

Bamidbar Chapter 23 - Transcript

Shiur Overview

Summary: Bamidbar Chapter 23 — Bilam's Prophecy Cycles

The Three-Part Structure of the Bilam-Balak Narrative

The story of Bilam and Balak has three major parts: (1) Balak sending messengers to Bilam and their dialogue, (2) Bilam's journey with the donkey and the angel, and (3) the central section — Bilam and Balak together attempting to produce curses. Everything in this narrative happens in threes: the donkey was struck three times, and while the messenger dialogues only happened twice (first refusal, then acceptance), the meeting with Balak himself functions as a third iteration of that same dialogue, with Balak asking "could I not honor you enough?" and Bilam responding that it's not about honor but about speaking only what Hashem says.

Geographic Staging and Pacing (End of Chapter 22 into Chapter 23)

The chapter division is slightly off — the chapter should really begin with "Vayehi Baboker" at the end of chapter 22. The locations matter, though their precise geography is unclear. Balak and Bilam first meet at Ir Moav (the city of Moav, at its border). They then go to Kiryas Chutzos, where Balak makes a **zevach** (feast/sacrifice) and sends portions to Bilam — this functions as a reconciliation gesture, showing he's not truly angry despite their earlier argument. They sleep over, and the repeated sleeping-overs both pace the narrative and likely carry deeper significance. In the morning, Balak takes Bilam to **Bamos Baal** — a high place (**bamah**) named after the Canaanite deity Baal — from which Bilam can see **ktzeh ha'am**, part of the people but not all, since the camp is too large to view from any single elevated point.

The Sacrificial Preparation — Karbanos as a Vehicle for Prophecy

Bilam instructs Balak to build seven altars and prepare seven oxen and seven rams. This reveals something never made explicit in all of Sefer Vayikra's discussion of karbanos: **sacrifices are a mechanism for receiving prophecy**. You want God to speak to you? Bring a karban. A precedent appears in the Sotah ritual, where God reveals whether the woman sinned through a Karban Mincha — and indeed every Karban Mincha is really a way of revealing God's will, which is why Tefilas Mincha commemorates this. Balak follows Bilam's instructions, and they both sacrifice one bull and one ram on each altar.

How Bilam Receives Prophecy (Pesukim 3–6)

Bilam tells Balak to stand on his olah (**hityatzev al olasecha**) — a ritual standing, being part of the process — while Bilam goes off walking alone. He says "perhaps" (**ulai**) God will come to meet him (**yikareh**). The word **shefi** describes Bilam's mode of walking — some kind of meditative practice, walking alone deep in thought, his known method for inducing prophecy.

It works: **Vayikar Elokim el Bilam** — God meets Bilam. The word **vayikar** means something like a chance meeting or encounter. Bilam reports to God that he has prepared the

seven altars and sacrificed on each — essentially saying "I've done my part, now you do yours."

Vayasem Hashem davar befi Bilam — "He placed a word in Bilam's mouth." The Midrash reads this hyper-literally (like a bit placed in an animal's mouth to lead it), but idiomatically it simply means God gave him a message to deliver. God tells him: return to Balak and speak this.

The First Mashal/Prophecy (Pesukim 7–10)

Bilam returns to find Balak still **nitzav al olato** (standing on his offering) with all the princes of Moav. **Vayisa meshalo** — he raises his mashal, beginning to speak prophetically in poetic form. The poem follows classic biblical parallelism throughout:

- **Origin:** **Min Aram yancheni Balak, melech Moav mehararei Kedem** — Balak led me from Aram / the king of Moav from the mountains of the East (Mesopotamia).

- **The request:** **Lecha ara li Yaakov, ulcha zo'ama Yisrael** — Come curse Yaakov / raise anger against Yisrael. The Yaakov-Yisrael pairing is the most basic poetic parallelism for referring to the people.

- **The refusal:** **Ma ekov lo kabo El, uma ez'om lo za'am Hashem** — How can I curse what God has not cursed / rage against what Hashem has not raged against? (**Ara** and **kavah** are synonyms for cursing.)

- **The vision:** **Ki merosh tzurim er'enu umigva'os ashurenu** — From the tops of rocks I see them / from the hills I behold them. This parallels Bilam's own description of coming from mountains.

