophet-for-hire, *Bila’am*.

Introducing the ‘Ultimate Stranger’ of Torah – Bila’am of Be’or

The second ‘main character’ introduced in this week’s parsha – the counterpart of Balak – is named *Bila’am*⁸. Torah introduced him to us as “*Bila’am, son of Beor*” and tells us that he lives at “*Petor on/by the River*”. He is a man of great spiritual

⁷ Rahm Emanuel, former Chief of Staff of the Barack Obama administration in the United States, was quoted as saying in the midst of the 2009 economic crisis that catapulted Obama from relative obscurity into the White House: “*You don’t ever want a crisis to go to waste; it’s an opportunity to do important things that you would otherwise avoid.*” This idea was later echoed by Hilary Clinton, then Secretary of State for the same administration, who a few months later responded to news of a severe energy crisis in Europe by saying: “*Never waste a good crisis ... Don’t waste it when it can have a very positive impact on climate change and energy security.*”

⁸ In Hebrew [BST-Hebrew font] the name is written בִּלְעָם.

reputation.

Who is this strange and powerful person who can both *bless* and *curse* with the same tongue? Hmmmn. Just who is this character called Bila'am indeed? Though likely of foreign origin the name Bila'am appears to be related to the Hebrew phrase *b'lo am*, meaning of no nation. Bila'am appears to have been a *cross-culturalist* – a prototype of the false prophet of the 'Man of Lawlessness' [*i.e.* the Anti-Messiah] predicted to arise and deceive the inhabitants of the earth in the end of days.

Bila'am is obviously no cheap charlatan who pulls off deception with smoke, mirrors and sleight of hand. He is *extremely gifted* spiritually. He obviously hears from the Holy One [among, no doubt, other spiritual sources]. And do not kid yourself - Bila'am talks a *really good talk*. Listen to how spiritual he sounds:

*He said to them, "Lodge here this night,
and I will bring you word again, as the Holy One shall speak to me ..."*

*Bila'am said to Balak, "Behold, I have come to you:
have I now any power at all to speak anything?
the word that the Holy One puts in my mouth, that shall I speak.*

Ah yes, Bila'am *talks the talk* - but then again, as we will soon discover, so does his donkey!

Through Bila'am Balak earnestly hoped to neutralize the Voice, so that he and his people could effectively utilize the sword to inflict the "final solution" to the problem of the Hebrews. **Numbers 22:11.**

The more we see of Bila'am the more dangerous we realize both he - and the false prophet of the Anti-Messiah of whom he serves as the prototype - truly are. Yeshua's revelatory letter to the called out ones of Pergamos states:

*I have a few things against you,
because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Bila'am,
who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel,
to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.
Repent, or else I will come to you quickly
and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.
He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the called out ones.*

[Revelation 2:14-17]

Bila'am certainly can be said, as well, to be the forerunner of the demagogues today who advocate that everyone unite across national and linguistic lines as '*citizens of Planet Earth*' [for instance, under the European Union or the United Nations]. This philosophy, though it disguises itself as wisdom, and masquerades as a spiritual vehicle for '*world peace*', necessarily requires its advocates to rebel

against what the Holy One decreed at the Tower of Bavel – that mankind would be *scattered* and *divided*. Bila'am represents – and foreshadows - the coming 'one-world' order and 'one-world' religion messengers of false *hope*, false *love*, and false *peace*.

According to one prominent commentary⁹ the name Bila'am is an *acronym* meant to convey that this mysterious seer from *Petor* is the embodiment of *tumah*/uncleanness. Stop and let that sink in for a moment or two. Where does such a wild idea come from, you ask? According to the commentator in question, the *beit* ['b' sound] with which the name Bila'am begins references *Balak*, the Moavi king who hired Bila'am to curse Israel, and who later arranged through diplomatic conspiracy with the sheiks of Midyan the seduction of Israel's young men by Midyani women. According to the same commentator, the *lamed* ['l' sound] which is the second letter of the name given to the seer from *Petor* references *Lavan*, the conniving, deceitful brother of Rivkah, who tricked Ya'akov into 20 years of bondage to him in Charan. Under this same analysis, the *ayin*, the third letter of Bila'am's name [in this case, making an 'ahh' vowel sound] represents *Amelek*, the perpetual enemy of the Holy One and of His covenant people. And, finally, according to this commentator, the *mem* ['m' sound] with which the name '*Bila'am*' concludes represents *Mitzrayim* [i.e. Egypt], which enslaved Israel, and sanctioned the murder of masses of male infants born to Hebrew women.

