

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Balak

14 Tammuz, 5777 – July 8, 2017

Compiled from the works of
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An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi

Parshas Balak

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Rashi in His Own Words

במדבר כ"ב, ב': וַיֵּרָא בָלָק בֶּן־צִפּוֹר אֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאֻמֵּי:

רש"י ד"ה וירא בלק בן צפור את כל אשר עשה ישראל לאמורי: אמר אלו שני מלכים שהיינו בטוחים עליהם לא עמדו בפניהם, אנו על אחת כמה וכמה. לפיכך ויגר מואב:

Bamidbar 22:2: Balak the son of Tzippor saw all that the Jews had done to the Emorites.

Rashi Heading: Balak the son of Tzippor saw all that the Jews had done to the Emorites: He said, "These two kings whom we relied on could not resist them; we certainly cannot." Consequently, "Moav became terrified."

Synopsis

This week we read the Torah portion of Balak. The Parshah begins by telling us that Balak saw all that the Jews had done to the Emorites. Rashi cites the entire verse and explains what it was that he saw. He saw that the Jews defeated the Emorites. He said to himself that if the Jews could defeat Sichon and Og who are so powerful, they can certainly defeat us. Rashi goes on to explain that therefore the second verse of the Parshah begins by saying that "Moav became terrified."

What Rashi is explaining is that the first verse of the Parshah leads to the second verse. Moav was afraid because of what Balak saw. Without Rashi's explanation we would not know that there is a connection between the two verses. "Balak saw" and "Moav was terrified" are two completely different things. The second verse of the Parshah must follow the first. Hence Rashi's comments appear to be superfluous.

The second verse of our Torah portion tells us clearly why Moav was afraid. It tells us that they were terrified because they saw how large and mighty the Jews were! The nation of Moav (not Balak) feared the size and the might of the Jewish army. However they could not do anything about their fear because their king Balak was not afraid. Bear in mind that the Torah says that Moav was terrified. It does not mention Balak. They could not put a plan into action until Balak was also afraid. Once "Balak saw" they could do something about it.

Without Rashi we might accept this explanation, despite its difficulty. The difficulty is that according to what we are saying it should have first said that "Moav became terrified." Only then should it have said that "Balak saw." Nevertheless we might have understood this as being Peshat. Therefore

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Rashi must come and teach us that the two verses are very much in order. Additionally they are cause and effect. Balak seeing was the reason that Moav feared.

Rashi's Explanation

This week's Torah portion tells of how Balak, the king of Moav, was afraid of the Jews. Why was he afraid? The verse says that¹ "Balak the son of Tzippor saw all that the Jews had done to the Emorites." Rashi cites the entire verse and explains exactly what it was that he saw. "He (Balak) said, 'These two kings whom we relied on could not resist them; we certainly cannot.' Consequently², 'Moav became terrified.'"

Defeating the Emorites entailed killing the two mighty giants, Sichon and Og. When Balak saw that the Jews defeated them he realized that he would not stand a chance against the Jews. He immediately became terrified. Rashi seems to be telling us that "Moav becoming terrified" was not an independent, new statement. Rather it is a continuation of the first verse.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

What we are saying is that there are two different ways of understanding the two first verses of our Parshah. Without Rashi we would think that first the Torah tells us that Balak saw all that the Jews had done to the Emorites. Then, in a totally separate vein the Torah tells us that Moav was afraid. How could we possibly understand the verses in that manner? Why would the Torah tell us that Balak saw what the Jews had done to the Emorites? The first verse seems to be out of place. Rashi, on the other hand, tells us that the two verse are directly related to each other. After Balak saw that the Jews killed Sichon and Og he became afraid. Based on this we need to understand why Rashi needs to explain the meaning of this verse. The two verses must obviously be connected to each other. Otherwise there is no reason for the Torah to teach us the first verse. What does Rashi's explanation add to our understanding of the Torah? We would know it on our own.

Furthermore, there are occasions when Rashi explains an entire verse. In those cases he usually cites the first few words from the verse. He follows that by writing "et cetera," in order to hint that he is including the rest of the verse. Here he cites the entire verse before giving his explanation. This is not in keeping with Rashi's general pattern. Why does he cite the entire verse here?

Finally, Rashi says that "These two kings *whom we relied on* could not resist them; we certainly cannot." The entire point is that Sichon and Og were so strong, and nevertheless the Jews defeated them.

1. Bamidbar 22:2.

2. Bamidbar 22:3.

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This being the case, the Jews could certainly defeat us. What difference does it make that Moav *relied* on Sichon and Og to defend them? Why does Rashi need to mention this?

The Explanation

The beginning student starts learning our Parshah from the first two verses. He learns that¹ “Balak the son of Tzippor saw all that Israel had done to the Emorites.” He then learns that² “Moav became terrified of the people because they were numerous, and Moav became disgusted because of the children of Israel.” His assumption, without Rashi’s explanation, is that the two verse are not related to each other. He see clearly that the second verse tells us the reason for Moav’s terror; “*because* they were numerous.” He doesn’t see any need to refer to the previous verse for the cause of their fear. The people of Moav saw that the Jews were a large and mighty nation. Even before the war with Moav we found that the Jews³ “surrounded the southern and eastern borders of the land of Moav.” They had sufficient reason to be afraid of the Jews.

