

PARSHAT BALAK

10 - 16 Tammuz 5785
6 - 12 July 2025

Torah: Numbers 22:2 - 25:9
Haftorah: Micah 5:6 - 6:8

PSALMS DAILY

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalm 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

SEFER HAMITZVOT

Negative Mitzvah 133

A Non-Priest Eating the Priestly Tithe

An individual who is not a priest may not eat Terumah (the priestly tithe), nor any of the other holy foods whose consumption is restricted to priests.

This precept also includes the prohibition against deriving benefit from any object that belongs to the "holy" [i.e., sacrifices or items belonging to the Temple coffers].

WHY THE JEWISH PEOPLE AWAIT MOSHIACH

The Jewish people famously await the coming of Moshiach (the Messiah) - a time of world peace, an end to poverty, hunger, and all sickness. A true utopia. Who wouldn't want that?

The interesting thing is, there's actually another secret reason the Jewish people have always wanted Moshiach, and that reason is very relevant to your life, right here, and right now.

Curses Gone Awry

Our parshah tells the story of perhaps the greatest non-Jewish prophet to ever live, Balaam. Balak, the king of Moab, the neighboring land, called upon Balaam to use his power of prophecy to curse the People of Israel. Witnessing their remarkable path of victory through the desert, Balak was terrified and knew that conventional methods of warfare would not work against this miraculous people. So, he turned to other, supernatural methods. Balaam was all too eager, and we read an extensive account of how this wily, conniving man tried to negotiate with G-d and seal a deal of destruction on the Israelites.

Eventually, he rises to a summit overlooking the Israelite camp, and to Balak's horror, he opens his mouth and some of the most beautiful pearls of poetry and praise come spilling out, heaping blessings on the people down below.

Balak literally claps his hands in frustration, yet, as Balaam tells him, there's nothing he can do other than pronounce the word of G-d.

As mentioned, the verses are deep and quite mysterious, but even a casual reader can identify that Balaam prophesied the future redemption:

"I see it, but not now; I behold it, but not soon. A star has gone forth from Jacob, and a staff will arise from Israel which will crush the princes of Moab and uproot all the sons of Seth. Edom shall be possessed, and Seir shall become the possession of his enemies, and Israel shall triumph." - Numbers 24:17-18

David and Moshiach

Indeed, in the concluding chapters of his magnum opus, Mishneh Torah, Maimonides analyzes these verses and demonstrates how they speak not only of one, but two redeemers - King David (2854-2924, or 907 BCE-837 BCE) and Moshiach. Verse by verse, he points to which words reference the former and which the latter. Here's a small sample: *'I see it, but not now'* - This refers to David; *'I perceive it, but not in the near future;'* - This refers to the Messianic

king; *'A star shall go forth from Jacob'* - This refers to David; *'And a staff shall arise in Israel'* - This refers to the Messianic king.

The question is, why King David? Moshiach's reign will usher in eternal world peace. Why is King David's stint on the world stage relevant here? After all, his reign came to a tragic end, and we aren't looking to go back there either; our eyes are pinned forward, to a future redemption. So why bring in King David?

What, or Who, Are You Waiting For?

Put simply, when speaking of the future redeemer, Maimonides wishes to tell us who and what we're really waiting for.

The average Jew is pretty certain they want Moshiach. Who doesn't want world peace, the return of their departed loved ones, and the end of poverty and hunger? These are incredible things, and throughout history - in the good times, and certainly in the bad times - Jews have set their eyes on a better future.

But here's a little secret: none of those reasons are the real reason anyone should be awaiting his arrival. By comparing Moshiach to King David, Maimonides demonstrates that Moshiach's role is essentially to restore and continue what King David did, just 2.0 - bigger, better, and more stable.

What did King David do?

Well, he brought Jewish sovereignty to the Land of Israel, laid the groundwork for the construction of the first Holy Temple, and overall, brought the vision and rule of G-d to the people. King David did not represent himself, rather G-d. Practically speaking, by setting up a Jewish political system and putting things in place for the Temple, King David created the opportunity for so many more mitzvot.

You see, much of our tradition is contingent on Jewish sovereignty in Israel and the Temple. Today, in exile, we are really only able to perform roughly 100 out of the 613 mitzvot of the Torah. So, David's role, his crowning achievement, was enabling the Torah's mandate to more fully manifest in the world.

Moshiach's role is much the same. The miraculous utopia he will usher in notwithstanding, Moshiach's core job is a continuum of David's: to create an environment in which G-d's mandate through the Torah can be fully manifest. So, when Jews throughout the ages desperately yearned for Moshiach, it was borne out of one simple desire: to finally fully see G-d's presence in this world. To lead a fully Jewish life with all the bells and whistles.

Not so much for candy-bearing trees and endless bank accounts, but for a maximum religious life.

Caring for Judaism

What does that tell you and me?