- **Their distinctiveness:** **Hen am levadad yishkon uvagoyim lo yitchashav** — A people dwelling alone / not reckoning itself among the nations — meaning they are stronger than everyone, unafraid.

- **Their multitude:** **Mi manah afar Yaakov umispar et rova Yisrael** — Who can count the dust of Yaakov / the **rova** of Yisrael? The dust may evoke the dust cloud raised by a great marching army. **Rova** is difficult to translate but parallels **afar** — perhaps referring to their encampment quarters.

- **The wish:** **Tamos nafshi mos yesharim utehi acharisi kamohu** — May I die the death of the upright / may my end be like theirs. **Acharis** means having a good end, as frequently in Tanach. The mention of death seems odd since death isn't good, but the meaning is: if you have a great life, you have a good death. Bilam is expressing envy — he wishes he could be like them.

Balak's Reaction and Bilam's Refrain (Pesukim 11–12)

Balak is furious: "What have you done? I brought you to curse my enemies and you've blessed them!" Bilam responds with what becomes his constant refrain: "I can only speak what Hashem puts in my mouth." This completes the first cycle.

The Second Cycle: Change of Location — Sedei Tzofim, Rosh HaPisgah

Balak's strategy is to take Bilam to a different vantage point. The rationale for changing geographical locations is not entirely clear, but the idea seems to be that Bilam sees the

people in a certain way that causes him to prophesy favorably — perhaps from a different angle he'll see something that enables a curse. They go to **Sedei Tzofim, Rosh HaPisgah** — notably the same Pisgah where Moshe later dies. *Pisgah* is likely originally a proper place name, not a generic word for "peak," though it came to be used that way.

The same ritual repeats: seven altars, an ox and ram on each. the nifal — (*ikareh*) אקרה — Bilam uses the same language form, meaning "I will prepare myself so that Hashem should meet me," positioning himself as the passive recipient of .divine encounter

A Subtle Narrative Difference in the Second Cycle

A notable difference: in the first cycle, Hashem simply places words in Bilam's mouth and he begins speaking. In the second cycle, Balak already knows Bilam's claim and asks directly: "What did Hashem speak to you?" This reflects the progression of the dialogue — Balak has internalized that Bilam claims to be merely a mouthpiece.

The Second Prophecy: God Does Not Change His Mind (Pesukim 18–24)

Addressing Balak — A Demotion

Bilam opens by addressing Balak: קום בלק ושמע, האזינה עדי בנו Stand up, Balak, and hear; listen to me, son of" — צפור — Tzippor." In the first prophecy, Balak was addressed as *Melech Moav* (King of Moab); now he is merely *ben Tzippor* (son of Tzippor). This represents a demotion in the .rhetorical framing

The Core Theological Argument

The central theme of this second prophecy is that **God does not change His mind**. God is — לא איש אל ויכזב וכן אדם ויתנהם .not change His mind not a man who lies or a human who regrets. A person speaks and doesn't follow through (*veyikhazev*), or speaks and changes his mind (*velo yekimenah*). But God I have received a blessing and I will not" — וברך ולא אשיבנה — "return it." The message to Balak is pointed: you think .changing the angle will change God's decision? It won't

Shift in Perspective — From the People to God

The first prophecy focused on the greatness of the people themselves — their origins, their distinctiveness, their multitude. The second prophecy shifts to **God's perspective on Israel**:

— לא הביט און ביעקב ולא ראה עמל בישראל — Jacob, does not see evil/trouble in Israel

— ה' אלקיו עמו ותרועת מלך בו — Hashem his God is with him, and" — the *teruah* of the King is among him." Here *melech* (king) is not the King of Moab but parallels *Hashem Elokav* — God is their king. *Teruah* may also be understood literally as the .shofar blast — God's presence is tangibly with them

God's Historical Relationship — The Exodus

God took them out of Egypt." As Rashi" — אל מוציאם ממצרים — noted in the first prophecy, the people didn't just leave Egypt on their own (*am yatza*); God actively brought them out. the power/majesty of a — כתועפות ראם This *Kel* acts with .*re'em* (apparently a strong, tall animal, a type of ox)