According to this line of reasoning Bila'am has been responsible for four separate attempts to destroy the Jewish people. 1) He was the same person as – or at least a descendant of – Lavan the Aramean, who abused and tried to enslave Ya'akov through enticements of his daughters, Rachel and Leah; 2) He advised Egypt's Pharaoh to torture the Jews in Egypt, and especially to throw their boy babies into the Nile; 3) He incited the wicked Amalek to declare eternal war against the Covenant Nation; and 4) Upon Balak's invitation he came to curse the Hebrew people, and when prevented from doing so by the Angel of the Holy One developed a strategy to seduce the Hebrew people into sensuality and idolatry.

Literally the name "Bila'am" means "*stopper*". A similar word in modern Hebrew is used to describe the brakes on one's automobile. The purpose of Bila'am is to *stop* - to put the brakes on - the advance of the Holy One's people toward their grand destiny. *Bila'am* is therefore *the epitome of the prophet of the Anti-Messiah*.

Bila'am is apparently uniquely blessed among the pagans of the world. He hears from the Holy One, as we find out in the opening aliyah¹⁰. This fact is interesting,

⁹ *Targum Yonatan ben Uziel* 31:8.

¹⁰ The sages opine that the Divine spirit visited Bila'am only at night, as is the case with all the prophets of the nations. Lavan [Rivkah's brother] too, received prophesy in a nocturnal dream. **Genesis 31:24**.

because the Holy One has heretofore reserved most ‘God-encounters’ to Avraham and his descendants. The Holy One *not only* speaks to *this pagan man, but actually* carries on detailed conversations with him. But though Bila’am heard from and conversed with the Holy One, he has a weakness for the flattery and admiration of men. He caters to rich and powerful men with neuroses like Balak instead of *sh’ma*-ing the Holy One, and therefore tries to use the revelation and insights he receives for his own ends. He – and all who are like him - eloquently spout high-sounding religious talk. This tends to attract many adherents. But because he knows he has ‘sold out’ for the praise and payment of men his heart comes to hate both the people and the ways of the Holy One. Hence he searches incessantly for ways to undermine them and silence the true *voice* – and *to hear only what he wants to hear*, so he can *continue to do what he wants to do.*’

Dealing With Higher Levels of Spiritual Deception

The story of Balak and Bila’am is at essence a story of *spiritual deception*. We have, of course, in the course of our studies of Torah thus far encountered *spiritual deception* in many forms and at many levels. It all started with the *Serpent-speak* of the Garden of Eden. A similar stench filled the air at the time of the Tower of Babel. Its negative effects permeated the conversations and established the priorities of the houses of Lavan and Potifar. Its negative energy infested the palaces of the Pharaohs and the council chambers of the Emori.

In this week’s parsha however we will see spiritual deception manifest at a level not seen since the ill-fated encounter at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This episode, like that one, will involve an ordinarily voiceless creature speaking with a human voice. In the Garden it was a serpent. In this week’s parsha it will be a donkey. Some time in the not-too-distant future it will be a ‘Beast’.

Revelation 13:11-17.

Do we dare *sh’ma* what our Divine Bridegroom is saying to us in Torah about spiritual deception? Do we dare actually consider how spiritual deception may be impacting us, our cultures, and our children, today? After all, spiritual deception is not a pleasant subject to discuss. It is far too real. Because you see, when it comes right down to it, every one of us is vulnerable to, and has at one time walked in - if not practiced - some form of spiritual deception. We all have human ears of flesh as well as spiritual ears. And our human ears of flesh love to be flattered and soothed and stimulated with teachings and ‘prophesies’ that make us feel good about ourselves. And that is what makes it so frightening. Yeshua of Natzret said it thusly: ***Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying I am He, and will deceive many.*** Mark 13:5-6. Shaul of Tarsus taught along the same lines, saying:

... evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

[II Timothy 3:13]

Let no one deceive you by any means;

