

This week's Audio, Video, and Teaching Notes are posted here.

Balaam's Book – The Pagan Prophecies (The Book of Balaam (Numbers 22:1 – 24:25); What Did Moses Write; A Donkey Speaks to Balaam; How Geography, Theology, Archaeology, and Technology Converge in the Book of Balaam; A Place Called Shittim; Israel Yoked Himself to Baal of Peor – This Great Sin; From Shittim to Gilgal; The Righteousness's of YHVH; Remember Please What Balak Schemed; YHVH Turns Balaam's Three Curses into Blessings; The Death of Balaam; God is Not a Man Nor a Son of Man; YHVH Speaks Through a Pagan Prophet; How Goodly are Your Tents, O Jacob; What is Good)

July 20, 2019 – Ross Nichols
Balaam's Book – The Pagan Prophecies

Audio/Video Link:

<https://unitedisrael.org/balaams-book-the-pagan-prophecies/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tplR8nmmnIA>

<https://www.facebook.com/unitedisrael/videos/373694409999327/>

TEACHING NOTES

-The annual Torah reading for today in the Book of Numbers is Balak. When I was in Israel in the wilderness I was thinking about the trek of the children of Israel, standing on the ground and reading the text of the Torah and placing myself in the biblical narrative, with maps spread out and I'm saying here is where the children of Israel were. The title of my teaching today is "Balaam's Book – The Pagan Prophecies". In Hebrew, Balaam's name is Bil'am, today I am talking about a pagan prophet and some of the words that are attributed to him. Between Numbers 22:1 and 24:25 are four sayings / pronouncements from Bil'am. Anciently this text from Numbers 22:1 – 24:25 was known as the Book of Balaam.

-According to the rabbi's what did Moses write? Traditionally we believe that he wrote from Genesis 1:1 – Deuteronomy 34:12. The rabbi's believe that Moses wrote his book and he also wrote the Book of Balaam. Josephus said, regarding the Book of Balaam, readers are free to believe whatever they please about the narrative. In this text is the fantastic tale of Balaam, a pagan prophet, who ultimately is on his way, hired by the king of Moab and he's on his way on a mission. Balak wants him to curse the children of Israel and God initially tells Balak he can't go with Balaam. He goes back after being urged by Balak to come to the area of the plains of Moab and to curse this people and on his way he is riding his donkey and the donkey has open eyes. Balaam cannot see the angel of YHVH who is standing in the way and making the way quite dangerous. The donkey sees the angel and refuses to go. Balaam beats the donkey and the donkey begins to speak. Today, I want to offer the same qualifier, you are welcome to believe whatever you want to believe.

-The insights contained within the Book of Balaam are very instructive and bring forward some critical things we ought to know to help guide us in our faith and our walk in a way that might be quite surprising and this Book of Balaam is one of the most interesting in the Torah for a number of reasons. Whether you are looking at geography, theology,

archaeology, or technology, the Book of Balaam has them all. Today I want to show you how these four converge to present one of the most incredible stories in the history of written literature.

-I often pray that God will somehow make something happen before me this day, I believe in providential meeting. I believe there are times when things are beyond coincidence and they often happen when we simply ask for them. In the end things don't always go according to your plan but they always go according to YHVH's plan. When I was in Israel I found myself in the midst of a study on the wilderness itineraries and not working to complete my book as I had planned. The trek of the children of Israel. Good bibles will have a map of the wilderness journey with two proposed routes, a northern route and a southern route. In the 40th year is the setting of the story that I am going to you about. The children of Israel during the 40 years in the wilderness get in trouble quite a bit. You would think that they would have learned from their mistakes during the first 39 years but no, even in the 40th year there are great departures from the faith that are recorded in the narrative.

-In today's class, Israel is in the 40th year of its wanderings and the children of Israel are east of the Jordan in the plains of Moab across from Jericho and this is the last place that they're going to be outside the land before they cross into the land and a great sin happens. They are at a place called Shittim and one of the things that you see in this area is the acacia trees. In the Book of Numbers 33 is a wilderness travel log recorded by Moses where the last place mentioned is Abel-Shittim. Abel in Hebrew means to mourn. Aaron and Mariam have died recently and they are still in a period of mourning. Abel can also mean a meadow, where they are in the plains on the east side of the Jordan preparing to crossover.

-Num 25: 1 While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. 2 These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. 3 So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of YHVH was kindled against Israel.

-This great sin takes place in this area known as Shittim, the last place that they stop before they go into the land of promise, and they still have not gotten it right.

-Jos 2: 1 And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there.

