

JUNE 21, 2010

Parashat Balak

Prominence through Fear and Hatred

And Balak the son of Tzippor was king of Moab” (Numbers 22:4) (ובלק בן צפור מלך למואב במדבר כב:ד)

Why does the Torah state that “Balak...saw all that Israel had done to the Emorites” (22:2) before telling us that he was the king of Moab? Rabbi Chayyim Soloveitchik (see Mei’otzareinu Hayashan, Parashat Balak) suggests that from this detail we learn that Balak only became king by instilling his people with fear of the Israelites: “First, he was only plain Balak. But later...he warned about the impending danger from Israel.” Thus, it was only through the spread of fright and hatred of the Jewish people that Balak was able to rise to his royal position.

In modern times, Iran’s leadership mimics Balak’s tactics by encouraging the world to be afraid of Israel. As Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad continues to vilify the Jewish state, the U.S. must pass and implement new sanctions on Iran to ensure that the Islamic Republic does not develop the means to destroy Israel.

Shortly after Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became the Islamic Republic’s sixth president on August 3rd, 2005, he infamously proclaimed that Israel should be “wiped off the map.” Given his vocal abhorrence for the state of Israel, and his calls for her destruction, Ahmadinejad’s nuclear program is a cause of serious concern. To ensure that Iran does not acquire nuclear weapons, the United Nations Security Council recently imposed significant new sanctions on Iran for its defiance of the world body’s five previous resolutions demanding a halt to its illicit nuclear program. Shortly thereafter, the European Union unveiled increased trade penalties on Iran. In the coming weeks, our own Congress is set to pass the most sweeping package of Iran sanctions ever proposed. The House of Representatives and the Senate should complete their work on Iran sanctions legislation as rapidly as possible, and President Obama should sign and implement that legislation immediately upon its arrival on his desk. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Balak achieved prominence by spreading a campaign of hatred and fear of the Jewish people among Moab. While Iran’s president continues to spread these same messages, new sanctions offer the best chance of peaceably ensuring that Ahmadinejad will never gain the power to lend actions to his hateful words. ■

Impeding Interference

You shall not go with them (Numbers 22:12)

לא תלך עמהם (במדבר כב:יב)

According to the Torah, when the Moabites first asked Balaam to curse the Jewish nation, God came to Balaam and told him: “You shall not go with them; you shall not curse their nation.” It seems apparent that if God forbade Balaam from going with the Moabites that he would also be unable to curse the Israelites. Why, then, did God include the second restriction? Rashi (on 22:12) adds the missing pieces to the conversation: “[Balaam] said, ‘I’ll curse them here.’ [God said,] ‘You shall not curse them.’ [Balaam] said, ‘If so, then I will bless them.’ [God said], ‘They do not need your blessing, for they are blessed.’” Understanding that even Balaam’s blessing would not benefit the Jewish people, God prohibited him from intervening in any way.

In the days of Balaam, God protected the Israelites' interests by blocking any form of outside intervention. Today, the United States recognizes the value of preventing such interference. While many nations seek to supersede Israel's independent investigation of the events surrounding the recent Gaza flotilla, the U.S. is dedicated to ensuring that Israel has the ability to conduct its own inquiry.

Following the recent Turkish flotilla's attempt to break Israel's blockade of Gaza, international voices have called for a United Nations (U.N.) investigation of Israel's role in the event. However, in the past the U.N. has proven incapable of carrying out a credible independent investigation. Most recently, the U.N.'s Goldstone Commission investigating Israel's 2009 operation in Gaza resulted in a one-sided critique of Israel that ignored Hamas' repeated and deliberate attacks on Israeli civilians. Like any sovereign nation, Israel has the right to conduct an independent review of its military affairs. The Israeli government has established a special commission—with international observers—to investigate the events leading up to the flotilla incident and to examine the roles played by terrorist organizations and outside countries in creating the confrontation. Israel's democratic institutions have repeatedly shown that they are fully capable of investigating such incidents. Previous investigations have at times leveled harsh criticism and held accountable the Israeli military and political leaders. While some countries reject Israel's ability to conduct a fair investigation, as State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley recently said, "We [the United States] believe that Israel certainly, as a government, has the institutions and certainly the capability to conduct a credible, impartial and transparent investigation." For more information on the Gaza flotilla, click [here](#).

Like the outside interference of Balaam in our *parashah*, the intrusion of the United Nations in Israel's investigation of the events surrounding the Gaza flotilla will not benefit anyone. The U.S. should continue to recognize this fact and stand up for Israel against one-sided activity in the U.N. and other international forums. ■

Balaam's Difficult Decision

His house full of silver and gold (Numbers 22:18)

מלא ביתו כסף וזהב (במדבר כב:יח)

After Balak offered Balaam great honor if he would curse the Jews, Balaam said he would not curse the Israelites "even if Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold." In this statement Balaam was proclaiming the value of his services. The Midrash (Tanchuma 6) explains that Balaam realized that a successful curse on the Jews would be well worth the cost: "[Said Balaam]: If he wanted to hire armies to fight [the Jews], he might or might not emerge victorious. Would it not be enough to pay [me] the same amount and certainly win?"

Ultimately, Balaam rejected the potential material benefits of cursing the Israelites when he felt the moral imperative to bless them instead. Today, the U.S. is fortunate not to have to make such a decision when it comes to Israel. In fact, the U.S.-Israel relationship promotes American values and provides tangible benefits to the United States.

The United States and Israel together are facing a host of threats and challenges in the Middle East. These range from terrorism, the spread of radical Islamist ideology and nuclear and missile proliferation to narcotics, counterfeiting, and cyberwarfare. Israel is a reliable fellow democracy that shares America's values and world view in a region often dominated by radical forces, dictatorial regimes and extremist non-state actors. Moreover, research-and-development collaboration between the United States and Israel has produced ground-breaking technologies and security techniques that are incorporated by the armed forces of both countries. Some examples of these technologies and techniques include Israel's development of armored plating which protects U.S. tanks, U.S.-Israeli joint missile defense programs which protect Israel and provide the United States with advanced knowledge for its own missile defense shield, and the Israeli developed emergency bandage which saves American lives. For more on how Israel is a strategic asset for the United States, click [here](#).

Balaam was forced to choose between material benefits and doing what he felt was right. As U.S. foreign aid to Israel represents a cost-effective tool that profits the U.S., American lawmakers can rest easy knowing that they do not have to make Balaam's difficult decision. ■