Magic Cannot Touch Them

There is no divination that — כִּי לֹא נִחַשׁ בִּיעֲקֹב וְלֹא קִסַּם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל — works against Jacob, no sorcery against Israel. This directly addresses Balak's strategy: you think you can come with *kesamim* (magical rituals) to curse them? They are stronger .than that

A Difficult Verse

This verse is harder to parse. — כַּעַת יֹאמֵר לִיעֲקֹב וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל מִה פֶּעַל אֵל — The best reading connects it to the overarching theme: what is happening to Israel is *God's activity* (*mah pa'al El*). You .cannot go against it because it is divine action

Israel's Power — The Lion Imagery

The poem concludes with imagery paralleling the first prophecy's description of national power: the nation rises like a lion (*lavi* and *ari* being two — יתנשא .words for lion, perhaps young and old) He will not lie down until he devours prey and" — הללים ישתה — drinks the blood of the slain." The eating/drinking parallelism .is idiomatic for military victory, not literal blood-drinking

Balak's Clever Counter-Argument (Pasuk 25)

This time Balak doesn't ask "what have you done?" because he already knows the answer from the first cycle. Instead, he — גַּם קֵב לֹא תִקְבְּנוּ גַם בְּרַךְ לֹא תִבְרַכְנוּ — makes a **sharper argument** Fine, don't curse them. But who forced you to *bless* them?" ".At least be silent! If God won't let you curse, just say nothing

Bilam's Response: Positive Obligation, Not Just Restraint (Pasuk 26)

Bilam's answer reveals an important distinction: כל אשר ידבר ה' — Whatever Hashem speaks, I must *do*." — אֲוֹתוֹ אַעֲשֶׂה — Previously he said eshmer* (I* — אשר ישים ה' בפי אותו אשמר לדבר — I* — will guard/keep) is always a *lo ta'aseh*, a negative commandment: I will not go against Hashem. But now he adds the positive dimension: **e'eseh** — I must actively do what God commands. It's like a *mitzvat aseh* (positive commandment). Balak's suggestion of a "pocket veto" through silence won't work — if God tells Bilam to speak a blessing, he .*must* speak it

Setup for the Third Cycle — Rosh HaPeor (Pesukim 27–30)

Balak is still not discouraged. He proposes a third location, now explicitly framing it in theological terms: "אולי ישר בעיני האלהים — Perhaps it will be right in God's eyes" to curse from" — there. The interpretive possibilities for what these location :changes represent include

- Strategic:** Bilam keeps being impressed by Israel's strength; perhaps from another angle he'll find a weakness, a way in.
- Spiritual:** Perhaps he'll find some *aven* (sin) — since God said He doesn't see sin in Jacob, maybe from another vantage point some sin will be visible.

They go to **Rosh HaPeor** — Peor being a mountain name (the same Peor of *Baal Peor*, literally "the lord of Peor"), overlooking the *yeshimon* (plain/wilderness). The same ritual of seven altars with oxen and rams is performed. The chapter ends here, with the third and fourth prophecies to follow.

Bamidbar Chapter 23: Bilam's First Prophecy and Blessing

The Structure of the Bilam-Balak Narrative

So we're reading Sefer Bamidbar chapter 23, which is the second part of the story of Bilam and Balak. As we've discussed, there's the second major part of the story, which is after the whole part of the first part of Balak sending messengers to Bilam and the whole dialogue between them. The second part of Bilam on the way and the dialogue between him and his donkey and the angel. There is the third part which is really the main part, the central part, which is Bilam and Balak together trying to get Bilam to curse, to give his curses.

We had at the end of the previous chapter, the last chapter, the first meeting of Balak and Bilam, which is really a continuation in some sense of the third part. I said that everything here happens three times, right? He hit his donkey three times. The thing that happened only two times was him having this dialogue or arguing with the messengers of Balak. He came once and he said no and the second time he said yes. But really here's the third time of that same dialogue because we have Balak himself asking Bilam, well, could I have not honored you enough? And Bilam answering, no, it's not about the honor. It's about me being able only to say what Hashem says and so on. That's sort of the third part.

