



Balak

Bamidbar (Numbers) 22:2 - 25:9

Balak, King of Moab, having seen Israel's victories over each of the armies that confronted them, feared for his kingdom as well. In search of a way to stop the advance of the Israelites, Balak invited Balaam to curse the Israelites so that he might defeat them. Several times he sent messengers to Balaam, yet Balaam refused to help. The final time G-d allows Balaam to go to Moab, but only to offer the words that G-d gives him.

During the journey to Balak, Balaam's donkey encountered an armed angel blocking its way. Three times this happened and three times Balaam struck the donkey. Then he, too, saw the angel and realizing he had sinned by accepting Balak's invitation, he offered to turn back. The angel told him he could proceed provided he spoke only that which G-d would tell him. The commentators point out the strange irony of the episode. Balaam has the gift of prophecy, but is unable to "see" what his donkey is able to see. And indeed, the donkey speaks to him, reminding us that as easily as G-d gave this special gift to Balaam, he could take it away.

On meeting Balaam, Balak held a feast in his honor. The next day, Balaam withdrew to consult G-d and then delivered his first prophecy, which extolled the virtues of Israel. This was not the result for which Balak had hoped.

When the time comes for Balaam to offer his next prophecy, instead of cursing Israel, he blesses them. Balak takes Balaam to several different locations and each time Balaam praises Israel. The famous prayer "*Mah Tovu Ohalecha Yaakov ...*" (How goodly are your tents O Jacob, your dwelling places O Israel) is taken from this *Parshah*.

The *Parshah* concludes with the great apostasy committed while the people were in Moab.



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