-It is from Shittim that the children of Israel are camped before the move into the land. It is here that this great sin takes place and it is where Moses gives his greatest orations and delivers the Torah to the children of Israel in the plains of Moab. Between the last stop at Shittim and the first stop in the Promised Land, Gilgal, something significant takes place. A lesson takes place that we should all take note of, why, because we are told to.

Something happens between Shittim and Gilgal that's very significant.

-Mic 6: 1 Hear what YHVH says: Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. 2 Hear, you mountains, the indictment of YHVH, and you enduring foundations of the earth, for YHVH has an indictment against his people, and he will contend with Israel. 3 "O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me! 4 For I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. 5 O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered

him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of YHVH."

-From the time that the children of Israel left Israel, through their wanderings in the wilderness, and eventually entering into the Promised Land, God was guiding them along the way. He didn't abandon them along the way. God promised to do something and he will do it from the beginning all the way through to the completion of the matter. Every step along the way despite the failings of the people that YHVH is going to fulfill he word. These two events, the exit from bondage and the entrance into a land of freedom, during both of these God's righteousness is made manifest.

-Mic 6: 4 For I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. 5 O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of YHVH."

-God's redemption is not just about bringing people out of bondage it's about bringing them into the promise to be free to serve in a land that God has given you. It takes both and this is significant.

-Deu 33: 21 He chose the best of the land for himself, for there a commander's portion was reserved; and he came with the heads of the people, with Israel he executed the justice of YHVH, and his judgments for Israel."

-Jdg 5: 11 To the sound of musicians at the watering places, there they repeat the righteous triumphs of YHVH, the righteous triumphs of his villagers in Israel. "Then down to the gates marched the people of YHVH.

-1 Sam 12: 7 Now therefore stand still that I may plead with you before YHVH concerning all the righteous deeds of YHVH that he performed for you and for your fathers.

-Psa 103: 1 Of David. Bless YHVH, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! 2 Bless YHVH, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, 3 who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, 4 who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, 5 who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. 6 YHVH works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. 7 He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.

-Whenever we see this phrase, "the righteousness's of YHVH", something has to do with salvation, deliverance, and justice for and on behalf of his people. YHVH says through the prophet Micha to remember please what Balak schemed and what Balaam answered him. I want to help you remember that because it's essential and tied to the righteousness's of YHVH unto the ultimately of his fulfilling the promises to the fathers which carries into the modern day. The same God sitting on the throne is the same God who made those promises and will ultimately bring them to pass, everything that he said.

-Deu 23: 3 "No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of YHVH. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of YHVH forever, 4 because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. 5 But YHVH your God would not listen to Balaam; instead YHVH your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because YHVH your God loved you. 6 You shall not seek their peace or their prosperity all your days forever.

-YHVH takes a curse and turns it into a blessing. Balaam is hired to curse the children of Israel by Balak the king of Moab. Moab is a descendant of Lot. Remember that they didn't meet you with bread and water and they hired someone to curse you. But God takes that curse and turns it into a blessing because he loves you. This is Torah faith at the heart, God loves Israel and moves on their behalf in such a way that he can spin the outcome of an intended bad thing into something good and it's all rooted in love.

-Num 22: 2 And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. 3 And Moab was in great dread of the people, because they were many. Moab was overcome with fear of the people of Israel. 4 And Moab said to the elders of Midian, "This horde will now lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field." So Balak the son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, 5 sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the people of Amaw, to call him, saying, "Behold, a people has come out of Egypt. They cover the face of the earth, and they are dwelling opposite me. 6 Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed."

-All the enemies of Israel, past, present, and future have the same goal, to strike Israel, to prevail against them, and to drive them out of the land. Modern haters of the children of Israel have the same goal as we read about in the Torah. One of the points of today's class is that that can't happen and it's because of the righteousness's of YHVH. Israel is commanded in the Torah to be righteous. Israel isn't going into the land because of their righteousness, it's because of God's promise and because of his righteousness's and because the other inhabitants of the land committed grievous offences. You are commanded to be righteous but don't think that your own hand has done this.

-In the ancient world Balaam is known for a special ability he has, whatever Balaam says your blessed your blessed, and whenever Balaam says your cursed your cursed. What Balak doesn't know is that what Balaam says doesn't work when YHVH is in the middle. Balaam knows that whatever he says can't come to pass unless YHVH gives him these words.

-Deu 23: 3 "No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of YHVH. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of YHVH forever, 4 because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. 5 But YHVH your God would not listen to Balaam; instead YHVH your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because YHVH your God loved you.

-YHVH is unwilling to listen to Balaam and turns the curse into a blessing because he loves Israel.

-Jos 24: 9 Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel. And he sent and invited Balaam the son of Beor to curse you, 10 but I would not listen to Balaam. Indeed, he blessed you. So I delivered you out of his hand.

