

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Balak

17 Tammuz, 5776 – July 23, 2016

Compiled from the works of
Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson
The Lubavitcher Rebbe

by
Rabbi Shmuel Mendelsohn

A Project of
Vaad L'Hafotzas Sichos
Copyright 2016©

An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Balak

Likkutei Sichos Volume 38, Pages 85 – 89

Rashi in His Own Words

במדבר כ"ב, ה': וַיִּשְׁלַח (בלק) מַלְאָכִים אֶל בְּלָעַם גֹּר' הַנֵּה עִם יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם הַנֵּה כִּסֵּה אֶת עֵינֵי הָאָרֶץ וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב מִמֶּלִי:

במדבר כ"ב, ו': וְעַתָּה לָכֵה נָא אֶרְהָ לִּי אֶת הָעַם הַזֶּה כִּי עֲצוּם הוּא מִמֶּנִּי אוֹלֵי אוֹכֵל נֶכֶה בּוֹ וְאֶגְרָשְׁנוּ מִן הָאָרֶץ כִּי יִדְעֵתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר תִּכְרְדֶּה מִכְרְדֶּה וְאֲשֶׁר תֵּאָר יוֹאָר:

במדבר כ"ב, י': וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלָעַם אֶל הָאֱלֹקִים בְּלַק גֹּר' שְׁלַח אֵלַי:

במדבר כ"ב, י"א: הַנֵּה הָעַם הַיֵּצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיִּכַּס אֶת עֵינֵי הָאָרֶץ עַתָּה לָכֵה קְבֵה לִּי אֹתוֹ אוֹלֵי אוֹכֵל לְהִלָּחֵם בּוֹ וְגִרְשָׁתִיו:

במדבר כ"ב, י"א: רש"י ד"ה קבה לי: זו קשה מארה לי, שהוא נוקב ומפרש: וגרשתיו: מן העולם. ובלק לא אמר אלא ואגרשנו מן הארץ, איני מבקש אלא להסיעם מעלי, ובלעם היה שונאם יותר מבלק:

Bamidbar 22:5: He (Balak) sent messengers to Bilaam ... saying, "A people has come out of Egypt, and behold, they have covered the "eye" of the land, and they are stationed opposite me;

Bamidbar 22:6: And now, please come and curse (אָרָה) this people for me, for they are too powerful for me. Perhaps I will be able to smite them and drive them out of the land, for I know that whomever you bless is blessed and whomever you curse is cursed."

Bamidbar 22:10: Bilaam said to G-d, "Balak ... has sent to me, (saying);

Bamidbar 22:11: "Behold the people coming out of Egypt, a nation, has covered the 'eye' of the earth. Now come and curse (קָבֵה) them for me, perhaps I will be able to fight against them and drive them out."

Bamidbar 22:11: Rashi Heading - curse for me: Heb. קָבֵה לִי. (This expression used by Bilaam) is stronger than אָרָה (used by Balak in verse 6), for it specifies and details (the curse). **and drive it out:** of the world. Balak said only, "and I will drive him out of the land" (verse 6). (His intention was), I want only to get them away from me, but Bilaam hated them more than Balak did.

A Brief Synopsis

This week's Torah portion, Balak, tells us how the king of Moav decided to use a gentile prophet, Bilaam, in order to curse the Jewish people. Knowing that his entire power to curse came from Hashem, Bilaam first asked Hashem for permission before taking on this mission. However, Rashi points out two differences between Balak's words to Bilaam, describing his request, and Bilaam's words to Hashem. When Balak asked Bilaam to curse the Jews, he used the Hebrew word אָרָה, meaning curse. While Bilaam was presenting his request to Hashem, he used the word קָבֵה. Rashi points out that the word קָבֵה is a stronger sort of curse, because it "specifies and details the curse." Additionally, Bilaam says that he was being asked to drive out the Jews, while Balak actually asked Bilaam to "drive them out of the land."

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Rashi explains that Bilaam hated the Jews more than Balak, and he actually wanted to drive the Jewish people out of the world, not merely the land.

