

# Parsha Q&A



## Parshas Balak

For the week ending 17 Tammuz 5758  
10 & 11 July 1998

### Parsha Questions

1. Why did the Moabites consult specifically with the Midianites regarding the best strategy to use against the Jewish people?
2. What was Balak's status before he became king of Moav?
3. Bilaam was an evil person. Why, then, did Hashem grant him prophecy?
4. On what basis did Balak think that Bilaam's curse would be effective?
5. Why didn't the elders of Midian remain with Bilaam overnight?
6. When did Bilaam receive his prophecies?
7. Hashem opened his conversation with Bilaam by asking, "Who are these men with you?" What did Bilaam deduce from this question?
8. How do we know that Bilaam hated the Jewish People more than Balak?
9. What is the evidence of Bilaam's greed?
10. In his conversation with his donkey, how did Bilaam shame himself in front of the princes?
11. Why was Bilaam's donkey slain by the *malach*?
12. Bilaam compared his encounter with an angel to someone else's encounter with an angel. Who was the other person and what was the comparison?
13. What does the word "*shefi*" mean?
14. Why did Bilaam tell Balak to build seven altars?
15. What tragedy befell the Jewish People at Rosh Hapigah?
16. Why are the Jewish People compared to lions?
17. On Bilaam's third attempt to curse the Jewish People, he changed his strategy. What did he do differently?
18. What were Bilaam's three primary characteristics?
19. What did Bilaam see that made him decide not to curse the Jewish People?
20. In verse 24:19, Bilaam stated that a king "shall rule and destroy the remnant of the city." Who is the king and which city?

### Sherlox Holmes and the House of Gold

World famous detective Sherlock Holmes puffed softly on his pipe. "A person reveals his character through tiny nuances of speech," he said.

"Yes," said Watstein. "For example, the verse quotes Bilaam telling Balak: 'Even if Balak will give me his entire houseful of silver and gold, I cannot transgress the word of Hashem my G-d...' Rashi comments: 'From here we see that Bilaam was greedy, desiring money that belonged to others.'"

"A common malady," said Sherlock.

"For the life of me, though, I do not see how the verse hints to Bilaam's greed," said Watstein.

"Explain," said Sherlock.

"When Balak promised Bilaam great honor, he was really offering Bilaam a hefty sum of money. Bilaam's response that 'even if Balak will give me his entire houseful of silver and gold' seems totally appropriate: Balak offered wealth and Bilaam responded regarding wealth. In fact, some of the most righteous people have responded similarly."

"Such as?" asked Sherlock.

"Such as Rabbi Eliezer Ben Hismah. He wasn't greedy in the least. Yet when offered precious jewels to join an unknown community, Rabbi Eliezer Ben Hismah responded: 'Even if you give me all the precious jewels in the world, I will not live anywhere other than a Torah community.' (Pirke Avos) What is different about Bilaam's statement which marks him as a greedy person?"

"People reveal their character with tiny nuances of speech," Sherlock said.

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## Answer

“Rabbi Eliezer ben Hisma,” said Sherlox, “made reference to wealth in a general sense — ‘all the precious jewels in the world’ — but not to any specific property. Bilaam, on the other hand, made reference specifically to Balak’s wealth: ‘Even if you give me your house full of gold and silver....’”

“I hadn’t thought about that,” said Watstein. “But what of it?”

“Through this very subtle nuance, Bilaam revealed that he eyed Balak’s estate. Otherwise, he would have said: ‘Even if you give me a house’ — not your house — ‘full of silver and gold.’”

“A golden insight!” said Watstein.

*Based on Devek Tov*

## I Did Not Know That!

**“And Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey...” (22:28)**

The other nations had heard that Moshe’s might came from his power of speech. They did not realize that this referred to his prayer, and instead believed that his power lay in his tremendous oratorical abilities. They therefore hired Bilaam, who was known as a great orator and who had exceptional powers to curse people, in order to vanquish Moshe. As a result, “G-d opened the mouth of the donkey” to show that even a donkey can be a good orator, and that Moshe’s powers were all based on prayer.

*Imrei Kohan*

## Recommended Reading List

### Ramban

22:5	Balak’s Rise to Power
22:20	Bilaam’s Mission
22:23	The Donkey
23:16	Bilaam’s Prophecy
24:20	Amalek

### Sforno

22:2	What Balak Saw
22:6	Bilaam’s Power
23:22	Jewish Conquest

## Answers to this Week’s Questions

**All references are to the verses and Rashi’s commentary, unless otherwise stated**

- 22:4 - Since Moshe, the leader of the Jewish people, grew up in Midian, the Moabites thought the Midianites might know wherein lay Moshe’s power.
- 22:4 - He was a prince of Midian.
- 22:5 - So that the other nations could not say “If we also had prophets, we would also return to be good.”
- 22:6 - He knew that Bilaam had helped Sichon defeat Moav.
- 22:7 - They reasoned that if Bilaam didn’t come right away, he would not be of help to them.
- 22:8 - Only at night.
- 22:9 - He mistakenly reasoned that Hashem isn’t omniscient.
- 22:11 - Balak wanted only to drive the Jewish People from the land. Bilaam sought to exterminate them completely.
- 22:18 - He said that Balak should give him all of his gold, since otherwise Balak would need to hire many armies.
- 22:29 - He told his donkey, “Were there a sword in my hand, I would slay you.” He was hired to destroy an entire nation through his power of speech, yet for a donkey he needed a sword!
- 22:33 - So that people should not point to it and say, “This is the donkey that silenced Bilaam.” Hashem is concerned with human dignity.
- 22:34 - Avraham. Bilaam said, “Hashem told me to go, but later sent an angel to stop me. The same thing that happened to Avraham: Hashem commanded Avraham to sacrifice his son Yitzchak, and later He rescinded the command through an angel.”
- 23:3 - Alone, silent.
- 23:4 - Corresponding to the seven altars built by the Avos. Bilaam said to Hashem, “The ancestors of the Jewish People built seven altars, but I alone have built altars equal to all of them.”
- 23:14 - Moshe died there.
- 23:24 - They arise in the morning, and “strengthen” themselves to perform *mitzvos*.
- 24:1 - He realized that enchantments wouldn’t persuade Hashem to allow him to curse the Jewish People. Rather, he hoped that by calling attention to their sins, he would be permitted to curse them.
- 24:2 - An evil eye, pride, and greed.
- 24:2 - He saw each Tribe dwelling without intermingling. He saw the tents arranged so that no one could see into his neighbor’s tent.
- 24:19 - The king is the *Mashiach* and the city is Rome.