* * *

*The coming of the Torah-less one is according to the working of ha-Satan,
with all power, signs, and lying wonders,
and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish,
because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.
And for this reason the Holy One will send them strong delusion,
that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned
who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

[II Thessalonians 2:3-4]

The good news is that there is an antidote for the poison of spiritual deception. Here is how Shaul described the ‘antidote’:

*But you must continue in the things that you have learned and been assured of,
knowing from whom you have learned them,
and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures,
which are able to make you wise for salvation
through faith which is in Yeshua Ha-Maschiach.*

[II Timothy 3:14-15]

This antidote is wonderful. But it is no one-time cure-all; it must be taken in substantial doses before, after, and during every “bite” of the serpent.

It will help you to keep this in mind as you read Torah’s tale of the prototypes of the great end-times deceivers. As we study parsha *Balak*, if we but pay attention to the Torah we will learn one of life’s most valuable lessons. We will learn what it is like – and why it is dangerous - *to walk on the ‘dark’ side*. What do I mean by such a provocative statement? I mean that through carefully reading and meditating upon the narrative of parsha *Balak* it is the Holy One’s desire that we will actually see, through eyes quickened by the *Ruach*, what happens when people choose to align themselves with evil men and rise up against B’nei Yisrael.

The ugly truth, you see, is that all human beings are potential Balaks and Bila’ams. All of us are potential *self-promoters*. All of us are potential *panderers*. All of us are potential *man-pleasers*. All of us are potential *half-truth dispensers*. All of us are potential *false prophets*. All of us are potential *blind guides*. All of us are potential victims of *pride*, of *greed*, of *self-will*, and of *folly*. All of us are potential *enemies of the Holy One and of His People*. So let us not think of ourselves more highly than we ought. Let us understand that there is a curiosity about, if not a hunger for, *the dark side* in every single one of us. Yes, that means me – and it also means YOU. When we look at Bila’am, lest we scoff, turn up our noses, take up an air of self-righteousness, and harden our hearts, we absolutely must grasp the essential truth that *there, but for the grace of the Holy One, go you and I*.

Okay ... so, do I now have your *undivided attention*? Good. Let us proceed with our *eyes fully open*, our *hearts fully tender*, and our *minds fully intent* on seeking the wisdom and instruction of the Holy and Compassionate One.

The Thin Line Between Fear and Hate

Our text tells us that, catching Balak's lethal myopia, *all Moav* became fearful as well. The people of Moav did not see that Israel's presence on their doorstep was their chance to redeem the mistake made by Lot so many generations ago, to rejoin Avraham's seed, and to be restored to the covenant life Lot had known when he sojourned with Avraham and Sarai. All Moav had to do was embrace Israel and its God as Lot had, in his youth, embraced Avraham and His God. All Moav had to do was prophetically model Zechariah 8:20-23:

Thus says the Holy One of Hosts:

***Many peoples, and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come;
and the inhabitants of one shall go to another, saying,
'Let us go speedily to entreat the favor of the Holy One,
and to seek the Holy One of Hosts. I will go also.'***

*Thus says the Holy One of Hosts: In those days,
ten men will take hold, out of all the languages of the nations,
they will take hold of the skirt of him who is a Yehudi [Jew], saying,
'We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'*

But Balak would have none of that. Balak apparently saw in the arrival of the people of Israel on his border only a chance to build *the kingdom* of his own he desperately craved. If he and his people *embraced Israel* and *joined the movement of the God of Heaven*, well ... if that happened *Balak's dreams of a kingdom* of his own would be no more. So when word began to spread about what had happened to Sichon and Og Balak chose to work his people into a frenzy of fear and hate. Both fear and hate, you see, spring forth from the same source – a sense that one is in danger of losing control or influence over someone or something that he or she delights obsessively in controlling or influencing. Sometimes what seems to be in danger is really important – like one's own life, a loved one's health, or one's nation's critical security interest. Other times it is something that is truly emotionally charged, like the affection or attention of one's child or friend or lover. And sometimes all it is that stirs our out-of-control mind, will, and emotions to fear or hate is just our obsession with some petty little kingdom, title, office, or ideology that, due to our walking in spiritual deception, seems far more important and valuable than it really is.

