
*The Appropriate
Response to a
Blessing...*

Rabbi Alon Meltzer

*A New Page of Talmud –
Balak 5782*



How fair are your tents, O Jacob, Your dwellings, O Israel! **Bamidbar 24:5¹** They crouch, they lie down like a lion, Like a lioness; who dares rouse them? Blessed are they who bless you, Accursed they who curse you! - **Bamidbar 24:9²** “those who bless you will be blessed and those who curse you will be cursed.” Bilam ridicules people who wish to curse the Jewish people, as in so doing they only bring a curse upon themselves. The Torah had made this point already in Genesis 12,3, when G-d said so to Avraham when he set

out to migrate to the land of Canaan. In addition, Isaac had passed on this blessing to his son Yaakov, when he said to him in Genesis 27,29: “those who curse you will themselves

be cursed, whereas those who bless you will be blessed.” – **Chizkuni on Bamidbar 24:9³**

Rav Yehudah’s exegesis asserts that the original intent of Bilaam’s speech continues to govern his utterance. The ‘blessing’ given to Israel by Bilaam is a curse masquerading in kindness. The mighty cedars appear to be a paragon of strength, but it proves unable to withstand the winds of the world. The great tree lacks strong roots and abundant water. When trouble comes it is easily toppled. – **Julia Watts Belser, Power, Ethics, and Ecology in Jewish Late Antiquity⁴**

While Israel was staying at Shittim, the people profaned themselves by whoring with the Moabite women, who invited the people to the sacrifices for their god. The people partook of them and worshiped that

god. – **Bamidbar 25:1-2⁵** Anyone who has these three things is from the students of Abraham, our father, and [anyone who has] three other things is from the students of Bilaam the evildoer: [one who has] a good eye, a humble spirit and a small appetite -- is from the students of Abraham, our father. [One who has] an evil eye, a haughty spirit and a broad appetite - is from the students of Bilaam the evildoer. – **Pirkei Avot 5:19⁶**

How fair are your tents...

מה־טבו אהלֶיךָ
Bamidbar 24:5

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