

Balak

Numbers 22:2 - 25:9

This translation was taken from the JPS Tanakh

² Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.

³ Moab was alarmed because that people was so numerous. Moab dreaded the Israelites, ⁴ and Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this horde will lick clean all that is about us as an ox licks up the grass of the field."

Balak son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, ⁵ sent messengers to Balaam son of Beor in Pethor, which is by the Euphrates, in the land of his kinsfolk, to invite him, saying, "There is a people that came out of Egypt; it hides the earth from view, and it is settled next to me. ⁶ Come then, put a curse upon this people for me, since they are too numerous for me; perhaps I can thus defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that he whom you bless is blessed indeed, and he whom you curse is cursed."

⁷ The elders of Moab and the elders of Midian, versed in divination, set out. They came to Balaam and gave him Balak's message. ⁸ He said to them, "Spend the night here, and I shall reply to you as the Lord may instruct me." So the Moabite dignitaries stayed with Balaam.

⁹ God came to Balaam and said, "What do these people want of you?" ¹⁰ Balaam said to God, "Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, sent me this message: ¹¹ Here is a people that came out from Egypt and hides the earth from view. Come now and curse them for me; perhaps I can engage them in battle and drive them off." ¹² But God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them. You must not curse that people, for they are blessed."

¹³ Balaam arose in the morning and said to Balak's dignitaries, "Go back to your own country, for the Lord will not let me go with you." ¹⁴ The Moabite dignitaries left, and they came to Balak and said, "Balaam refused to come with us."

¹⁵ Then Balak sent other dignitaries, more numerous and distinguished than the first. ¹⁶ They came to Balaam and said to him, "Thus says Balak son of Zippor: Please do not refuse to come to me. ¹⁷ I will reward you richly and I will do anything you ask of me. Only come and damn this people for me." ¹⁸ Balaam replied to Balak's officials, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, big or little, contrary to the command of the Lord my God. ¹⁹ So you, too, stay here overnight, and let me find out what else the Lord may say to me." ²⁰ That night God came to Balaam and said to him, "If these men have come to invite you, you may go with them. But whatever I command you, that you shall do."

²¹ When he arose in the morning, Balaam saddled his ass and departed with the Moabite dignitaries.

²² But God was incensed at his going; so an angel of the Lord placed himself in his way as an adversary.

He was riding on his she-ass, with his two servants alongside, ²³ when the ass caught sight of the angel of the Lord standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. The ass swerved from the road and went into the fields; and Balaam beat the ass to turn her back onto the road. ²⁴ The angel of the Lord then stationed himself in a lane between the vineyards, with a fence on either side. ²⁵ The ass, seeing the angel of the Lord, pressed herself against the wall and squeezed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he beat her again. ²⁶ Once more the angel of the Lord moved forward and stationed himself on a spot so narrow that there was no room to swerve right or left. ²⁷ When the ass now saw the angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam; and Balaam was furious and beat the ass with his stick.

²⁸ Then the Lord opened the ass's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you that you have beaten me these three times?" ²⁹ Balaam said to the ass, "You have made a mockery of me! If I had a sword with me, I'd kill you." ³⁰ The ass said to Balaam, "Look, I am the ass that you have been riding all along until this day! Have I been in the habit of doing thus to you?" And he answered, "No."

³¹ Then the Lord uncovered Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, his drawn sword in his hand; thereupon he bowed right down to the ground. ³² The angel of the Lord said to him, "Why have you beaten your ass these three times? It is I who came out as an adversary, for the errand is obnoxious to me. ³³ And when the ass saw me, she shied away because of me those three times. If she had not shied away from me, you are the one I should have killed, while sparing her." ³⁴ Balaam said to the angel of the Lord, "I erred because I did not know that you were standing in my way. If you still disapprove, I will turn back." ³⁵ But the angel of the Lord said to Balaam, "Go with the men. But you must say nothing except what I tell you." So Balaam went on with Balak's dignitaries.