The Petty Little Kingdoms Men Hold So Dear

Never underestimate the attachment of people to the power and prestige of having a title and/or position of seeming authority. That attachment is, when all is said and

done, the force that ultimately drives the actions of people who hold titles, positions, and offices. It is just fallen human nature. Earthly kingdoms possessed always wind up possessing their kings. That is, I suspect, one of the main reasons Yeshua taught His followers not to give people titles, positions and offices. **Matthew 23:8-10**. Consider Balak. Balak was given the title of king of Moav. It was not much of a kingdom as earthly kingdoms go – but it was his. And so he chose to invoke spiritual deception to strengthen and bolster his kingdom – second-rate and unsatisfying as it was – rather than join the movement of the Holy One and link arms with the strangers who approached his land with fire in their eyes. As a result, Torah tells us that Moav was filled with something besides fear - something the NIV mistranslates as “dread”. The Hebrew word thus mistranslated is *qus*, meaning not “dread”, but “*loathing, hatred*”. What we are dealing with in Lot’s descendants, as in all those who reject the blessing of the Holy One through Avraham and his descendants, is not just fear, but full-blown *anti-Semitism*¹¹.

Understanding the Nature of This Sinister Hatred Known in Our Day as ‘Anti-Semitism’

What is *anti-Semitism*? Merriam-Webster’s on-line Dictionary defines it as “*hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious, ethnic, or racial group*”. But anti-Semitism is not like the other forms of racial animus and hostility that unfortunately exist and periodically cause trouble throughout the world. Anti-Semitism is far more sinister. Indeed, this particular brand of racial/religious hatred is the stuff of which world wars, Holocausts, ‘Anti-Christ’s’ and Armageddon’s are made.

Anti-Semitism is that which always stirs in those who choose to live by the *hand* and the *sword* (that is, out of their base, negative emotions, like Yish’mael, and *by their own strength* and untamed bloodlust like Esav) when in the presence of those who live by *the Divine Voice*. Those who live by the *hand* and the *sword* cannot even articulate why they hate those who live by *the Divine Voice*. It is not for anything those who live by the voice have done to them or to anyone - it is solely because they cannot control those who live by the Voice of the Creator of the Universe. Those who live by the Divine Voice – i.e. the Holy One’s *sh’ma* people - cannot be intimidated, subjugated, humiliated, or used by men for their own purposes. That is our crime. Well ... so be it. May we always be 100% guilty as charged.

Even if those who live by the hand and the sword are allowed, in the Holy One’s permissive will, to kill our bodies, however, our voice, like the *Divine Voice* will

¹¹ The story of how the poison of anti-Semitism first manifested itself in the world is presented in parsha *Toldot* – and particularly in Genesis 26. The Rabbi’s son’s initial discussion of the subject is in the study for *Yom Revi’i* of that week.

remain. Indeed, when persecution strikes our voice becomes even closer aligned with that of the Holy One than when our bodies were alive, and thus continues to testify against those who live by the sword. And so, the hand and the sword of man are, in reality, impotent against *the voice in us* - and they know it. That drives men who have chosen to live by the hand and the sword absolutely crazy. It enrages them. It causes them to come undone. They fume. They scream. They threaten. They gnash their teeth and boast to one another that they are going to ‘drive us into the Sea’¹². And they will fall headlong over themselves to align with any demagogue, sorcerer, charlatan, or weapons dealer who tantalizes them with the prospect of some new and delightfully perverse way to silence *the voice* in us. What is worse, their obsession, if not checked, will always lead to their own destruction and to the devastation of their families and their cultures. Let us explore why this is the case.

Which Is More Powerful: Self-Interest? Or Anti-Semitic Bloodlust?

Please take note of a curious fact. Although Balak believes Bila’am has the power to *bless* as well as *curse*, note that he does not at any point ask that Bila’am pronounce a blessing on his own people, the Moavi. Instead, he asks that Bila’am *curse Israel*. Isn’t that interesting! Balak actually cared more *that Israel be cursed* - if it were possible - *than that his own household and his own people and nation be blessed*.

Self-interest cannot hold a candle to the bloodlust for genocide. That is the nature and essence – and the fatal disease - of anti-Semitism. That is why it is so much more sinister than any other form of racial animus. With every other form of racial discrimination, self-interest overrides the hostility. With anti-Semitism, however, the animosity overrides even self-interest. That is why you do not often see suicide bombers in any other form of racial war, while in wars of Anti-Semitism suicidal attacks are actually encouraged, cultivated, trained, and celebrated.