The Geographic Locations and Pacing of the Story

But that leads us into the main part and this is really where this chapter should start. I think they started it one pasuk after where it should have started. Even if you would have caught it here, it should have started the **Vayehi Baboker** [and it was in the morning] here in the last pasuk of chapter 22.

Which is that there's locations and there's important apparently—I don't know the geography of these locations very well so it doesn't mean anything to me—but apparently each of these areas are known places or places which are surrounding the place where the Yidden [Jews] were encamped and so on. So the first place they meet, Balak and Bilam meet in Ir Moav, the city of Moav, and at the border of Moav and wherever the next place is where maybe where Bilam is coming from.

Then they take him to a place called Kiryas Chutzos, which is where they have their first party. He makes a zevach [sacrifice/feast]. He sends Bilam—that's like sort of the reconciliation, right? We say he's not really mad at him. He's inviting him to his party. He's part of his life, although they had like this little argument a bit before. And then in the morning—that's where the real main part of the story starts—they sleep over, Bilam and Balak. It's also important. It also gives a pacing to the story where they keep on sleeping over, but there's probably some deeper meaning also in this sleeping over.

The First Location: Bamos Baal

And in the morning, Balak takes Bilam to a second place—third, first place if we start counting here from the places where he's tried to actually give his curses—which is Bamos Baal. Bamos Baal is apparently Bamos in the sense of a high place, a hill called Baal. Baal is of course famously the god of Canaan and so on, the god maybe that's why it's named like that. And that's a place from where we can see some of their people, not all of them. He sees part of them. Apparently it's a big camp. It's hard to find like an elevated location from which

you can see everything, but he sees some of that. And this is where Bilam is going to sort of look at them and try to give his mashal [parable/prophecy], his prophecy, his curse.

The Sacrificial Preparation: Karbanos as a Vehicle for Prophecy

So the order of this is that Bilam tells Balak you need to build a mizbeach [altar] for me and actually build seven of them and prepare seven oxen and seven rams to slaughter on these seven altars. And this actually reveals a secret to us that we didn't know in the entire Sefer Vayikra, which talks about karbanos [sacrifices], which is that **karbanos are a way to receive prophecy**. Right, you want God to speak to you and God to appear to you in whichever way, in whichever modality He appears, one of the ways of doing that is to bring a karban.

We actually did see a sign of this in the story of the Sotah [suspected adulteress] where God reveals if she sinned by way of bringing a Karban Mincha [meal offering]. And I said then that every Karban Mincha really is a way of revealing God's will in some way. And so Tefilas Mincha [the afternoon prayer], which is a zecher [remembrance] to that—in any case, Bilam commands to have these seven altars with the seven great sacrifices prepared. That will be his way of preparation for prophecy. And that's what they do. Balak follows him. They both each—**vaya'al** [and he elevated/offered]—they sacrifice one bull and one ram each on each mizbeach.

How Bilam Receives Prophecy

And now Bilam tells Balak—and here we again have the description of how the prophecy comes to Bilam in a way that we don't have in most other prophets. Definitely not in the Torah we don't have for Moshe. We have in a little bit for other prophets in Nach [Prophets].

Bilam tells Balak you stand here. Rashi says stand on your karban, which is apparently a kind of a ritual standing. It's like stand here, be part of this process. And he will go, go somewhere, go and take some walks by himself. And maybe God will meet me, basically will come across to me and will show me something and I will tell you. So that's his way of describing how the prophecy will come to him—by some kind of walking, by some kind of meditation, whatever he's doing, he might speak to him.

Vayelech shefi [and he went shefi]—and shefi is apparently a word, I think a word for this kind of meditation or this kind of preparation that Bilam is doing. To walk in a certain way or walk by himself or walk deep in his thoughts, wherever it is where he meets God. That apparently this is how he knew how to bring the prophecy on him.

God Meets Bilam

And that happens. What he said **ulai** [perhaps] happens. **Vayikar Hashem el Bilam** [and Hashem met/encountered Bilam]—God meets Bilam. **Vayikar** should be translated something like meet or like a chance meeting, but I think that's the best translation that I can give right now.

