



#40 Balak Numbers 22:2- 25:9

Torah teaching and teaching, Make God's Ways Your Ways By Moshe Schwab

Names

Kefa – Peter
 Messiah – English for Mashiach; anointed one; Christ
 in the Greek means to be smudged
 Mishkan – Tent of Meeting in the desert
 Moshe – Moses
 Shaul – Paul
 Yeshua – Jesus' real name
 Yĕhōvāh – God's real name forever (Ex. 3:15)
 Yochanan – John

Terms

Haftarah – reading from the prophets
 Menorah – 7 candle Israelite lamp
 Tanakh – Old Testament portion of Bible
 Mishkan – tent of meeting in the desert
 Torah – 1st 5 books of the Bible
 Torah portion – there are 54 portions of the
 Torah
 (There are also transliterations from Hebrew)

Even though we get busy, do not forget that God is there. Zephaniah 3:17 NKJV says, "The LORD your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing." This Messianic scripture has not been fulfilled yet, but will someday. It shows loving and caring nature of our God. In this Messianic era, God is not far from us, and He knows all we go through; He loves us and cares for us. Psalm 55:22 NKJV says, "Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you." Shaul refers to this scripture in Philippians 4:6-7.

We can make God smaller in life than His true nature is. It amazes me that the God of the universe cares about us, and God cares about you and me. How wonderful is that! Nehemiah 9:6 NKJV says, "You alone are the LORD; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You."

God wants to part of our life because He cares about us.

Psalm 23:1-6 NKJV

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Make ways to infuse our wonderful God into our lives. We may be doing these things to some extent. Perhaps there is an area you can do better.

Enjoy God more
 Be thankful more
 Acknowledge God more
 Pray more
 Engage God with your life
 Enjoy what God created
 Start your day with prayer
 Allow your mind to rest from work at times and talk to God
 Etcetera ...

What area do you need to apply better? I often touch my Mezuzah and tell God I love Him. Sometimes I hear Him tell me that He loves me back. How thrilling! This Jewish believer I know tells this story about a lady who was having trouble hearing from God. He encouraged her to keep trying and 6 months later she was thrilled to tell Him that God spoke to her.

Putting God more at the forefront of our lives, keeps us in the light. Perhaps it is like putting sugar in your tea; every sip we take is then sweet. Putting God ahead of other things in our lives helps us to be resilient and be at peace. It seems the more we think about our situation, our loss, our problems, and the strain and negative issues of life, the less peace we have. We can trust in God; that is a better way to deal with life.

Make God your strength and shield; let your heart trust in God so that you have more joy. Psalm 28:7 NKJV says, "The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him." What do you do when you are struggling? Why not trust in God.

Psalm 53:3-4, 9-11 NKJV

Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word), in God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?

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When I cry out to You, then my enemies will turn back; this I know, because God is for me. In God (I will praise His word), in the LORD (I will praise His word), in God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?

Shaul refers to this in Romans Chapter 8. Especially in this Messianic age, we should talk to God and trust in Him. Romans 8:31 NKJV says, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" The psalmist said, "This I know, because God is for me." God is for you too!

The things of the world can weigh on us, but God can lift the weight we face. He is a good God who can provide room for us to breathe under the pressures we sometimes face.

Psalms 55:3 NKJV says, "Because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked; for they bring down trouble upon me, and in wrath they hate me." Why let the wicked bring you down?

Then later in Psalms 55:16-18 NKJV it says, "As for me, I will call upon God, and the LORD shall save me. Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice. He has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle that was against me." Recite this scripture in your mind when you think things are out of control or against you. Or just a little farther on, we quoted earlier, "Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you;" Psalms 55:22 NKJV. Psalm 4:1 NKJV says, "Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me in my distress; have mercy on me, and hear my prayer." In our portion today, Balaam perhaps thought that he could make a little money by cursing Israel. God would not allow him to do that. In the same way, God will stand up for us; He is our God. Shlomo said a wonderful prayer about being loyal to God asking God to be with His believers.

Shlomo prayed in 1 Kings 8:57-61 NKJV:

May the LORD our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. May He not leave us nor forsake us, that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, which He commanded our fathers. And may these words of mine, with which I have made supplication before the LORD, be near the LORD our God day and night, that He may maintain the cause of His servant and the cause of His people Israel, as each day may require, that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no other. Let your heart therefore be loyal to the LORD our God, to walk in His statutes and keep His commandments, as at this day.