³⁶ When Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went out to meet him at Ir-moab, which is on the Arnon border, at its farthest point. ³⁷ Balak said to Balaam, "When I first sent to invite you, why didn't you come to me? Am I really unable to reward you?" ³⁸ But Balaam said to Balak, "And now that I have come to you, have I the power to speak freely? I can utter only the word that God puts into my mouth."

³⁹ Balaam went with Balak and they came to Kiriath-huzoth. ⁴⁰ Balak sacrificed oxen and sheep, and had them served to Balaam and the dignitaries with him. ⁴¹ In the morning Balak took Balaam up to Bamoth-baal. From there he could see a portion of the people.

Chapter 23

¹ Balaam said to Balak, "Build me seven altars here and have seven bulls and seven rams ready here for me." ² Balak did as Balaam directed; and Balak and Balaam offered up a bull and a ram on each altar. ³ Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stay here beside your offerings while I am gone. Perhaps

the Lord will grant me a manifestation, and whatever He reveals to me I will tell you." And he went off alone.

⁴ God manifested Himself to Balaam, who said to Him, "I have set up the seven altars and offered up a bull and a ram on each altar." ⁵ And the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth and said, "Return to Balak and speak thus."

⁶ So he returned to him and found him standing beside his offerings, and all the Moabite dignitaries with him. ⁷ He took up his theme, and said:

From Aram has Balak brought me,
Moab's king from the hills of the East:
Come, curse me Jacob,
Come, tell Israel's doom!

⁸ How can I damn whom God has not damned,
How doom when the Lord has not doomed?

⁹ As I see them from the mountain tops,
Gaze on them from the heights,
There is a people that dwells apart,
Not reckoned among the nations,

¹⁰ Who can count the dust of Jacob,
Number the dust-cloud of Israel?
May I die the death of the upright,
May my fate be like theirs!

¹¹ Then Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? Here I brought you to damn my enemies, and instead you have blessed them!" ¹² He replied, "I can only repeat faithfully what the Lord puts in my mouth." ¹³ Then Balak said to him, "Come with me to another place from which you can see them--you will see only a portion of them; you will not see all of them--and damn them for me from there." ¹⁴ With that, he took him to Sedehzophim, on the summit of Pisgah. He built seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each altar. ¹⁵ And [Balaam] said to Balak, "Stay here beside your offerings, while I seek a manifestation yonder."

¹⁶ The Lord manifested Himself to Balaam and put a word in his mouth, saying, "Return to Balak and speak thus." ¹⁷ He went to him and found him standing beside his offerings, and the Moabite dignitaries with him. Balak asked him, "What did the Lord say?" ¹⁸ And he took up his theme, and said:

Up, Balak, attend,
Give ear unto me, son of Zippor!

¹⁹ God is not man to be capricious,
Or mortal to change His mind.

Would He speak and not act,
Promise and not fulfill?

²⁰ My message was to bless:

When He blesses, I cannot reverse it.

²¹ No harm is in sight for Jacob,
No woe in view for Israel.

The Lord their God is with them,
And their King's acclaim in their midst.

²² God who freed them from Egypt
Is for them like the horns of the wild ox.

²³ Lo, there is no augury in Jacob,
No divining in Israel:

Jacob is told at once,
Yea Israel, what God has planned.

²⁴ Lo, a people that rises like a lion,
Leaps up like the king of beasts,
Rests not till it has feasted on prey
And drunk the blood of the slain.

²⁵ Thereupon Balak said to Balaam, "Don't curse them and don't bless them!" ²⁶ In reply, Balaam said to Balak, "But I told you: Whatever the Lord says, that I must do." ²⁷ Then Balak said to Balaam, "Come now, I will take you to another place. Perhaps God will deem it right that you damn them for me there." ²⁸ Balak took Balaam to the peak of Peor, which overlooks the wasteland. ²⁹ Balaam said to Balak, "Build me here seven altars, and have seven bulls and seven rams ready for me here." ³⁰ Balak did as Balaam said: he offered up a bull and a ram on each altar.