Other commentators point out that there are a number of other differences between Balak's speech to Bilaam, and Bilaam's to Hashem. However Rashi seemingly overlooks these. Additionally, how does Rashi know that Bilaam's hatred for the Jews was greater? Despite his hatred, one would think that Bilaam would have toned down his words and used less severe language when speaking with G-d. As a prophet, he knew how much G-d loves the Jewish people, and was trying to "persuade" Him to permit a curse to be delivered to His people.

Additionally, why was Balak afraid of the Jews? Why did he want to hire Bilaam to curse them? The Jews were commanded not to "distress Moav, and not to provoke them to war." Had Balak done nothing, he would not have been attacked by the Jews. Even if he was not aware of the prohibition which would have prevented the Jews from attacking, Bilaam, as a prophet, was certainly aware! Why did he not simply tell Balak not to be concerned about the Jews? He was very happy to have an excuse to curse the Jews, because his hatred of the Jews was greater than Balak's. It was greater not just in quantity, but in quality as well. He had a totally irrational hatred of Jews. Balak, upon seeing how powerful the Jews were, simply did not wish to be conquered. For him it was merely a question of self-preservation. This explains why Bilaam used a stronger term of cursing, and why he sought to remove the Jews from the earth, rather than from the land.

Rashi's Explanation

This week's Torah portion, Balak, tells us how the Balak, the king of Moav, sought to defeat the Jews by means of a curse. He sent for Bilaam, a gentile prophet, and commissioned him to take on the task. Balak sent to Bilaam saying¹, "He (referring to Balak) sent messengers to Bilaam ... saying, "A people has come out of Egypt, and behold, they have covered the "eye" of the land, and they are stationed opposite me. So now, please come and curse this people for me, for they are too powerful for me. Perhaps I will be able to wage war against them and drive them out of the land, for I know that whoever you bless is blessed and whomever you curse is cursed."

Bilaam was, to say the least, very excited about the proposition. However, in his position as a prophet, he knew that he could only do that which was permitted by Hashem. He was also aware of the abounding love which Hashem has for His nation. Therefore, before accepting this commission he spoke to the Almighty. He said to him², "Balak ... has sent to me, (saying), 'Behold the people coming out of Egypt, a nation, has covered the 'eye' of the earth. Come and curse them for me, perhaps I will be able to fight against them and drive them out.' "

For the most part, Balak's words to Bilaam were the same as Bilaam's words to Hashem. However, Rashi points

1. Bamidbar 22:6.

2. Bamidbar 22:11.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

out that there are several differences between the two³. Rashi cites the words "curse them," meaning the Jewish nation. He points out that even though Balak did ask Bilaam to curse the Jews, he used a different Hebrew word than Bilaam used when asking Hashem. Bilaam said "קָבַהּ לִי." This expression is stronger than "אָרַהּ לִי," the expression used by Balak, "for it specifies and details (the curse)." The other difference which Rashi points out is the expression "and drive it (the nation) out." Rashi comments that Bilaam was implying to Hashem that Balak wanted him to drive the Jews out "of the world." Balak said only, 'and I will drive him out of the land.' (His intention was), I want only to get them away from me. However, Bilaam hated them more than Balak did."

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

The commentary of the holy Ohr Hachaim⁴ asks regarding a number of additional differences between Balak's words and those of Bilaam. We also find that:

1. Balak said "A people has come out of Egypt," and Bilaam said "the people coming out of Egypt."
2. Balak said "behold they have covered," and Bilaam said "and they covered."
3. Balak said "and now," and Bilaam said "now."
4. Balak said "smite them," and Bilaam said "battle against them."

Why does Rashi ignore these other differences?

There is (at least) one other difference between the two. Namely, Balak said "they are stationed opposite me," which Bilaam did not mention. This difference may be the most significant of all. Rashi explains it to mean that "they are close by, ready to knock me down." This explains Balak's urgency.

The Ohr Hachaim builds the answer to all of his questions on one foundation. Namely, in as much as Bilaam knew how much G-d loves the Jews, he wanted to understate Balak's hatred toward the Jewish people. In order to gain Hashem's permission to undertake this mission, he wanted to underplay the damage that Balak wanted done to the Jews. Therefore, the Ohr Hachaim explains that the word for curse, "אָרַהּ" which Balak used is stronger than the word "קָבַהּ" which was used by Bilaam while speaking to Hashem. On this basis the Ohr Hachaim explains all of the differences. However, according to Rashi who says that "Bilaam hated the Jews more than Balak did, accordingly "קָבַהּ" is a stronger expression than "אָרַהּ," and rather than expressing a desire to rid himself of the Jews, Bilaam stated that he wanted to remove the Jews from the world. According to Rashi, the enmity which Bilaam bore for the Jews was the basis of all of the above mentioned differences. Why does Rashi feel compelled to explain the differences in this manner? From where does he understand that Bilaam's hatred was greater than Balak's? Granted, the Midrash does make that point. However, as we have explained many times, Rashi explains the Torah according to Peshat.