Spiritual warfare and spiritual acuity can keep us in the place where we need to be. Be sharp in thought and stay clean spiritually. First of all, we need to understand that we are in a spiritual battle. We shared this verse last week. 1 Corinthians 9:25-26 NKJV says, "And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."

We thoughtfully apply the Bible to our lives and consider proper applications of God's commandments in our lives. For example, we are not to covet what others have. This should lead us to keep our hands off things that do not belong to us. Also, this should teach us to not be jealous of what others have. When I did ministry in the jungle the people there had very little, but they were just as happy as those who had more. Stop being jealous, instead be a giving and kind person. Leviticus 19:18 NKJV, "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD."

We control ourselves in all that we do. We do not give into extreme behaviors because they are out of control behaviors. We decide that our minds are in subjection to us. We are in control of our lives and thoughts, and we decide to discipline our lives to win the fight against spiritual powers that are against us. Remember the attributes of those controlled by the devil, the devil is out to steal our lives from us, kill us, and is the author of the destruction in this world. Isaiah 14:12 NKJV says, "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are

cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!" Look at what the devil has done to this world; all the murder, the wars, the stealing, the corruption come from being influenced by the devil.

We discipline our minds and if necessary, and we can also call on the name of the Messiah Yeshua with lips of believing. We are in a real spiritual battle and the devil is against us. Philippians 2:9-10 CJB says, "Therefore God raised him to the highest place and gave him the name above every name; that in honor of the name given Yeshua, every knee will bow — in heaven, on earth and under the earth." I use the Complete Jewish Bible translation in this case to make the point that we should use Yeshua's real name if we know it. The devil has to respect the name of Yeshua. Yeshua is over all and we can count on Him to help us and deliver us from the devil. Yeshua is, "Far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come." Ephesians 1:21 NKJV. Isn't that wonderful. We can trust in the love and power of our dear Messiah Yeshua.

Torah Study

We cover the Torah portions because that was instituted by God, some credit the holy prophet Nehemiah. Also, life is filled with ritual. If we reject one tradition, we will simply fill in with another tradition. Not all ritual is bad. **Making man-made ritual into a commandment of God is wrong.** The Talmud contains a lot of man-made commandments and the Jews also call the Talmud the Torah (oral Torah). So do not be confused by this. The Talmud primarily contains man-made commentary.

Some rituals are commanded by God. Wearing a hat or kippah is not wrong but telling others they must wear a hat is wrong because it is not a commandment of God. I like to wear a kippah (a hat) because of what it symbolizes; that God is over me and I am a servant of God, and not because I have to. I am not dressing weird; you understand my intentions. Similarly, talking about the things of God is not weird because we know what we are doing.

I might add that just because something is a Jewish tradition, it does not mean it is wrong. There is a difference between understanding something as a tradition or a commandment. A lot of Jewish tradition comes right from the Bible. The attitude that Jewish tradition or ritual is wrong is anti-Semitic and discriminatory. Sometimes these wrong attitudes come from Jew haters, so do not make the mistake of going along with them. Yeshua (Jesus) was Jewish and so were all the early believers in the Jewish Messiah Yeshua. Do not make tradition into a commandment of God though.

Sometimes believers in the Messiah Yeshua have formed man-made traditions into commandments that are contrary to God's commandments. Yeshua (Jesus) said about these traditions, "In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." Matthew 15:9 NKJV. So, they have made man-made traditions that are contrary to the Bible and their made-up commandments are worthless. Remember, last week we talked about how God expected Moshe to do exactly what God said. God said to speak to the rock; God expected Moshe to do just that.

We have also talked some about the good eye (ayin tovah; Philippians 4:8) and the evil tongue (lashon harah; James 3:5-12). These are standard Jewish teachings. There is also something called the evil eye. The evil eye views things with mistrust, evil intentions, envy, resentment, and can see others as threats. It produces greed and arrogance. Proverbs 22:9 NKJV says, "He who has a generous eye will be blessed." This is a characteristic of a good eye. Yeshua talks about the good eye and the evil eye, "Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness;" Luke 11:34 NKJV. Because most of Christianity does not understand Jewish teachings, they fail to understand the Jewish roots of their faith and the Bible. Have a good eye and not an evil eye. In this portion, we will talk about Balaam some who had an evil eye.

The Torah portion for this week is Balak and it means, "devastator," "empty," or "wasting" (ref. Wiki). In this portion, Balak, Moav and Midyan were afraid of Israel so Balak, the king of Moav hired Bilam (Balaam) to curse Israel. Bilam (Balaam) first refuses, but inquires again and God says he can go, but he is to say only what God tells him to say. God was angry at Bilam probably for his selfish motives and He made an angel to stand in his way and had Bilam's donkey speak to him. The angel tells Bilam that he is to only speak what God tells him.