And Bilam tells him, look I've prepared these seven altars. I've sacrificed an ox and a ram on each altar. In other words, when he's saying, he means to say, okay, like I've done my part now you do your part. Right? That's what he's saying. He's like look I've given you what you need. So what do you say?

Vayasem Hashem davar befi Bilam [and Hashem placed a word in the mouth of Bilam]. This literally means he put a word in the mouth of Bilam. The Midrash of course exploits

the literalism of this saying that it's like someone putting a—how do you call the thing that you put in the mouth of an animal to lead it or something like that? But this is just an idiom. That means he gave a message, right? I give—to put something in your mouth means I give you a message to give the next person. So he tells him go back to Balak and you'll speak this. So he has his message.

Bilam's First Prophecy

And he's returning. I want to hear the message in one second. Bilam returns to Balak. He's there still **nitzav al olato** [standing on his burnt offering], which is like I said part of the process, standing with all the ministers, all the princes of Moav.

Vayisa meshalo [and he raised his parable/prophecy]—and Bilam speaks, this is he raises his mashal, his proverbs, his poem. I'm saying like he starts speaking prophetically. That's the way it describes it.

The Content of the First Mashal

And what does he do? He gives a prophetic or poetic description of the story of how Balak asked something from him and how he can't provide it because this nation that he asked him to curse is actually great. And there's this parallelism here, this dualism, and it's like all Hebrew poetry or biblical poetry has.

And he starts: **Min Aram yancheni Balak** [From Aram Balak led me]—Balak has called me or led me from Aram. **Melech Moav mehararei Kedem** [the king of Moav from the mountains of Kedem]—the king of Moav who's the same as Balak has led me from the mountains of Kedem. So Kedem is the east where Mesopotamia, where Bilam is from, called Aram, called the mountains of Kedem.

And he asks me: **Lecha ara li Yaakov** [come curse Yaakov for me], curse Yaakov for me. **Ulcha zo'ama Yisrael** [and come rage against Yisrael]—**zo'ama** is another way, means be angry, but some apparently means raise anger against Israel. So we have also this parallelism always Yaakov-Yisrael. That's the very basic if you want to say something twice. You say use two names. Yaakov-Yisrael are the two names the poetry always uses for the people.

Bilam's Response: Why He Cannot Curse

Now Bilam responds to Balak's request in his poetry. **Ma ekov lo kabo El** [How can I curse what God has not cursed]—what can I curse? God is not cursed. So exactly corresponding to the two things as we saw before. **Odah** and **kovah** mean the same thing. So I cannot curse what God is not cursed. I cannot raise anger against what God is not angering against.

And then he explains sort of why God doesn't let him curse. Why is God not cursing and describes—remember the blessings of God is not just God sitting there and blessing. Good blessings of God are actions, right? The fact that he gives greatness or gives power to people.

The Vision from the Mountains

Describes God's blessing: **Ki merosh tzurim er'enu** [For from the top of rocks I see him]—also, there's a parallelism here to Bilam describing himself as coming from the mountains of Kedem. He says I've seen him from the heads of the great rocks, of the great hills, great mountains. **Umigva'os ashurenu** [and from the hills I behold him]—

geva'os usually is smaller mountains or larger mountains. And I see.

Hen am levadad yishkon [Behold, a people dwelling alone]—I see a people resting or encamping by themselves, in other words stronger than everyone. **Uvagoyim lo yitchashav** [and among the nations it does not reckon itself]—**bagoyim** there doesn't have to count other nations. In other words, he's stronger than them. He's not afraid of them.

Their Multitude and Greatness

And he says they're also great people. There's many of them. **Mi manah afar Yaakov** [Who can count the dust of Yaakov]—who can count the dust of Yaakov? So there's a lot. **Afar** might mean something like sometimes we see when there's a great army they walk and there's like dust coming out of their feet because there's a great march. **Umispar et rova Yisrael** [and the number of the rova of Yisrael]—I don't know. There's a problem with how to translate the word **rova**, but it must be a parallel to **afar**, like the maybe like the quarter where they quarter themselves or something like that.