3. *ibid.*

4. Rabbi Chaim ben Moshe ibn Attar, best known as the Ohr Hachaim for his classic commentary on the Torah, He was a Talmudist and a Kabbalist; and was perhaps the greatest rabbi of his time. He was born in Morocco 1696, and deceased in Jerusalem in 1743.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Despite Bilaam's hatred toward the Jews, why would he think that Hashem would be more likely to grant him permission by using harsher expressions of destruction than even Balak did? Rather than saying to remove them from the land, he said to totally remove them from the earth, using a stronger form of curse, etc. His intention was to "persuade" Hashem to give him permission to accept Balak's commission. He, who was granted prophecy, certainly knew of Hashem's unbounding love of the Jews!

The Explanation

This will all be understood by first understanding the answer to a different question. It is this question that brought Rashi to explain the verses as he did. Rashi did not draw any conclusions from the word קבה used for cursing, or from the expressions "drive the Jewish people out," which Rashi explains as driving them out from the world. These expressions can both be explained in two different ways, as we see from the difference in how the Ohr Hachaim explains them, as opposed to how Rashi explains them. The actual question bothering Rashi is why Balak was afraid of the Jews. Hashem had told the Jewish people⁵ "... do not distress the nation of Moav, and do not provoke them to war, for I will not give you any of their land as an inheritance ..." Actually, Balak himself saw that the Jews would not even enter his land because he did not grant them permission to do so. Rashi already told us this⁶. The Jewish nation "circled the southern and eastern borders of the land of Moav, until they came to the other side of the Arnon River in the middle of the Emorite territory, to the north of the land of Moav." In other words, the Jews would not even enter the land of Moav in order to get to the Emorites, let alone wage war against them. Why was Balak afraid?

It is possible to say that Balak and the Moavite nation were not aware of the commandment not to distress Moav. They may have assumed that the only reason that the Jews did not attack them was because they had the giants Sichon and Og to protect them, as Rashi said⁷ that the nations "paid them tribute in order to protect them from marauding armies." It is possible that Balak thought that the only reason the Jews were not attacking Moav was in order not to incite Sichon and Og against them. However, once Balak saw that the Jews defeated Sichon and Og, he was afraid. Therefore he approached Bilaam.

The question is, however, that Bilaam, as a prophet, must have been aware of the prohibition against provoking Moav to war. This being the case, why did he not simply tell Balak that he had nothing to worry about? This is why Rashi says that Bilaam's hatred of the Jews was greater than Balak's. It was not merely greater quantitatively, but qualitatively as well. Balak hated the Jews because he was afraid that they would wage war against him and conquer his land. Whereas Bilaam's hatred stemmed from a deeper place. It had to do with his essence, and had no rational basis. Based on this we can understand why Bilaam did not inform Balak that Moav had no need to fear the Jewish nation; he was glad to have any excuse to do harm to the Jews.

5. Devorim 2:9. This was previously cited in *Rashi's commentary* to Bamidbar 21:26.

6. Rashi's commentary to Bamidbar 21:13.

7. Bamidbar 21:23.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

This also explains the reasons for all of the differences between the way that Bilaam and Balak phrased something which was essentially the same. Balak was concerned with the current actions of the Jewish nation, inasmuch as this is what caused him to fear them. Bilaam, on the other hand, was not concerned with what the Jews were doing. He was simply a rabid anti-Semite. Therefore, Balak said "they are stationed opposite me," which Rashi explained to mean that "they are close by, ready to knock me down." That was his concern. Bilaam did not mention this at all; he was well aware that the Jews would not "knock him down," for they were prohibited from doing so.

