

Messianic Rabbi: Was Balaam's Prophecy Much More Than a Compliment?

I remember the first time I heard the story of Balaam as a child. My attention went directly to the part of the story in which a donkey was talking.

This was probably because at that time there was a popular television program, "Mr. Ed," about a talking horse, and I had also watched the movie about Francis the talking mule. Today, children might relate the story of Balaam to the talking donkey in the cartoon *Shrek*.

Each year as I grew up, when the portion of Torah which includes the story of Balaam and his donkey was read in synagogue, we would discuss the text and the text seemed to grow with me. First, it was about a talking donkey. Then, it was about an angel with a large sword. Later, it was about a greedy man who wanted to curse Israel. Still later, it became about showing that an enemy could not curse what G-D had blessed.

Recently, I read this portion of Scripture from Numbers 24:1-5 again, and I was reminded once again how we can read a series of verses from the Bible over and over and each time see something different and new:

"When Balaam realized that it was pleasing in the eyes of Adonai to bless Israel, he did not resort to sorceries as at the other times, but turned his face toward the wilderness. Lifting up his eyes, Balaam saw Israel dwelling by tribes. *The Ruach Elohim came over him*. He uttered his oracle and said: "This is the oracle of Balaam son of Beor, and the oracle of a strong man whose eye has been opened, the oracle of one hearing God's speech, one seeing Shaddai's vision, one fallen

down, yet with open eyes: *How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, and your dwellings, O Israel!*"

In the text above, I have emphasized two places in the text. These two sections seemed to jump off of the page as I read. The first text lets us know that the Spirit of G-D came upon Balaam just as G-D's Spirit would come upon the prophets of Israel. While I'd read these words many times before, it wasn't until this reading that those words became so prominent on the page. Seeing these words so strongly caused me to look at the words Balaam spoke in a new light. Instead of seeing Balaam's words as just being nice words about Israel, I saw his proclamation not as words *about* Israel, but as words that were prophetic *for* Israel.

Look closer at what Balaam says. This is the oracle of one whose eyes were opened, who heard G-D's speech, who saw Shaddai's vision. Balaam wasn't looking at how Israel's tents were arranged and saying "look how beautiful this tent city is." Balaam was speaking forth a prophetic vision that he saw and heard from the voice of G-D.

So, when we look at the words from Numbers 24:5, we should try to view them not as simple words blessing Israel, but rather as a prophetic word for Israel:

"How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, and your dwellings, O Israel!"

It struck me that when Balaam spoke, he said two different things. First, he used Jacob, and then he used Israel. We know these were words repeated by Balaam, but spoken first by G-D. So, to understand what is being said we should look how G-D used these two names previously. We know that G-D changed Jacob's name to Israel after the wrestling match and said, "From now on, you will be called Israel."

However, after G-D changed Jacob's name to Israel, G-D Himself still called Israel, Jacob. He did this whenever Jacob was not

walking completely in rightness. So, when Israel was walking correctly, G-D called them Israel, and when they were not, G-D called them Jacob.

With this in mind, and knowing that this “blessing” spoken by Balaam was prophetic, let’s see what it might be speaking to Israel, rather than about Israel. What if, instead of Balaam saying that Israel’s tents looked really nice from the top of a mountain, Balaam was speaking of future events?

What if Balaam saw an event that took place when Israel was not walking/living as they should, when they were Jacob, followed by a second event that would take place when they were Israel? What if Balaam spoke over Israel that day a prophecy from the Spirit of G-D concerning the First and Second comings of Yeshua?

What if the “how lovely are your tents, O Jacob” refers to when Yeshua came and was rejected by Jacob, and the words “your dwellings, O Israel” refers to the second coming when Yeshua’s brothers will welcome Him with the words “Baruch Haba B’Shem Ad-nai!” (Blessed is He who comes in the name of the L-RD!)

Maybe *this* is why these words prophesied by Balaam, known as the Ma Tovu, are sung in synagogues every Shabbat. {eo}

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