-Whatever Balaam wants to say that curses Israel is turned and he says a blessing instead.

-Neh 13: 1 On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people. And in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, 2 for they did not meet the people of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them--yet our God turned the curse into a blessing.

-Balaam was known in the ancient world, he is the earliest biblical figure attested in archaeology. He is the earliest figure that we have archaeology for which comes from a plaster inscription that was discovered east of the Jordan in 1967. This inscription dates to the 8th century BCE and does not coincide with the biblical text. It's not from the Book of Balaam but from another story about Balaam that was circulating in the ancient world. In this story, Balaam is known as a seer of the gods. He has the ability to see when others can't see and see what others can't see because he beholds the visions of God. He has a troubling vision and is invited into the divine counsel where the gods are talking and there is an impending catastrophe coming upon the earth.

-I often think of Balaam as the first temptation in the wilderness. There is an adversary who seeks to destroy Israel and he tempts Balaam to come up to this high place and let me show you the kingdom. He is caused to go up and look down on Israel three times and he's asked to curse Israel.

-Num 24: 10 And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he struck his hands together. And Balak said to Balaam, "I called you to curse my enemies, and behold, you have blessed them these three times. 11 Therefore now flee to your own place. I said, 'I will certainly honor you,' but YHVH has held you back from honor."

-God took Balaam's twisted words and straightened them out. This pagan prophet is gifted with spiritual gifts. He has insight and hears from YHVH. He admits that he can only say what YHVH permits him to say. He knows he can't curse what YHVH has blessed. He sees the visions of Shadai. He is gifted and is a pagan prophet. He describes long into the future the defeat of Israel's enemies in the last days. He sees a messianic figure that is yet to come and will help deliver Israel in the future.

-He also has another distinction that very few have. Balaam and his story / words are mentioned in the Torah, in the Prophets, and in the Writings. Who else that we know of from Biblical literature was noted in the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings? Balaam tells us that God is not a man nor a son of man that he should lie, O that the world would accept this truth. The complexities of man are great. If you would just read his words of Balaam you would see God in a positive light. You would read the words of YHVH and say, he's a very positive figure. One cannot be judged solely on the eloquent words that come forth from one's mouth. While Balaam ultimately pronounced blessing on Israel and was shown their ideal place his intentions were not good. Rabbinic literature calls Balaam without a people, outside of the people, without a share in the world to come with the people of God.

-Num 31: 16 Behold, these, on Balaam's advice, caused the people of Israel to act treacherously against YHVH in the incident of Peor, and so the plague came among the congregation of YHVH.

-Balaam tries to curse the children of Israel and God turns it into a blessing. He works closely with Balak and the others to devise a plan whereby the children of Israel fall prey to bad. They fall for these women of Moab in the matter of Peor and ultimately bring a grave sin upon the children of Israel.

-Num 31: 8 They killed the kings of Midian with the rest of their slain, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian. And they also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword.

-If we only had his words and we heard the tale that they slew Balaam with the sword and we would say for what reason? He pronounced great blessings. Why on earth would you kill him? He is called a soothsayer in Joshua 13:22.

-Jos 13: 22 Balaam also, the son of Beor, the one who practiced divination, was killed with the sword by the people of Israel among the rest of their slain.

-Despite his end and his bad intentions some of his words continue to echo through the ages, quite beautiful and prophetic. Why, because they're the words of YHVH. He is speaking not his own words but the one that sent him. The words that come forth from the mouth of Balaam, his crooked words having been straightened by YHVH, he speaks forward blessing, prophecy and good things that represent the righteousness's of YHVH.

-One utterance from the lips of Balaam have come to be part of the liturgy of the synagogue service every Sabbath day. A pagan prophet who intended to curse Israel would be rolling over in his grave to know that every Sabbath Jews are saying his words.

-Num 24: 1 When Balaam saw that it pleased YHVH to bless Israel, he did not go, as at other times, to look for omens, but set his face toward the wilderness. 2 And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. And the Spirit of God came upon him, 3 and he took up his discourse and said, "The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, 4 the oracle of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down with his eyes uncovered: 5 How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel! 6 Like palm groves that stretch afar, like gardens beside a river, like aloes that YHVH has planted, like cedar trees beside the waters.

-O how good, this saying comes across every Shabbat and it's the words of Balaam, a pagan prophet. What is good can only be seen within the spirit if you will at the present. When the Spirit of God comes upon Balaam it's then that his eyes are opened, it's then that he can look out and see the beauty that is intended, the ideal Israel. When Balak hires Balaam to curse Israel all they see is a fearful fear inspiring mass of people. They are many, they will lick up the dust and overtake us. Israel had no intention of doing that to Moab but that's the perception of the others. But from the Spirit when he looks out and he sees them encamped together he is then able to say, O how good. What is good?

