

Bnei Yisroel are marching toward the Land. They are now on the border of Moav, so Moav's King sends messengers to hire a known thaumaturgist.

וַיִּשְׁלַח מְלָאכִים אֶל-בְּלָעַם בֶּן-בְּעוֹר פְּתוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר עַל-הַנָּהָר אֶרֶץ בְּנֵי-עַמּוֹ לְקַרְאֵ-לוֹ
לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה עַם יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם הִנֵּה כֹסֶה אֶת-עֵינֵי הָאָרֶץ וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב מִמְּלִי

“And he sent messengers to Balaam son of Beor in Pethor, that is a land on the River: ‘His people are calling to him saying, behold! A nation went out of Mitzrayim. Behold, it covers the sight of the earth, and it settled next to me.’” (Bamidbar 22:5).

The message to Balaam is cryptic. First, it does not appear to say who the message is from. It would be expected that that the Torah would write “So says, Balak son of Tzipur, King to Moav...” Instead, the message is more conversant, as if Balak and Balaam are equals. Second, no money is offered. The incentive to curse Yisroel is simply “for I know that whoever you bless is blessed and who ever you curse is cursed.” (Ibid 22:6). Third, it does not say who the nation is. Simply, that they left Mitzrayim. Finally, there are two parts to the message. (1) Behold a nation left Mitzrayim. (2) Behold it covers the sight of the earth, they settle next to me. Are they both important? The sheer numbers of the nation should be incentive enough. Further, other than explaining who Balaam was, is there something to learn out the description that he was from Pithor, the land of his people?

Gemara Sanhedrin Yerushalmi 1:3 says, *memuli means immediately next to; one after the other.*

Gemara Chullin 19b says, *the word memuli means adjacent to.*

Gemara Sanhedrin 105a says, *it says ‘Son of Beor’ (Bamidbar 22:5) and “His son Beor.” (Ibid 24:3). This teaches that Balaam was greater than his father in his abilities.*

Midrash says, *Pesora means money changer, because Balaam was like a money changer, where everyone gathers in the market. Many kings sent Balaam inquiries for advice. (Tanchuma Balak 4). He was also sought for advice, ‘pesoran.’ (Ibid 5). ‘Memuli’ means ‘to cut off’ like the word ‘mul.’ They are close enough to cut me off. (Ibid 4). Balaam merited prophecy so that the*

nations of the world will not complain to Hashem and say "if we had prophets we would do better." (Ibid 1).

Rashi says, they called him for his own benefit, as they would offer to pay him. 'They came from Mitzrayim.' And if you ask what is the harm, see that Sichon and Og were both slain by it.

Ibin Ezra says, the River is the Euphrates that runs to Aram-Naharaim. Balaam was an Aramean.

Chizkuni says, the land of his people, refers to Balaam. As opposed to Balak's land.

Ramban says, Balaam was a diviner from a land where others had divinity.

Tur HaAruch says, he was a sorcerer from a land of sorcerers, he was the High Priest to the sorcerers.

Alshich says, the emissaries did not mention Bnei Yisroel by name so as to belittle them in the eyes of Balaam. They also said, 'they left Mitzrayim' but omitted the miracles and wonders. Balaam might talk to Hashem and find out that Bnei Yisroel were not to touch Moav. To avoid this, they said, "they settled next to us" to give their location a threat of permanence.

Ohr Chaim says, the specificity of the pasuk is so the emissaries not lose time. It is Balaam the son of Beor, who is in Pethor, by the River, in Aramea. There shall be no confusion. He called "to him" meaning it would be beneficial to Balaam. It says "behold they left Mitzrayim and now cover the earth." Balaam knew this, as the entire region knew of the miracles and wonders. However, based on Midrash Rabbah that Balaam promised Balak earlier that Yisroel would never leave Mitzrayim, Balak was now coming to collect. Balaam went to Mitzrayim and used his magic on Bnei Yisroel. It did not work. Balak is telling him, 'They now cover the earth.' It behooved Balaam to curse them and correct this.

The psauk says, he sent emissaries to Balaam son of Beor in Pesorah that is a land on the River. They were sent to Balaam in Pithor. While Balaam was in Pithor he was not a Pithorean he was an Aramean. He was a descendant of Lavan the Aramean. He was, thus, family to Moav through the cousin Lot. Aramea is a land on the Euphretes River as is known when Yaakov ran there. (See Bereishis 29:1).

His people are calling to him. This is the salutation of the missive. Your people are calling to you. Do not read it, "land of his people; to call to him." Read it your people are

calling to you. Balak was telling Balaam that Moav was calling to him. This was not a king's command but an invitation to join a family dispute. It was not Balak the king calling to Balaam but Lavan and Lot were. Lot, Lavan, and Yaakov, were all family. This is why the message does not begin with "So says Balak son of Tzipur, king to Moav." (Compare to Bamidbar 22:16 – invoking Balak's name after Balaam's first refusal).

Saying. The pasuk continues with the message. *Behold, a nation went out of Mitzrayim.* The pasuk does not say "Land of Mitzrayim." It focuses on the location in Mitzrayim where the people left from. "Mitzrayim district." This is where Goshen was, and this is where Bnei Yisroel left from. "אֲנִי" they went out. They did not *leave*. They had an exodus, a *yetiya*. "Behold" is used when there is surprise or a point of emphasis. Balak is conveying to Balaam that Bnei Yisroel went out of Mitzrayim with miracles and wonders. This was not obvious to Balaam because the *yetiya* actually occurred some 40 years earlier. Balak was impressing upon Balaam that the same Hashem who took Bnei Yisroel out of Mitzrayim is still with him.