The Wish to Share Their Fate

And he says—then he ends by saying he wishes to be like them. **Tamos nafshi mos yesharim** [May I die the death of the upright]—may I die. I think **yesharim** again, this is a parallelism. **Utehi acharisi kamohu** [and may my end be like his]—**acharis** is the end of someone, the end of a person's life. And may I die correct, straight death and have my end being like that. In other words, I wish I would be like them. They're going to have a good end.

Like many times in Tanach we see **acharis** means having a good end. Death is a little weird here because death is not a good thing, but what it means to say is if you have a great life, then you have a good death. That's really what he's talking about.

Balak's Reaction and Bilam's Refrain

Now this was Bilam's first prophecy and Balak, of course, is not very happy. Screams at him. What have you done to me? I've asked you to curse my enemies and you've blessed them. And Bilam answers what is going to be his refrain all the time: I've told you already I can only speak what Hashem will put in my mouth. That's what I keep—what do I keep to speak?

So now—so that's the first cycle.

Bamidbar Chapter 23 — Bilam's Second Prophecy and the Setup for the Third

.And he says, then he ends by saying he wishes to be like them **Tamot nafshi mot** [תמות נפשי מות] **והתי אחריתי כמהו** [yesharim, tehiy achariti kamohu] again this is a parallelism. — [yesharim, tehiy achariti kamohu] *Achris* is the end of someone, the end of a person's life. And may I die a correct, a straight death and have my end being like them. In other words, I wish I would be like them, they're going to have a good end. Like many times in Tanach we see .*achris* means having a good end

Death is a little weird here, because death is not a good thing. What it means to say is if you have a great life, then you have a good death. That's really what he's talking about.

Now this was Bilam's first prophecy, and Balak of course is not very happy. He screams at him, "What have you done to me? I've asked you to curse my enemies and you've blessed them." And Bilam answers — what is the refrain going to be all the time? I've told you already, I can only speak what Hashem will

put in my mouth. That's what I keep, what I keep to speak. So that's the first cycle.

The Second Cycle: A New Location at Sedei Tzofim

Second cycle, Balak tells Bilam, you know what, maybe they'll take you somewhere else, you'll see him, you'll see some of him again, just like before they only saw some, but some other angle, maybe you'll curse me from there. So apparently, it's not clear what this changing of, like I said, changing geographical locations is supposed to help, but maybe he sees something else, maybe he understands that Bilam sees them in a certain way and that causes him to prophesy like this. He'll go somewhere else, he'll see them from a different angle and a different way, he'll be able to give a curse.

So he takes them to another place called **Sedei Tzofim** in **Rosh HaPisgah**. Rosh HaPisgah is also where Moshe died, right? Pisgah might be the proper name of a mountain — we say Pisgah in the sense of a mountain, not a peak, but I think originally Pisgah is just the name of a place.

The Ritual Repeated

And same thing they do again, there's seven altars, ox and ram in each altar. He tells the same exact thing to Bilam: stand on your *olah* [burnt offering], I will be *ikareh* [I will be met], right? So I'll be the *nifal* [passive form], what happens to me from the Hashem *yikra* [will meet]. I will prepare myself so Hashem should meet me, I will be meeting towards him.

And the same thing, Hashem meets Bilam and he puts something in his mouth and he tells him this is what you will speak to Balak. And he comes back, same exact words, he's standing on his *olah* with all the *sarei Moav* [princes of Moab], and Balak asks him, okay, what did Hashem speak?

A Subtle Difference: Balak's Question

So this is something he didn't have before. Before, the first time he just faced the *machaneh* [camp], he just starts to speak. Now he already told Balak, Balak, that I will only speak what Hashem speaks to me. So Balak is like, okay, so what did Hashem speak to you? And he starts again, he starts his prophecy again, and he basically has the same, repeats the same thing again, but also relates to the fact that this is the second time.

