

Ma Tovú

In *Parashat Balak*, when the king of Moab saw the huge host of Israelites coming out of the wilderness, he tried to hire a prophet named Balaam to curse them. When Balaam first asked permission to go curse Israel, *Adonai* forbade him. However, when King *Balak* sent a more impressive delegation, Balaam again asked *Adonai* if he could go (does *Adonai* change His mind?) In this case, *Adonai* gave Balaam the *desire of his heart* but sent *leanness to his soul* (*Palm 106:15*). As Balaam was traveling to where Israel was, his donkey (ass) suddenly stopped and refused to go forward: *“²⁷When the donkey (ass) saw the angel of Adonai (אֱתֵּי־מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה)...”* (*Nu. 22:27*). Balaam became furious and began beating his donkey (ass) with a rod. The donkey (ass) spoke and gave him a serious message: *“³¹Then Adonai opened Balaam’s eyes, and he saw the angel of Adonai (מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה) standing in the road with his drawn sword in his hand. So he fell on his face”* (*Nu. 22:31*). Who is the specific (the *et* in front of *malach*) angel of *Adonai* that spoke to Balaam? Scripture does not say, and the reader may wonder...

Accumulated tension is at the bottom of Balaam’s anger because he is in a battle between the lust in his heart and *Adonai*. In my message from 29May21, *Get Rid of All Anger* I discussed the relationship between anger and sexual immorality/pornography, lust, greed, and jealousy. The primary Greek word for anger is *orge*, which is the root of the English word *orgy*. Anger carries a very high price tag: it damages both the health of the person who is angry and those to whom it is directed. It damages vital relationships, results in financial loss, and *results* in unwise judgment and destructive behavior. Nevertheless, Balaam goes to where Israel is dwelling and utters the words: *Ma Tovú Ohalecha Yaakov, Mishke-notecha Yisrael.*

“¹When Balaam realized that it was pleasing in the eyes of Adonai to bless Israel, he did not resort to sorceries as at the other times, but turned his face toward the wilderness. ²Lifting up his eyes, Balaam saw Israel dwelling by tribes. The Ruach Elohim came over him. ³He uttered his oracle and said: “This is the oracle of Balaam son of Beor, and the oracle of a strong man whose eye has been opened, ⁴the oracle of one hearing God’s speech, one seeing Shaddai’s vision, one fallen down, yet with open eyes: ⁵How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, and your dwellings (dwelling places), O Israel!” (*Nu. 24:1-5*).

Please notice these details in the text. Firstly, it is *pleasing in the eyes of Adonai to bless Israel*. Secondly, *the Ruach Elohim came over him* and **then** he spoke. Thirdly, Balaam said this is *the oracle of one hearing God’s speech, one seeing Shaddai’s vision (not his own vision)*. The first line of the actual blessing is: *“⁵How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, and your dwellings, O Israel!”* Thus, our dwelling places can be lovely!

Was Israel aware that Balaam was making this blessing (or for that matter, it could have been a cursing at the direction of *Balak*, an enemy king) over them? Why did *Adonai* intervene and did not allow Balaam to curse Israel, but instead bless them? On the surface this seems contradictory to the Scripture: *“Like a fluttering sparrow or a flying swallow, so an undeserved curse (causeless curse, KJV) does not land”* (*Prov. 26:2*). It must have been **VERY IMPORTANT** for Israel to receive this blessing (life) instead of a cursing (death)!

Life is often like the old TV show *Let’s Make a Deal*. Doors of opportunity present themselves to us and we must choose between them. Once we choose, we are then presented with the consequences of those choices: either Life (the Blessing) or Death (the Curse). In the TV show, people anxiously waited to see the results – and there were always results. Balaam also had to choose. Would he curse or bless *Yisrael*? How powerful could this Blessing or a Curse be? Perhaps a better title for this episode could be: *While Yisrael lived life unaware {not even conscious of their surroundings, the evil one planned their cursing...}*. In Numbers 25:1, Scripture relates that while *Yisrael* was at *Shittim*, they played the harlot with Moabite women and idols. As this was going on, *Adonai* is on the scene (even behind the scenes, if you please) battling the enemy to make it possible for Israel to *inherit the blessing* by *stopping the curse*. In addition, there were human foes who also sought their demise. While Israel was busy living their daily life, *Adonai* was astounding the world with His Supernatural Power. *Adonai* has the power to turn curses into blessings!

The blessing concludes with: *“⁹He crouches like a lion or a lioness – who would rouse him? He who blesses you will be blessed, and he who curses you will be cursed” (Nu. 22:9).* The same as *Gen. 12:3*. Awesome!

Scripture tells us that between Numbers 24 and Numbers 25 Balaam figured out a way to collect his reward (his lust of the eyes and flesh) from *Balak*. Balaam advised the Moabites how to entice the people of Israel into grave sin with prostitutes and idolatry. Since he could not curse Israel directly, he came up with a plan for Israel to bring the curse upon themselves. *Balak* followed Balaam’s advice, and Israel fell into sin, worshiping *Baal of Peor* and committing fornication with Midianite women. The consequence was an ensuing plague, where 24,000 people died. This is way more people than the potential casualties of a war with Moab! Moses refers to the evil work of Balaam: *“...because they hired against you Balaam son of Beor from Petor of Aram-naharaim to curse you. ⁶But Adonai your God refused to listen to Balaam, and Adonai your God turned the curse into a blessing for you because He loves you” (Deuteronomy 23:5b-6).* In the Psalms we read: *“²⁸Then they yoked themselves to Baal of Peor, and ate the sacrifices of dead things. ²⁹So they provoked Him with their deeds, and a plague broke out among them. ³⁰But Phinehas stood up and intervened, so the plague was stopped. ³¹It was credited to him as righteousness, from generation to generation forever” (Psalm 106:28-31)*

Similarly, *Yeshua*, at the direction of the Father, has turned our deserved cursing in to blessing – *life and life more abundantly*. The enemy cannot bring about *an underserved curse* upon us, but a *deserved consequence* is another story. The enemy of *Adonai* is continually observing our life (our dwelling places) and scheming to curse us. *These curses are not imagined, they are real!* We are often not even aware that such an evil conniving conspiracy is taking place right under our noses, so to speak. Wake up! We have been blessed by *Adonai* and His Son *Yeshua* and we **CAN** choose the blessing and not the cursing. You have nothing to fear when it comes to curses because *Adonai’s* protective hand is over you. No weapon, curse, or ill will can touch you in the palm of His protective hand (as long as you choose to stay there). Fear not, for He is always with you. Trust Him completely and stay in His dwelling places and ***DO NOT GIVE THE ENEMY ANY PERMISSION/REASON TO CURSE YOU!***

“¹For the music director, upon the Gittite lyre, a psalm of the sons of Korah. ²How lovely are Your tabernacles, Adonai-Tzva’ot! ³My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of Adonai. My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. ⁴Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young –near Your altars, Adonai-Tzva’ot— my King and my God! ⁵Blessed are they who dwell in Your House –they are ever praising You. Selah” (Ps. 84:1-5).

“♪ How lovely are thy dwelling places. My soul longs for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. You are my King and my God ♪”

Shabbat Shalom!