

Parsha Paths: Balak: The Power of Blessing

Where is Arvot Moav?

וַיִּסְעוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּעֵרְבוֹת מוֹאָב מֵעֵבֶר לְיַרְדֵּן יְרִחוֹ:

The Israelites then marched on and encamped in the steppes of Moab, across the Jordan from Jericho. (Bamidbar 22:1)

“And they pitched by the Jordan, from Beit-HaYeshimot to Avel-Shittim in the plains of Moab” (Numbers 33:49), and Rabba bar bar Hana said that Rabbi Yoḥanan said: I myself saw that place, and it is three parasangs [*parsa*], the equivalent of twelve *mil*, by three parasangs. (Eruvin 55b)

Rav Pappa says Ammon and Moab became purified through the conquest of Sihon. (Gittin 38a)

Medva

וַיִּגְרַם אֲבָד הַשְּׁבוֹן עַד־דִּיבֹן וַנְּשִׂים עַד־נֹפַח אֲשֶׁר עַד־מִידְבָּא:

Yet we have cast them down utterly,
Heshbon along with Dibon;
We have wrought desolation at Nophah,
Which is hard by Medva. (Bamidbar 21:30)

Rabbi Akiva said: Rabbi Ishmael once argued against me saying; snow does not raise up the mikveh [to its required quantity]. But the men of Madeba testified in his name that he had once told them: go and bring snow and with it prepare a mikveh from the outset. (Mishnah Mikvaot 7:1)

Nahal Arnon

מִשָּׁם נָסְעוּ וַיַּחֲנוּ מֵעֵבֶר אֶרְנוֹן אֲשֶׁר בְּמִדְבַּר הַיַּצָּא מִגְּבֹל הָאֱמֹרִי כִּי אֶרְנוֹן גְּבוּל מוֹאָב בֵּין מוֹאָב וּבֵין הָאֱמֹרִי:

From there they set out and encamped beyond the Arnon, that is, in the wilderness that extends from the territory of the Amorites. For the Arnon is the boundary of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites. (Bamidbar 21:13)

וַיִּשְׁמַע בְּלָק כִּי בָא בַלָּעָם וַיֵּצֵא לִקְרֹאתוֹ אֶל־עִיר מוֹאָב אֲשֶׁר עַל־גְּבוּל אֶרְנוֹן אֲשֶׁר בְּקִצְצָה הַגְּבוּל:

When Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went out to meet him at Ir-moab, which is on the Arnon border, at its farthest point. (Bamidbar 22:36)

King Mesha of Moav

Now King Mesha of Moab was a sheep breeder; and he used to pay as tribute to the king of Israel a hundred thousand lambs and the wool of a hundred thousand rams. But when Ahab died, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.

So King Jehoram promptly set out from Samaria and mustered all Israel. At the same time, he sent this message to King Jehoshaphat of Judah: "The king of Moab has rebelled against me; will you come with me to make war on Moab?" He replied, "I will go. I will do what you do: my troops shall be your troops, my horses shall be your horses." (Kings II 3)

I am Mesha, son of Kemosh(yat), king of Moab, the Dibonite. My father ruled over Moab for thirty years, and I ruled after my father. I made this high place for Kemosh in Qerihoh because he saved me from all predators and because he made me triumph over all my enemies. Now as for Omri, King of Israel, he oppressed Moab for many days because Kemosh was angry with his land. And his son succeeded him, and he also said: "I will oppress Moab." It was during my days that he said th(is),

Bilaam

[i.1] The misfortunes of the Book of Balaam, son of Beor. A divine seer was he. [i.2] The gods came to him at night. And he beheld a vision in accordance with El's utterance. They said to Balaam, son of Beor: "So will it be done, with naught surviving. No one has seen [the likes of] what you have heard!" [i.5] Balaam arose on the morrow; He summoned the heads of the assembly to him, [i.6] And for two days he fasted, and wept bitterly. Then his intimates entered into his presence, and they said to Balaam, son of Beor, "Why do you fast, and why do you weep?" [i.7] Then he said to them: "Be seated, and I will relate to you what the Shaddai gods have planned, And go, see the acts of the god!"

Tables and Moneychangers

וַיִּשְׁלַח מִלְאָכִים אֶל-בִּלְעָם בֶּן-בְּעוֹר פְּתוּרָה אֲשֶׁר עַל-הַנָּהָר

He sent messengers to Balaam son of Beor in Pethor, which is by the Euphrates, (Bamidbar 22:5)

HE SENT TO BALAAM פתורה because he was like a money changer before whom everyone lays coins; similarly all the kings used to send him their letters, asking for his advice.

וְעָשִׂיתָ שְׁלֶחַן עֲצֵי שֹׁטִים אֲמַתִּים אָרְכוֹ וְאִמָּה רַחְבּוֹ וְאִמָּה וְחֲצֵי קִמְתּוֹ:

וְתַעֲבֹד פְּתוּרָה דְאֵעֵי שֹׁטִין תַּרְתִּין אֲמִין אֲרַכִּיה וְאִמְתָּא פְתִיה וְאִמְתָּא וּפְלָגָא רוּמִיה:

Shmot 25:23 and Onkelos' translation

אָמַר רַבִּי חֲנָא פְתוּרָאָה: עֵילָא מִינָאי הָוָה קָאֵי בַר נַפְחָא, וּבְעָא מִינֵי דִינְרָא קוּרְדִּינָאָה לְשַׁעוּרֵי בֵיה טְרִיפְתָא

Rabbi Hana the money changer said: Bar Nappaḥa, i.e., Rabbi Yoḥanan, was standing over me, and he requested of me a Kurdish dinar with which to measure tereifot (Chullin 54b)

A Star from Jacob

אֲרָאֵנּוּ וְלֹא עֲתָה אֲשׁוּרֶנּוּ וְלֹא קָרוֹב דְּרָךְ כּוֹכֵב מִיַּעֲקֹב וְקָם שֶׁבֶט מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל

What I see for them is not yet,
What I behold will not be soon:

A star rises from Jacob,

A scepter comes forth from Israel; (Bamidbar 24:17)

Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai stated: Akiva my teacher used to preach, there appeared a star out of Jacob there appeared Koziba out of Jacob. When Rabbi Akiva saw Bar Koziba he said, this is King Messias. Rabbi Johanan ben Torta said to him, Akiva! Grass will grow from your jaws and still David's son (still has to) [will not have] come. (Yerushalmi Taanit 4:5)

Rabbi Akiva says Just as there is one *lulav* and one *etrog*, so too there is one myrtle branch and one willow branch. (Mishnah Sukkah 3:4)

Goodly Tents, Gates of Hesed

מֵה־טֹבוֹ אֱהֲלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

How fair are your tents, O Jacob,
Your dwellings, O Israel! (Bamidbar 24:5)

Rashi: מה טבו אהליך HOW GOODLY ARE THY TENTS — He said this because he saw that the entrances of their tents were not exactly facing each other

From Moav to Iran

הֲנִי־עַם כְּלָבִיא יְקוּם וְכֹאֲרֵי יִתְנַשֵּׂא לֹא יִשְׁכַּב עַד־יֵאֱכַל טֹרֶף וְדַם־חַלְלִים יִשְׁתֶּה:

Lo, a people that rises like a lioness,
Leaps up like a lion,

Rests not till it has feasted on prey

And drunk the blood of the slain. (Bamidbar 23:24)