Balak dare not attack Israel with the hand or the sword, lest his kingdom share the fate of his stronger neighbors Sichon and Og. He instead decided to call upon a “prophet for hire”. Everyone in Balak’s little kingdom had heard that a man named Bila’am, son of Beor, from a place called *Petor*, beyond the River, was reputed to have a powerful prophetic gift. And if Balak could bring Bila’am in to pronounce a curse on Israel, and call the people of Moav to back up Balak and stand with him against this threat from those newcomers with fire in their eyes ... well, could the genocide Balak craved be far behind? So Balak rejected the Holy One’s offer of Himself and His blessing for himself and for his people. He instead devised a shaky alliance with Midyan, the old archenemy of his people– who, after all, knew

¹² They doth protest too much. They can do no such thing. We are simply not theirs to drive.

Israel's leader, Moshe, very well Together they come up with a plan. Here is how Torah puts it:

V'yishlach mal'achim el-Bila'am ben-Be'or Petorah

He sent emissaries to Bila'am son of Beor, to his native land in Petor

V'atah l'cha-na arah-li et ha-am hazeh ki-atzum hu mimeni

if you would, come - curse this nation for me, and we may be able to defeat them

[Numbers 22:5]

He who chooses to live by the hand and the sword, you see, always looks for an “angle”, a “program”, a “technique” to accomplish its ultimate purpose of holocaust. And alas there are always plenty of charismatic prophets and preachers ready, willing and able - for a nice little offering” of course - to spout the party line of the title-holder which invited them. And there are always multitudes who sit spellbound and listen to the witchcraft these spiritual deceivers spew, and pat the Balak of their particular little world on the back one more time, and watch their opportunity to embrace the goodness and majesty of the Glorious King of Heaven, and His offer of Life, Health, Blessing, and Peace, pass them by like a ship in the night.

The “Rest of the Story”

Lest you think Balak's ill-advised decision means that the descendants of Lot would forever forfeit representation among the Covenant People however, consider what I like to call the “rest of the story.” Generations after the events we read about this week another Hebrew – a woman with fire in her eyes named Naomi - will sojourn in the country of Moav. In that day one of Balak's descendants, a woman we know as Ruth¹³, will do what Balak and his people did not – embrace the people through whom the Holy One's blessing is promised and designed to come. From Ruth, this daughter of Moav, we hear the following words:

"Don't entreat me to leave you, and to return from following after you,

for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge;

your people shall be my people, and your God my God;

where you die, will I die, and there will I be buried:

the Holy One do so to me, and more also, if anything but death part you and me."

[Ruth 1:16-17]

May the response of Ruth be your response as well. It is the pathway to life and health and peace.

¹³ According to the Gemara (Sotah 47a) Ruth was the daughter of King Eglon, who was a descendant of Balak, king of Moav.

A Brief Look At Haftarah Balak

Micah 5:6 – 6:8

Vehayah sherit Ya'akov b'kerev amim rabim – *And then the remnant of Ya'akov, in the midst of many peoples/nations ...* ***k'tal me'et Adonai*** - *will be as the dew of the Holy One ...*
Micah 5:6.

The traditional Haftarah for *Balak* is an excerpt from the book of *Micah of Moresh*. This prophet lived somewhere between 750 and 686 BCE - about the same time as *Yeshayahu* [Isaiah] and *Hoshea* [Hosea]. The kingdom was divided in those days, but both Israel [to the north] and Judah [to the south] were still viable - and redeemable.

The main points of Micah's message were:

[1] Both kingdoms have departed from the Holy One and His Torah, as the result of which they have become riddled with corruption;

[2] Both kingdoms have been called to teshuvah multiple times, in multiple ways, but have heretofore resisted each call;

[3] It is for this reason that foreign invaders will be allowed to come into both lands;

[4] When the foreign invaders come, they will devastate the land of promise, will kill many, and will take others into captivity;

[5] This must NOT be construed to mean the Holy One's covenant with Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov was annulled or over. Heaven forbid!