When it is time to curse Israel, Bilam ends up blessing Israel. King Balak takes Bilam to another place and he ends up blessing Israel again. The false prophet Bilam is taken to another place by Balak and Bilam realizes that he cannot use his incantations and allows God to speak blessings again for Israel. He says in Numbers 24:9, "Blessed be all who bless you! Cursed be all who curse you." Balak is very angry with Bilam, but Bilam says there was nothing he could do about it. Further Bilam prophecies that a messianic king will come from Israel and destroy all their enemies someday.

Next, some in Israel met prostitutes who enticed them to commit sexual sin and they also made sacrifices to the pagan god Ba'al Pe'or. When we sin, we can cause a curse to fall on us. Because of Israel's sin, God allows a plague to fall on Israel. Moshe had the men hung who engaged with the prostitutes. A man brought one of these women near the Tent of Meeting and Pinchas went after him and speared him and the woman. As a result of the idolatry and sexual sin, 24,000 died from a plague, but the plague stopped because of Pinchas.

Ironically, the blessings that God made Balaam (Bilam) pronounce over Israel became part of the modern Jewish service and is called the Ma Tovu. Balaam even gives prophecy about the future Messiah of Israel. Another irony in the Torah portion is that the donkey saw the angel and Balaam didn't see it; Balaam should have been able to see, but continued on with his folly because he had an evil eye. God made the donkey to talk to Balaam and Balaam talked to the donkey; it is a humorous point – perhaps we could say that God made Balaam to look like his donkey. It seemed that Balaam repents, but like other wicked people, his repentance is only temporary. He opposes the purposes of God and Israel entering their land, but he is unsuccessful; instead, God made Balaam to bless Israel; Balaam's motives were wrong and we should remember to be careful that our motives and values line up with the scriptures and not try to wrongly justify our behavior. Remember to have a good eye and not an evil eye.

Also, according to Revelation 2:14 it was Balaam who laid a stumbling block in front of Israel with the worship of Ba'al Pe'or. In Jewish thought and we are biblically commanded to not do anything that can cause a person to fail or sin. He could not curse Israel, so Balaam brought a curse on them through the sin of Ba'al Pe'or. He ends up dying shortly after this for his sin.

What can we learn from Balaam's behavior?

- * We should not just listen to what God says, but do what He says.
- * We need to have deep godly values that we are willing to stand for.
- * We should never consider witchcraft or the occult. The Torah says not even learn to do what the pagans do. There are devil spirits behind these activities.
- * Watch out that we do not let power get to our head as Balaam did. Those who are proud are far from God, "Yet He regards the lowly; but the proud He knows from afar. Psalms 138:6
- * Protect your mind from wrong thinking. Have a good eye and not an evil eye.
- * Do not acquire money through evil gain (as Balaam attempted).
- * Do not be a stumbling block to others and cause them to sin. Instead think about how we can help people to do what is right. "Resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way;" Romans 14:13 NKJV. Shaul (Paul) is applying Leviticus 19:14 from the Old Testament portion.
- * Be patient with one another and be encouraging. Say encouraging things to each other. We need each other to stay strong.

Another thing this portion teaches us is that God is over all. God was over the evil of Balaam. Rabbi Shaul (Paul) said that Yeshua is over all in Ephesians 1:19-23 NKJV:

"And what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

It says there is great power to those who believe. If you lived in an ancient society, you probably wondered why things happened sometimes. Shaul says that Yeshua the Messiah is over all and that includes all the pagan gods and people who say they operate some kind of power (and from devil spirits like Balaam operated). The Messiah is over all and none of these powers can touch us. What God blesses cannot be cursed if we stand on God's word in faith and keep His commandments. Abraham trusted in what God told him to do and kept God's commands. God told Abraham that he would bless him and bless those whom he blesses (Genesis 12:2-3). Also, it said in Ephesians that Yeshua is the head over the believers. The head of your denomination or congregation is not the head over the believers. Kefa (Peter) says leaders are to be examples as they serve God's people. "Nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;" 1 Peter 5:3 NKJV.

