

Torah: B'midbar (Numbers) 19:1 – 25:9
Haftarah: Mikhah (Micah) 5:6-6:8
B'rit Hadashah: 2 Kefa (2 Peter) 2:1 – 3:2

	yr. 1 19:1-21:20	yr. 2 22:2-38	yr. 3 22:39-25:9
1	19:1 – 9	22:2-4	22:39-23:5
2	19:10 – 17	22:5-7	23:6-12
3	19:18 – 20:6	22:8-12	23:13-26
4	20:7 – 13	22:13-20	23:27-30
5	20:14 – 21	22:21-27	24:1-13
6	20:22 – 21:9	22:28-30	24:14-25
7	21:10 – 20	22:31-38	25:1-9

and Bil'am walked with Balaq and they came [to] Kiriath Huzoth	<i>va'yélekh Bil'am im-Balaq va'yavo'u Qir'yath khuzot</i>	וַיֵּלֶךְ בִּלְעָם עִם-בָּלָק וַיָּבֹאוּ קִרְיַת חֻצוֹת:
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Parashah Balaq contains the popular story of the pagan prophet Bil'am and his talking donkey. Balaq, King of Moav fears the approaching Israelites and seeks Bil'am to put a curse on them. On his way to serve Balaq, an angel blocks Bil'am's way. He does not see it but the donkey does. HaShem tells Bil'am not to curse the Israelites, and to say only what HaShem says. The time comes, but instead of cursing Israel, he blessed them. Part of his blessing is a standard Jewish prayer (Ma Tovu). But after this, the people suffer as they turn to idolatry with a local god.

The Haftarah portion connects to the Torah portion referring to (6:5) the story of Balak and Balaam.

Highlights

- Nu. 22:39-23:5** Bil'am accompanies Balaq to what is an unknown site. Animals are slaughtered by Balaq for a ritual meal to be shared with Bil'am and dignitaries to enter a state of sanctification for a divine encounter. It is believed that the object of the curse must be within sight to be effective. The seven-altar sacrifice of the most valuable of animals was a part of Bil'am's divination technique. Multiple altars for a single ritual is not attested to anywhere else in scripture. One tradition suggest the seven altars recall altars erected by seven righteous men: Adam, Abel, Noakh, Avraham, Yitz'khaq, Ya'aqov and Moshe. Balaq and Bil'am work together. Bil'am references Yahweh, who puts words in his mouth (Ex. 4:15 with Aharon).
- Nu. 23:6-12** Bil'am's first oracle. "A people dwell alone" echoes De. 33:28, Mic 7:14. "The dust of Ya'aqov" echoes the patriarchal promise of Ge. 13:16. "My fate as theirs" illustrates the blessing available to every people sharing in the fate of Israel (Ge. 12:3, 22:18, 28:14). *Only HaShem determines blessing and curse (v. 8).*
- Nu. 23:13-26** Balaq is shocked and hurt by HaShem's praise of Israel through Bil'am. Perhaps a change of location/view will change God's mind. The ritual sacrifice is repeated. Balaq recognizes that it is HaShem alone who determines the fate of Israel. HaShem is proclaimed (*teru'ah* – תְּרוּעָה) in Israel (Nu. 10:5-6, Amos 2:2). A central point here is that Israel does not depend on magical arts to determine the will of HaShem, as he speaks directly with them (De. 18:8-15), and others can see this if they choose to (Is. 5:12). "Like a lion.." (Ge. 49:9, De. 33:20, Mic. 5:7). *God's blessings cannot be revoked.*
- Nu. 23:27-30** Balaq is resigned to admit this is about pleasing HaShem, but he does not give up. Bil'am orders a third set of seven altars, along with bulls and rams. Balaq fearlessly takes Bil'am to new heights where the entire encampment of Israel can be seen.

5. **Nu. 24:1-13** Bil'am introduces himself and, for the first time, addresses Israel directly. The mention of Israel's enemies refers to the future times of Kings Saul and David. *Not only is Israel blessed, but those who bless or curse Israel will themselves be blessed or cursed.* Balaq is furious, Bil'am reiterates his terms.
6. **Nu. 24:14-25** Bil'am's fourth oracle speaks to the future of Balaq and beyond. "A star" has been understood in four ways: 1) image of a king (Is. 14:12), David, 2) King Messiah, 3) weapons that destroy enemies, 4) a "host" or army that marches forth.
7. **Nu. 25:1-9** The glorious promise of Israel is immediately dashed by the sick reality of Israel's behavior. Like the golden calf incident, idolatry is involved. Pestilence breaks out in punishment and 24000 die. Pinkhas steps up with severe action which stops the plague.

Thought Focus

Prophet: Good or Bad? The words of Bil'am (בִּלְעָם) are recited in prayer every day and the prophetic words HaShem gave him have and will continue to come to pass. How can this be? Perhaps truth transcends the speaker. Even a donkey can reveal truth. Bil'am was puffed up with pride and full of himself (Hab. 4:2). HaShem reveals himself to those who humbly trust in him (De. 18:13-14, Is. 26:3-4).

Daily Devotional questions for reflection and application

1. (20:22) Is your journey difficult? Do you know God's care for you in the details? Have you "arrived?" (Deu 4:4, Mat 10:29, 2Ti 1:12, Psa 143:6-11, Luk 21:10-19)
2. (20:24) What are your thoughts about life after death for yourself? For those you love? For all the world? (Gen 25:8, Isa 65:17, Eze 37:12, Dan 12:2, Mar 12:26-27, Mat 25:21, 1Co 15:19-20, Joh 6:40, Rom 4:16-17, Heb 11:13-16)
3. (22:2) What does the enemy see in your past history? What does God see? What do you see? (Num 21:1-3, 21-32, 33-35, Eph 6:12, Mat 5:14, Jam 4:7, Heb 12:1-3, 1Pe 5:6-9)
4. (22:13) How do you share what God speaks to you? What is your motivation? (Gen 22:3, Jos 8:14, Hos 6:4, 1Ki 22:11-23, Mat 5:37, 12:37, Eph 4:15, 2Th 2:11-12)
5. (22:39) How are you influenced by the company you keep? Do you point fingers or take responsibility for your actions? (1Sa 15:14-20, Pro 28:13, 1Jo 1:8, Exo 32:21-24, 2Sa 12:7-14, Luk 15:21-24)
6. (23:13) Do you experience temptation in the same three-fold pattern used by Balak to curse Israel? (Num 23:9, 19, 21, 23, 24:5-7, Mat 4:5, 8, Mat 26:69, 71, luk 22:59, 1Co 10:13, Eph 6:13, 2Co 11:1-4, Eph 6:10-18)
7. (24:14) What excites you about "the Last Days?" Has the "morning star" arisen in your heart? (Gen 49:10, Num 24:17, Isa 14:26, Mat 2:2, 2Ti 3:1, Rev 22:16, 2Pe 1:19, Zec 14:4, 9:10, Mic 4:2, Hos 3:4-5, Rev 11:15-17)