It's time to start caring a bit more about our Judaism.

If a nation can collectively so desperately want something simply because they're concerned that G-d's mandate isn't fully manifest, then we can certainly start caring a drop more about the fact that our own, personal environment may possibly be less holy, less G-d-aware than it could be.

It starts with you and your immediate surroundings. If you're plugged into your relationship with G-d, there are so many steps - small steps - you can take to bring that awareness to those around you.

Hang up a Torah message on your work desk and prompt people to ask you about it. Make audible blessings on your food and invite people's inquisitiveness. Pray openly in the airport as you wait for your flight and politely and genuinely explain it to anyone who cares.

There's really so much.

And when you do, you will have sampled a taste of Moshiach.

*By Rabbi Aharon Loschak
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CLOSE YOUR BLINDS

On my infrequent walks with my wife we enjoy sticky-beaking at the building styles and architecture of the houses we pass. Just do us one favor; please close your blinds. I don't care about the décor of your kitchen, I don't want to know if you're fighting with your partner, and, if you insist on plate-glass windows, invest in a hedge.

We live in an age of revelation. Gossip mags compete for saucy scoops, underwear is overwear and privacy is passé. When popular culture reeks from a "if you've got it, flaunt it" mentality, can I really expect people to have enough sensitivity to keep their family lives private?

The Moral High Ground

This week we read about the evil prophet Bilaam, the mouth from the South, who was employed to curse the Jews.

Contrary to the rhymes of the youth, words as a weapon hurt worse than sticks and stones. If speaking well of others can have positive ramifications, then ascribing evil



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intent, or cursing others, must have untoward negative consequences. Bilaam was the world expert in inciting G-d's displeasure by finding and describing the weak chink in his victim's spiritual armor and viciously exploiting it.

Bilaam climbed a mountain lookout and gazed down at the Jews camped unsuspectingly below him. He was primed for his task and ready to unload a bucketful of vituperation....

"How goodly are your tents (sons of) Jacob, your dwelling places, Israel" - Numbers 24:5 Bilaam couldn't do it. Overwhelmed by the spectacle of respectability arrayed before him, he could only praise the virtues of this People. Hundreds of thousands of tents set up in orderly rows, separated into tribal groups, in a wide circle surrounding the Mishkan (Tabernacle).

It was the orientation of all the tents that excited Bilaam's admiration. No two tents had front entrance flaps facing each other. The prevailing cultural sensitivity dictated that

each family's privacy was inviolate, leaving everyone minding their own business.

Eye In The Sky

The average punter makes sure that his house is well built; with firm foundations and space to breathe. Check out the same guy's campsite while holidaying and it's a radically different set-up. Can you blame him? Home is for keeps, while a caravan park is just for the night.

The Jews were camping, in tents, in the desert, and yet the same standards of modesty and sensitivity prevailed!

It is so tempting sometimes, when just passing through, to drop our standards and live life loosely. Sure, you think, toss the can out the car window, let it all hang out in the backyard, nobody's looking, no one will know.

The Jews in the desert could never have dreamed that there was an enemy overhead scoping their every move. They acted decently and modestly not because they worried about being watched but because that was who they were. When next tempted to cut a corner on the

highway of life, hold back this once; not because someone may catch you, but because it is the right thing to do.

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BALAK IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Balak," refers to Balak, king of Moab, and it is found in Numbers 22:2. Balak, the king of Moab, summons the prophet Balaam to curse the people of Israel. On the way, Balaam is berated by his donkey, who sees, before Balaam does, the angel that G-d sends to block their way. Three times, from three different vantage points, Balaam attempts to pronounce his curses; each time, blessings issue forth instead. Balaam also prophesies on the end of the days and the coming of Moshiach.

The people fall prey to the charms of the daughters of Moab and are enticed to worship the idol Peor. When a high-ranking Israelite official publicly takes a Midianite princess into a tent, Pinchas kills them both, stopping the plague raging among the people.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 10 Tammuz 5785 - 6 July 2025

King Zedekiah captured (423 BCE)

When the Babylonians breached the walls of Jerusalem on the 9th of Tammuz 3338 (423 BCE), the Judean King Zedekiah fled the city. He was captured by Babylonian troops in the plains of Jericho on the 10th of Tammuz and was taken to King Nebuchadnezzar, who forced him to witness the slaughter of his sons, and then ordered his eyes gouged out.

Monday, 11 Tammuz 5785 - 7 July 2025

Purim Tammuz (Algiers) (1775)

In 1775 (1775), the Spanish General O'Reilly attacked the city of Algiers and was successfully repulsed by the Dey of Algiers, Mohammed ibn Uman. Tradition has it that flames came out of the graves of the great Rabbis Isaac ben Sheshet and Solomon ben Simon Duran and contributed to the Spanish defeat. To celebrate the miracle of having escaped Spanish rule, the Jews of Algiers instituted a "Purim" on the 11th of Tammuz.