-Psa 133: 1 A Song of Ascents. Of David. Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! 2 It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! 3 It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there YHVH has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

-This Psalm is very interesting in its association with, what is good. There is one other text that is tied to, what is good and it brings us back to where we started.

-Mic 6: 5 O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteousness's of YHVH." 6 "With what shall I come before YHVH, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? 7 Will YHVH be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" 8 He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does YHVH require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

-When brethren dwell together in unity remembering the righteousness's of YHVH, doing what is pleasing to him, then that person will know what is good and what has God done / wrought to quote Balaam. Balaam is also tied in with a few other interesting story lines.

-In 1844 a man by the name of Samuel was working on a new technology and it was state of the art at the time involved transmitting a written message from one location to another distant location. The name they gave to this new technology used two Greek words "tele" (far) and "graphy" (write). His test was to send a set of characters from Washington DC to a friend of his who was in Baltimore. On May 24, 1844 at 8:45am he sent a message. This message that was sent on Shavuot was taken by the words of a pagan prophet by the name of Balaam. The words were, "What hath God Wrought?" It was within this day that the words of a pagan prophet were associated with technology. Balaam is tied interestingly enough into theology, his story is associated with us knowing about the righteousness's of YHVH. It's tied in with archaeology in that he is the earliest person from the bible known to us from a discovery in archaeology. In technology, Balaam the pagan prophet shows up.

-For some reason technology advances favor Balaam's words. On erev-Shabbat, June 29, 2007 the technology giant Apple released its latest device, which was called an iPhone. It was called revolutionary and the Torah reading that week was called Balak.

-Moses wrote the Book of Balaam. In regards to its narrative, readers are free to think whatever they believe. It's interesting to note that the words of this man, straightened by YHVH's hand have come to be a blessing to the people of Israel to this very day and a blessing to the people of the world in association with technological advances and because of the advancements in technology I'm able to come to you live on Shabbat every Sabbath and share a message. Today we have learned, what is good. Israel dwelling together in unity is good. God has shown us what is good and what he asks of us is to do justice, to love loving kindness, and to walk circumspectly with our God.

Shabbat Shalom, Shavua Tov, See you Next Week!

THIS WEEK IN TORAH

JULY 20, 2019

This week's Torah Portion Balak: "Balak" (Numbers 22:1 – 25:9) Balak summons Balaam – Prophet of the nations, God's permission, Balaam's donkey and the angel, Balaam's donkey speaks, Balaam's first oracle (blessing), Balak's anger, Balaam's second oracle (blessing), Balak's anger and further request, Balaam's third oracle (blessing), Balaam's final oracle (blessing), Balaam's plot, Baal worship at Peor, Phinehas's zealotry.

"This Week in Torah" FB Page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/571648826269105/>

UPCOMING EVENTS

-UNCC Mt. Zion Archaeological Project, Dig Mt. Zion (2019):

<https://digmountzion.uncc.edu/>, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/digmountzion/>

-Tanakh Tours of Israel 2019 – 11/11/2019 – 11/19/2019

<https://www.truth2u.org/tanakh-tour/>

-Blossoming Rose Israel Tours (2019 – 2020):

<https://blossomingrose.org/israel-tours/>

-Tabor & Nichols Israel Tour 2020 – Walking the Ancient Paths: 2/28/2020 – 3/10/2020

<https://blossomingrose.org/israel-tours/tabor-nichols-walking-the-ancient-path-tour-2020/>

UNITED ISRAEL WORLD UNION (UIWU) WEBSITES

-UIWU Official Website: <https://unitedisrael.org/>

-UIWU YouTube Website:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCq31WAlio9zC1eXDzrEVzlg/videos?view_as=public

-UIWU Facebook Website: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/unitedisraelworldunion/>

-UIWU Facebook Live: <https://www.facebook.com/unitedisrael/>

-UIWU President, Tabor Blog, Religion Matters from the Bible to the Modern World:

<https://jamestabor.com/>

-UIWU Executive Vice-President, Ralph Buntyn, “Remembering David Horowitz”:

<https://unitedisrael.org/category/remembering-david-horowitz/>

FRIENDS OF UNITED ISRAEL WORLD UNION

-Blossoming Rose, Official Curator of Biblical Tamar Park: <https://blossomingrose.org/>
& https://www.facebook.com/groups/97078180601/?ref=group_browse

-Kol Yehuda, A Voice from Judah, Connecting you to Israel:

<https://www.kolyehuda.com/> & <https://www.facebook.com/groups/470824226357829/>

-Simcha Jacobovici: The Naked Archaeologist:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/57979546982/>