Balak said that, "A people has come out of Egypt, and behold, they have covered the 'eye' of the land." In other words, he was stating two separate things. First he identified the nation regarding whom he spoke, "a people which has come out of Egypt," i.e. the Jews. He also said it in the past tense, because that did not concern him. He then made a new statement, that "behold, they have covered the 'eye' of the land," and therefore he was afraid.

Bilaam, on the other hand, said that "Behold the people coming out of Egypt, a nation, has covered the 'eye' of the earth." He said both things together, and in the present tense. He was saying that the Jews cover the 'eye' of the earth, meaning that they are a destructive nation. The same is true of all of the other differences between Bilaam and Balak's words. There are only two words which we would not have understood on our own. We would not have known which word implying curse is harsher, and whether "and drive the nation out," or "drive it out of the land" is more severe. Therefore, those are the only two differences which Rashi explains.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

Further on it says that "the Lord, your G-d, did not want to listen to Bilaam, so Hashem transformed the curse into a blessing for you, because He loves you." Hashem transformed Bilaam's curses themselves into blessings. Based on the above, it is quite easy to understand exactly what took place. Bilaam's hatred was pointless, and lacked any logical rationale. In the same manner, his blessings emphasized the love which the Almighty has for the Jews, which transcends intellect. G-d's love for the Jewish people is the same as the love of a father toward a child.

This is also the reason that in this Torah portion, the Torah foretells the ultimate Moshiach, who will redeem the Jewish people with the complete and true redemption⁸. The future redemption is also above human comprehension. This is in keeping with Hashem transforming the curses into blessings. In place of the irrational hatred toward the Jews, the prophecy of the redemption, which transcends understanding, was revealed.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Balak 5734, 5740)

To dedicate a week, a month or a year of

The Rashi of the Week, visit

www.RebbeTeachesRashi.org/dedications.html

You can find us on the web at www.RebbeTeachesRashi.org.

8. See Mishnah Torah, Laws of Kings and Their Wars, 11, 1.

**DEDICATED IN HONOR OF
the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

* * *

**IN HONOR OF
Chaim and Aiden Oded שיחיו Morris**

*

**DEDICATED BY THEIR PARENTS
Rabbi & Mrs. Menachem M. and Chaya Mushka שיחיו Morris**

* * *

**IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Dr. Chaim Yitzchok ben Reb Yechiel Moshe ע"ה Handwerger
Passed away on 25 Adar II, 5776
May His Soul be bound in the Eternal Bond of Life**

*

**DEDICATED BY HIS CHILDREN
Mr. and Mrs. Yoav and Devorah Leah שיחיו Handwerger**

**IN HONOR OF
Meital Zimra שתחי' Cohen
On the occasion of her birth, 14 Sivan, 5776 – Year of Hakhel
May her parents merit to bring her up
to Torah Study, Chupah and to Good Deeds**

*

**Dedicated by her parents
Mr. & Mrs. Natan Mordechai Hacoheh and Dena שיחיו Cohen**

* * *

**DEDICATED BY
Hatomim Moshe Shlomoh Zohar שי' Mars**

*

MAY HE MERIT TO BE A CHOSSID, A YEREI SHOMAYIM AND A LAMDON

**מוקדש לזכות
כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש**

* * *

לזכות

חיילי "צבאות השם" חיים ועדן עודד שיחיו מאריס

*

נדפס ע"י הוריהם

הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל וזוגתו מרת חי' מושקא שיחיו מאריס

* * *

לעילוי נשמת

ר' חיים יצחק בן ר' יחיאל משה ע"ה האנטווערקער

נפטר ביום כ"ה אדר שני, ה'תשע"ו

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

*

נדפס ע"י בנו וכלתו

ר' יואב וזוגתו מרת דבורה לאה שיחיו האנטווערקער

* * *

לזכות מיטל זמרה שתחי' כהן

לרגל הולדתה ביום י"ד סיון ה'תשע"ו – שנת הקהל

יה"ר שהורי' יזכו לגדלה לתורה ולחופה ולמעשים טובים

*

נדפס ע"י הורי'

ר' נתן מרדכי הכהן וזוגתו מרת דינה שיחיו כהן

* * *

נדפס ע"י

הת' משה שלמה זהר שי' מארס

*

יהי רצון שיזכה להיות חסיד, ירא שמים, ולמדן