Behold they cover the sight of the earth. "אֵינָם" means "eye." It also means spring. They cover the earth like water does. Water flows from a spring uncontrolled. If there is an obstacle one place the water will find a way around it. Bnei Yisroel are coming up from the desert to the Land like a spring of water, uncontrollable, passing through, inevitably. Ein was also the name of a city-state in the southern desert border of Shimon's territory in Eretz Yisroel. (Yehoshua 15:7). The pasuk can mean, *they are covering the lands (around) Ein.* They will settle there and forever be an adjacent adversary.

They settled adjacent to me. This is the threat. First, they are the same nation that has Hashem that took them out of Mitzrayim. Second, they are a nation that now covers the land and flows like water and they are adjacent to Moav. "Moav said to the elders of Midian, 'Now this assembly will eat up everything around us, as the ox eats up the greens of the field.'" (Bamidbar 22:4). It is not that Bnei Yisroel specifically threatens Moav. Bnei Yisroel did not declare war on Moav. Further, if Balak learned anything from politics, he would know that Bnei Yisroel asked for permission from Emor and Og. Only when refused did they conquer those lands. Arad attacked and was defeated. Balak should

have advised to just let Bnei Yisroel be. However, it was not fear that moved Balak. It was hatred.

This was an old grudge, an old family dispute. Avraham prospered while he allowed his nephew, Lot, to wander aimlessly in the desert after Sodom was destroyed. Balaam would have a stake in the fight because he was from Lavan, and Yaakov allegedly cheated Lavan out of his wealth. He absconded with Lavan's children and grandchildren.

Balak was telling this to Balaam. It is the descendants of Avraham – as opposed to Lot or Lavan – who came out of Mitzrayim. *Behold! Avraham's children came out of Mitzrayim with wonders, miracles, and importantly – wealth. Behold! They cover the land. They are a swarm of prosperous and plentiful. They will now reside next to us, in the Land.* Canaan borders Moav. This was not an immediate threat but this was a general political statement. This great nation that came out of Avraham will be on our border, forever. Balak said this to Balaam. You are family. You are in this fight. You have to help us curse them and destroy them. It is not right that Avraham has prospered while Lavan has no land to call his own, (Balaam was in a city called Pithor, not a land called "Lavan") and Moav was a small desert nation. Moav did not even have its own king. "And Balak son of Tzipur was king to Moav at that time." (Bamidbar 22:4). Balak was not "Moav's king" but "king to Moav." They could not afford their own king. They were a poor desert nation. This was a dispute over jealousy of inheritance.

BONUS SHTIKEL

“And Balak the son of Tzipur saw all that Yisroel had done to the Emories.” (Bamidbar 22:2). Who was Balak? What did he see?

He *saw* all that Yisroel did to the Emories. (Ibid 22:2). It was not Moav that saw it, it was Balak. He conveyed it to Moav who then made him king. He also saw how to defeat Yisroel. If possible, it would not be through arms, it would be through curses.

Balak was a prophet. He was a man of substance and talent and he was also a prophet himself. Moav did not have a king. Instead, they had a High Priest-like adviser king. “Balak the son of Zippor was king to Moab at that time.” (Ibid 22:4). Balak was not the King of Moav. He was king *to* Moav. He was akin to Moshe, a prophet-leader-king. Balak did not get the Midianites involved. It was “Moav [that] said to the elders of Midyan.” (Ibid). The pasuk means Moav had its own elders and Balak was their king.

“And Balak son of Tzipur *saw*.” (Ibid 22:2). Balak did not just *know* or *hear*. He saw. Either he watched it from the mountains – after which he came to Moav with a plan of action and was made king. Or he saw it in a vision. At the end of this episode the pasuk says, “Balaam arose, went, and returned home, and also Balak went on his way.” (Ibid 24:25). Just as Balaam “got up” from his prophecy, so did Balak, “also.” Later, Yehoshua refers to Balak and his war with Bnei Yisroel and gives further support to this point. “Then Balak the son of Tzipur, king of Moav, arose and warred against Yisroel, and he sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you.” (Yehoshua 24:9). There is no mention of war against Bnei Yisroel. It also says “Balak” warred, not “Moav warred.” The war was Balaam and his curses. Why didn’t Balak attack or assemble an army? Along with hiring Balaam he should have buttressed Moav’s defenses with Midyan’s armies. He did not because he had a vision that Bnei Yisroel will not attack. He knew through prophecy that Hashem forbade Bnei Yisroel from attacking Moav. War would be futile and also it was politically unnecessary. Therefore, *he* warred with Bnei Yisroel (he attacked) through Balaam and the curses. Midyan joined in – not with men to die in battle but by hiring Balaam – because they knew this task had little risk. Either Balaam was successful or Bnei Yisroel would just pass through peacefully.

Later, Yisroel sent messengers to Edom saying, “And now, are you surely better than Balak son of Tzipur king of Moav, who quarreled greatly with Yisroel or go to war with them?” (Shoftim 11:26). Again, it was Balak that “quarreled” verbally, hiring Balaam. He did make war. He knew he needed not to buttress defenses. That information could only be known through prophecy.

Balak is a mystery. The Torah does not say which nation he came from or the relevance of his father, Tzipur. Tzipur is mentioned many times in *Tanach* but always—otherwise—as a bird. This could mean that Balak descended from those who were like birds, had the power of song. He could see and speak visions. He rose to become king of Moav (posthumously, he was called “King of Moav” in *Tanach*). While he was a prophet, he was not an enchanter. Hashem wanted to bless Bnei Yisroel. He gave Balak the vision to hire Balaam.