The Haftarah is Mikhah (Micah) 5:6-6:8 Micah talks about the future Israel, and says they are like the dew and rain from the Lord; like a lion. They will defeat their enemies and God will remove idol worship and cause havoc on those who would not listen to God. Micah says God

brought them out of slavery and Bilam blessed them. God commands us, "To act justly, love grace and walk in purity with your God;" Micah 6:8 CJB. Someday, God will perform what He said He will perform. Micah is in the Old Testament portion. Notice it says grace; **God's commandments at Mount Sinai were a gift of God's grace for mankind.** Those who say they believe in grace should keep God's commandments. God's commands give us life the Bible says. "Therefore you shall love the LORD your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always ... that you may prolong your days in the land;" Deuteronomy 11:1, 9 NKJV.

Make God's Ways Your Ways (a teaching to accompany this portion)

God's ways can lead us and give us life even where there is only worldly support that does not support truth.

Have you ever wondered where all the good people have gone? I was invited to a gathering not long ago where there were some unbelievers. I got to talking with someone who talked about their accomplishments and wealth. I figured that was all they were focused on in life. When we watch the news, all that seems to stick out is the evil that is going on. Remember the news is just a TV show; they are trying to get you to watch them again however they can influence you.

When I get together with believers in God, I get to find out about all the good that my friends are doing. It is quite a contrast. If people only had worldly goals and desires, this world would be a terrible place. Thank God we have His word for direction and we have good people who want to do what is right and love God. Do not be tempted to do things the world's way. Keep applying God's commandments. Here are a few scriptures from Proverbs 2; it is great encouragement. I suggest reading Proverbs.

Proverbs 2:1-9 NKJV:

"Treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path."

These scriptures are so encouraging. Treasure God's commandments and His wisdom and understanding. Seek to understand how to live as much as you value money or seek riches (buried treasure). We need to have a deep respect (fear) of God so we know the knowledge that God has imparted to us. Those who seek the wisdom of God will get more and be protected by God's wisdom. God puts power on the ways of justice and keeps His holy people. So, will be revealed the blessings of doing what is right, just, and staying on the path by keeping God's commandments ("good" often means to keep God's commandments in Jewish thought).

We sometimes think that sin needs to be allowed as truth. It can seem like a natural allowance. In the end sin will bring destruction. 2 Peter 2:6 NKJV says that God turned, "The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly." They were destroyed because they did not help the poor and because of their sexual sin (Genesis 19:4-5; Ezekiel 16:49-50). The Bible says that the land itself will destroy people because of sin. Leviticus 18:25-26 NKJV says, "The land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations."

Not only do people who sin bring destruction on themselves, but those who do not do what is right and good will be punished for eternity because God is a just God. 2 Peter 2:9 NKJV says, "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment." Doing things God's way brings goodness and blessing and eternal life with a good God. Who wouldn't want that!

Focus on God and His beautiful wisdom. Think about His ways and consider God's good ways. It said in Proverbs 2:3-5 NKJV, "Cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God." Who wouldn't want to know what the all-knowing and good creator has to say about life? Decide you will be faithful to God's good ways. You will be glad you did.

Life is often a series of events that are similar. Applying truth changes how things work out. Do we want things to work out well spiritually? Seek what is spiritual and God's wisdom.

In little ways, everyday our lives take a turn for the better because we do what is right. If we step away from doing right on a consistent basis, our lives start getting messed up. The nice thing about life is that when we make a mistake, we can apologize to others, accept our mistake, make amends, and get right back on track. We must also ask God for forgiveness. God looks for those who want to live right. "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him; 2 Chronicles 16:9 NKJV.

We all make mistakes. Yochanan said in 1 John 1:10 NKJV, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." Those who say they are perfect are not trying to do what is right; they are not changing their sinful behaviors. Also, we do not make up excuses to live in sin. Living right (righteous) is the daily process of working out our lives and keeping God's commandments (teshuva) that keeps us in fellowship with God. If we do sin, God will forgive those who confess their wrongdoing to God and make a commitment to not sin again. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness;" 1 John 1:9 NKJV. We are to work at doing what is right. Philippians 2:12 NKJV says. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Why fear and trembling? If we want to be in God's eternal kingdom and not the lake of fire, it is important to work on keeping God's commandments.

In this portion, Balaam is hired to curse Israel, but ends up blessing Israel because God will not let Balaam curse Israel. This reminds us that God is over all and cares about His people. God has good intentions for us. Even though the world is counter culture to doing things God's way, we can and should do what is right and good. We do not want evil; instead, we want the beauty of God's good ways. Applying God's wisdom to life changes life for the better. Make God's ways, your ways and stay faithful.