Chapter 24

¹ Now Balaam, seeing that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, did not, as on previous occasions, go in search of omens, but turned his face toward the wilderness. ² As Balaam looked up and saw Israel encamped tribe by tribe, the spirit of God came upon him. ³ Taking up his theme, he said:

Word of Balaam son of Beor,

Word of the man whose eye is true,

⁴ Word of him who hears God's speech,
Who beholds visions from the Almighty,
Prostrate, but with eyes unveiled:

⁵ How fair are your tents, O Jacob,
Your dwellings, O Israel!

⁶ Like palm-groves that stretch out,
Like gardens beside a river,
Like aloes planted by the Lord,
Like cedars beside the water;

⁷ Their boughs drip with moisture,
Their roots have abundant water.
Their king shall rise above Agag,
Their kingdom shall be exalted.

⁸ God who freed them from Egypt
Is for them like the horns of the wild ox.

They shall devour enemy nations,
Crush their bones,
And smash their arrows.

⁹ They crouch, they lie down like a lion,
Like the king of beasts; who dare rouse them?
Blessed are they who bless you,
Accursed they who curse you!

¹⁰ Enraged at Balaam, Balak struck his hands together. "I called you," Balak said to Balaam, "to damn my enemies, and instead you have blessed them these three times! ¹¹ Back with you at once to your own place! I was going to reward you richly, but the Lord has denied you the reward." ¹² Balaam replied to Balak, "But I even told the messengers you sent to me, ¹³ 'Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not of my own accord do anything good or bad contrary to the Lord's command. What the Lord says, that I must say.' ¹⁴ And now, as I go back to my people, let me inform you of what this people will do to your people in days to come." ¹⁵ He took up his theme, and said:

Word of Balaam son of Beor,
Word of the man whose eye is true,
¹⁶ Word of him who hears God's speech,
Who obtains knowledge from the Most High,
And beholds visions from the Almighty,
Prostrate, but with eyes unveiled:

¹⁷ What I see for them is not yet,
What I behold will not be soon:
A star rises from Jacob,
A scepter comes forth from Israel;
It smashes the brow of Moab,
The foundation of all children of Seth.

¹⁸ Edom becomes a possession,
Yea, Seir a possession of its enemies;
But Israel is triumphant.

¹⁹ A victor issues from Jacob
To wipe out what is left of Ir.

²⁰ He saw Amalek and, taking up his theme, he said:

A leading nation is Amalek;
But its fate is to perish forever.

²¹ He saw the Kenites and, taking up his theme, he said:

Though your abode be secure,
And your nest be set among cliffs,

²² Yet shall Kain be consumed,
When Asshur takes you captive.

²³ He took up his theme and said:

Alas, who can survive except God has willed it!

²⁴ Ships come from the quarter of Kittim;
They subject Asshur, subject Eber.
They, too, shall perish forever.

²⁵ Then Balaam set out on his journey back home; and Balak also went his way.

Chapter 25

¹ While Israel was staying at Shittim, the people profaned themselves by whoring with the Moabite women, ² who invited the people to the sacrifices for their god. The people partook of them and worshiped that god. ³ Thus Israel attached itself to Baal-peor, and the Lord was incensed with Israel. ⁴ The Lord said to Moses, "Take all the ringleaders and have them publicly impaled before the Lord, so that the Lord's wrath may turn away from Israel." ⁵ So Moses said to Israel's officials, "Each of you slay those of his men who attached themselves to Baal-peor."

⁶ Just then one of the Israelites came and brought a Midianite woman over to his companions, in the sight of Moses and of the whole Israelite community who were weeping at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. ⁷ When Phinehas, son of Eleazar son of Aaron the priest, saw this, he left the assembly and, taking a spear in his hand, ⁸ he followed the Israelite into the chamber and stabbed both of them, the Israelite and the woman, through the belly. Then the plague against the Israelites was checked. ⁹ Those who died of the plague numbered twenty-four thousand.