[6] After the Holy One's "purging" of the remnant, the Holy One will raise up Mashiach to regather the outcasts, to rebuild Jerusalem, and to reunite both kingdoms under Messianic Rule;

[7] This will usher in a period of never-before-experienced peace, security, and prosperity, and will ultimately result in the adoption of the Holy One's Torah lifestyle by all nations and peoples of the earth.

The Apostolic Readings for the Week of Balak

I Corinthians 1:17-31

Mashiach did not send me to immerse people in water, but to announce good tidings. He did not send me to impress people with sophistry, but to make certain that what He accomplished on the execution stake is never forgotten. I Corinthians 1:17.

The part of the apostolic record that I have selected for the week of *Balak* comes from Shaul's first letter to the followers of Yeshua who were living out the Diaspora in the Greek city of Corinth. The context is established by I Corinthians 1:10-12, as follows:

*It has been reported to me concerning you, my brothers,
by those who are from Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.*

*Now I mean this, that each one of you says,
"I follow Sha'ul," "I follow Apollos," "I follow Kefa," and, "I follow Messiah."*

The problem that led Shaul to write this letter is thus the existence of divisions within the community of faith in Corinth – particularly divisions based upon [a] the personality of certain charismatic leaders, and [b] the different worldviews – and respective areas of spiritual blindness – of recently Messiah-awakened *Hebrews on the one hand*, and of recently Torah-awakened *gentiles on the other*. Shaul knows that this contention/division is *lo tov* – i.e. not good. He does not intend to ignore it – or just sweep it under the rug. He sets out to attack it at its root and most basic level, saying: ***Is Messiah divided? Was Sha'ul crucified for you? Or were you immersed into the name of Sha'ul?*** Shaul then poses four very interesting rhetorical questions designed to induce humility in the contentious parties – whether they be of Hebraic or Gentile background and mindset. He addressed the ‘charismatic leader’ contention as follows: ***Where is the wise man¹⁴? Where is the scholar¹⁵? Where is the philosopher of this world? Hasn't God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*** Shaul then addressed the more difficult Gentile vs. Hebrew line of contention, saying:

Y'hudim [i.e. Jews] ask for signs, Yevanim [i.e. Greeks] seek after wisdom, but we preach Messiah crucified¹⁶; a stumbling block to Y'hudim, and foolishness to Yevanim, but to those who are called, both Y'hudim and Yevanim, Messiah is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.
[I Corinthians 1:20-25]

Hmmm. It will be very interesting indeed to see what Shaul has to teach us about how we should deal with these things.

*May you know the Holy One, and hear His voice,
and not be distracted by the flattery of men, by the allure of public ministry,
nor by the excitement of religious activity.
May you love His People and quietly fulfill His Will.*

The Rabbi's son

¹⁴ Since this refers back to Isaiah 29:14 we know Shaul is thinking “*chakamin*”.

¹⁵ Since this refers back to Isaiah 29:14 we know Shaul is thinking “*biynat*”.

¹⁶ The way Jonah declared without explanation “***Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.***”
Jonah 3:4.

Amidah Prayer Focus for the Week

Petition No. 12: ***Sh'ma Koleinu*** [*Hear our Cry*]

Sh'ma koleinu Adonai Eloheinu

Be attentive to our cry, O Lord our God

Chus v'rachem aleinu

Show compassion and mercy to us.

V'kabel b'rachamim b'ratzon et t'filateinu

Accept our prayers gently and lovingly.

Ki el shomea tefilot v'tachnunim atah

For You are a God who listens to prayers and supplications

V'mil'feneichah malkeinu rekom al-t'shiveinu

From your face, our King, let us not turn away empty.

Ki atah shomea t'filot amecha Yisrael b'rachamim

For You are attentive to the prayers of Your people Israel with compassion

Baruch Atah Adonai shomea tefilah

Blessed are You, Oh Holy One, Who hears prayers

v'tov b'eynecha l'varech et am'cha Yisrael

and may it be good in Your eyes to bless your people Israel

v'kol et uv'kol sha'ah b'sh'lomecha

at every time and every hour with Your Peace/Wholeness/Wellness

Baruch atah Adonai

Blessed are You, O Holy One our God,

Ha-m'varech et amo Yisrael b'shalom

Who blesses His People Israel With Peace.