Passing of Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman (1941)

Rabbi Elchanan Bunem Wasserman headed a famous Yeshiva in Baranovitch (in what is now Belarus), attracting many bright students. At the outbreak of World War II, he fled with the yeshiva to Lithuania. In 1941 (1941), when the Nazis broke their pact with the Soviets and overran Lithuania, he was one of the thousands of Jews who met their deaths, sanctifying G-d's name. Rabbi Elchanan authored Kovetz Shiurim, a collection of Talmudic classes he delivered at the Yeshiva.

Tuesday, 12 Tammuz 5785 - 8 July 2025

Passing of Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher (Tur) (1348)

Rabbi Yaakov (Jacob) ben Asher, son of Rabbi Asher ben Yechiel (the Rosh), was one of the most prominent Torah scholars in medieval Europe. His classic work on Jewish law, Arba'ah Turim (known also as Tur), covers every area of Jewish life (in the post-Temple era), presenting the various opinions of previous authorities along with the author's own decisions. A host of commentaries were written on this work, including one by Rabbi Yosef Caro and

another by Rabbi Moshe Isserlis. These two commentaries formed the basis for the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law), the definitive guide to Jewish observance until today. Rabbi Yaakov also authored a popular commentary on the Torah, uncovering layers of hidden meaning in the text by way of Gematria (and other close analysis of the texts). He passed away on 12 Tammuz 5108 (1348).

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Born (1880)

12 Tammuz is the birthday the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn of Lubavitch (5640-5710, or 1880-1950).

Liberation of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak (1927)

On the 12th of Tammuz of 5687 (1927), the sixth Lubavitcher rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, was officially granted release from his sentence of exile to Kastroma in the interior of Russia. Twenty-seven days earlier, the Rebbe had been arrested by agents of the GPU for his activities to preserve Judaism throughout the Soviet Union and was sentenced to death, G-d forbid. International pressure forced the Soviets to commute the sentence to exile and, subsequently, to release him completely. The actual release took place on 13 Tammuz, and the 12th and 13th Tammuz are both celebrated as a "festival of liberation" by the Chabad-Lubavitch community.

Thursday, 14 Tammuz 5785 - 10 July 2025

Jews of Schaffhausen (Switzerland) Burned at the Stake (1401)

After the postilion (coach driver) of the local governor killed the four-year-old son of a councillor, charges were lodged against a Jew named Michael Vinelmann, a former resident of Basel, alleging that he had promised the murderer three gulden for the blood of the child. The murderer was broken on the wheel, and the Jew burned alive without trial.

Shortly before, a similar accusation had been brought against the Jews of Schaffhausen and been successfully refuted. When news of Michael Vinelmann's fate was brought to Schaffhausen, several of the Jews of the city fled and were soon captured. They were taken back to Schaffhausen,

where they were thrown into a dungeon and terribly tortured. Unable to endure the pain, they "confessed" to the crime of which they had been accused, whereupon all the Jews living in Schaffhausen were condemned to death. Thirty Jews were burned alive on 14 Tammuz 5161 (1401). Four weeks later, eighteen men and women died at the stake in Winterthur in a similar context.

Passing of Rabbi Yosef Trani (1639)

Rabbi Yosef Trani, known as the Maharit (5328-5399, or 1568-1639), was born in Safed and married a descendant of Rabbi Yosef Cairo. When a plague broke out in Safed, he left the city, but returned in 5354 (1594) to head a yeshiva. In 5364 (1604), he was appointed rabbi of Constantinople (current-day Istanbul, Turkey) and, a few years later, leader of Turkish Jewry. He is renowned for his responsa published under the title Teshuvot Maharit.

Friday, 15 Tammuz 5785 - 11 July 2025

Passing of Rabbi Chayim ben Attar (1743)

15 Tammuz is the Yahrtzeit (anniversary of passing) of the famed Torah scholar and mystic Rabbi Chayim ben Attar (5456-5503, or 1696-1743), author of the Ohr HaChayim commentary on the Torah. Born in Morocco, he also lived and taught in Algiers, Italy, Acco and Jerusalem, where he settled a year before his passing. Many stories are told of his holiness and greatness, and of the repeated unsuccessful attempts by Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov to reach the Holy Land and meet with him in the belief that together they could bring the Moshiach and the final redemption.

Passing of Rabbi Aryeh Leib (1785)

Rabbi Aryeh Leib was an outstanding scholar known for his diligence in study and penetrating analysis. He served as rabbi of Metz, France and authored Shaagas Aryeh, a collection of analytical discourses on the laws of Orach Chaim (daily life and the festivals). In addition to Shaagas Aryeh, Rabbi Aryeh Leib authored Turei Even and Gevuras Ari, in-depth commentaries to a number of Talmudic tractates.