One might wish to say that the people of Moav were not terrified until after the Jews defeated the Emorites. However that is still not enough reason to connect the two verses. The first verse says that “Balak (the king of Moav) saw;” while the second says that “Moav became terrified.” One verse is discussing the king, while the second is talking about his nation.

That is why *without* Rashi’s comments we would explain this in the following manner. Even prior to the Jew’s victory against the Emorites the nation of Moav was afraid. Their fear began from the time that the Jews surrounded them. However they couldn’t take any steps to deal with it; their king was not afraid. Once the Jews defeated the Emorites Balak became afraid. Then they could openly display their fear and take the necessary measures. First they sought counsel from the elders of Midian⁴. Balak then sent messengers to Bilaam in order to help them deal with the Jews⁵.

This explanation is less than perfect. In order for everything to fit perfectly the Torah should have first said that “Moav became terrified.” Only then would it fit to say that “Balak saw.” Nevertheless without Rashi we would have learned that the verses are out of order. Therefore Rashi must teach us that the first two verses are cause and effect; first Balak saw, and as a result of that Moav was afraid.

Why does the Torah says that “Balak saw” instead of “Moav saw.” After all, everyone saw that the Jews had defeated the Emorites. It was not Balak alone who saw this. The explanation is that Sichon and Og had a secret agreement with all of the Canaanite kings. Sichon and Og were recognized as the mightiest of the mighty. They therefore arranged to protect all of the Canaanite kings. Obviously they

3. See Rashi’s comments to Bamidbar 21:13.

4. Bamidbar 22:4.

5. Bamidbar 22:5.

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did so for a price. Each king paid tribute to Sichon and Og. The populace of the nations had no idea that any such arrangement existed. When Balak saw that the Jews had beaten Sichon and Og he was terrified. They were his source of protection. Here he saw that even *they* could not stand up to the Jews. How would he be able to protect his country against them?

While it was true that both Balak and his nation saw the Jews defeat the Emorites, nonetheless each saw something completely different. The people of Moav were afraid of the Jews before; they continued to be afraid of them. For them it was just another battle that the Jews won. Balak saw something totally different. He saw the defeat of those whom he had paid to protect him. He saw the destruction of those whom he had expected to be his salvation. This also explains why Rashi writes “these two kings upon whom we had relied.” The point was not that they were stronger than him. It was that Balak had relied upon him for protection.

Once Balak saw that his protection was gone he no longer kept it a secret from his people. He told them that they had been relying on the protection of Sichon and Og until that point. Now they had no one to protect them from the Jews. Therefore after “Balak saw” and then “Moav was terrified.”

The above also explains why Rashi cites the entire verse before telling us his explanation. He quotes that¹ “Balak the son of Tzippor saw all that the Jews had done to the Emorites.” The verse tells us that Balak saw what the Jews had done to the Emorites. Sichon was the king of the Emorites. We might think that it refers to just him alone. However Rashi’s comments tell us that the verse is referring to Og as well. In Rashi’s words, “these *two* kings whom we relied on could not resist them; we certainly cannot.” We also do find that on a number of occasions Og is also called the king of the Emorites⁶.

A Deeper Explanation of Rashi

There remains one thing which is not clear. Wee said that after Balak saw the destruction of Sichon and Og, he informed his nation of the agreement they had. Why did he find it necessary to do so? Sichon and Og were now dead and they could no longer protect him. Of what benefit was it to tell his population that he was paying them tribute in exchange for protection? All that it accomplished was to bring upon his nation even more fear than they had before!

The explanation is that once he saw the destruction of Sichon and Og he became totally confused. Out of fear he lost control of his faculties. He could no longer control himself. At that point he told his nation everything. This is in keeping with our Sages teaching that⁷ “the wicked are under the control of their hearts.”

6. See Devorim 3:8 and Yehoshua 2:10.

7. See Bereishis Rabbah Chapter 34, Section 10, and Chapter 67, Section 8. The same teaching of our Sages is also found in a number of other places.

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This is in stark contrast to Moshe Rabbeinu. At one point Moshe was afraid of Og, and for good reason. Og had once done a favor (albeit for selfish motives) for our forefather Avrohom. Moshe was concerned lest that merit save him⁸. Not only did Moshe not express his fear in any manner whatsoever. As the Talmud says⁹ the fear remained solely in his heart. He had complete control of himself. Balak, however, had no self-control whatsoever. This despite the fact that it threw his nation into a panic.

May we learn from Moshe, the leader of the generation to control ourselves; at least in thought, speech and deed.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Balak 5725)

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8. See Rashi's comments to Bamidbar 21:34.

9. See Talmud Niddah Page 61, at the end of Side b.

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