The Second Prophecy: God Does Not Change His Mind

Addressing Balak — A Demotion in Status

קום, He starts again, he says, first he addresses Balak, he says Kum Balak veshema, ha'azina עדי בנו ציפור **בלק ושמע, האזינה עדי בנו ציפור** stand up Balak, I'm here, the son of — [adei beno Tzipor Tzippor, listen to me. So again, first he was *Melech Moav* [King of Moab], was the second of Balak, now he's just the son of Tzippor. So this might be a little demotion for Balak in this language, like the first one was addressing him as the king of Moav, now he's addressing him as the son of Tzippor

The Theological Core: God's Unchanging Nature

And he says, you think that you're going to get God to change his mind? God is not a man who lies or says something and then makes it false, because he doesn't follow through. He's not a man who changes his mind, who regrets. A person, he speaks, says, and he doesn't do, or he speaks, he doesn't follow through on what he did, because he changed his mind. But from God, he has taken a blessing from God, this is what God wants to take, he will not return it. God didn't change his mind, you think you're going to change his mind by taking it to another angle, it's the same thing.

Shifting Perspective: From the People to God's View

And now he speaks more about the perspective of God. In the previous one he only started with the greatness of the people where they come from, and now he's really speaking from the perspective of God, because remember the subject of this poem is more about God not changing his mind, about God actually loving Yisrael and Yaakov, and not wanting to change his mind.

Lo hibit aven] לא הביט און ביעקב ולא ראה עמל בישראל He says He does not see evil, he — [b'Yaakov v'lo ra'ah amal b'Yisrael does not see sin in Yaakov, he doesn't see madness, evil, we can think about how to exactly translate the word *amal* in Hashem Elokav imo, utru'at] ה' אלקיו עמו ותרועת מלך בו .Yisrael Hashem, his God, is with him, and the *teruah* — [melech bo of his king — so here the king is not the king of Moav, the king is *melech*, which is a parallel to Hashem Elokav, or Elokav meaning his king, his God is a similar thing, he's their leader, is with him, so Hashem is with him. His *teruah* might also literally mean like *teruah*, like his horns, his shofar that he blows is with them. Basically God is with them, he doesn't want to see evil with them

God's Historical Relationship: The Exodus

And he's not only being with them from now, remember you yeah, like — [El motzi'am miMitzrayim] אל מוציאם ממצרים, said Rashi noticed, it's not *am yatza miMitzrayim* [the people left Egypt], *El motzi'am miMitzrayim* [God took them out of Egypt], God took them out of Mitzrayim, this *El*, this Havayah, with the greatness or the raisedness, the highness of *re'em*, which is apparently some kind of strong or tall, beautiful animal, like a kind of ox apparently

Magic Cannot Touch Them

Now you try, you think you're going to come with some kind of magic, some kind of rituals to curse them — [Ki lo nachash b'Yaakov v'lo kesem b'Yisrael] קסם בישראל there is no *nachash* [divination] that works on Yaakov, they're stronger than that

A Difficult Verse

Ka'et ye'amer l'Yaakov] כעת יאמר ליעקב ולישראל מה פעל אל Now we will tell to Yaakov. Now this — [ul'Yisrael mah pa'al El is a passage that is a little harder to read, what he seems to be saying is, again, connecting to the theme, it's *El* that is the one that takes out the Mitzrayim, it's the *El Hashem Elokav*, that's *imo*, so you can't tell Yaakov, you can't go against, because this is *ma'pol El* [the activity of God], this is the God's activities, that's the best I can do for now

The Lion Imagery: Israel's Power

The last two lines of this poem, it goes back to the way he described it in the first poem, and describes the power, the great courage and power of this nation **הן עם כלביא יקום וכארי יתנשא** .great courage and power of this nation [Hen am k'lavi yakum v'kh'ari yitnasa] *lavi* and *ari* are two words for a lion, maybe a young one or an old one, I don't know, he stands up like a lion, and it will not sleep until he eats what the lion eats, like *teref* is a lion that devours, conquers other animals, and drinks the blood of his enemies. And that's also, so there's this parallel between eating and drinking, of course nobody drinks the blood of their enemies literally, but this is an idiom for winning a war and killing

Balak's Clever Counter-Argument: Just Be Silent

So now Balak is already upset, and he doesn't respond, *matas* [what have you done], because he already knows the answer, he already knows the answer to the question he asked last time, I've asked you the curse and you've blessed, he knows the answer, the answer is Hashem told you.

So Balak tells Balak [sic — Balak tells Bilam], you know something, I have a solution for you. Okay, you know something, God doesn't want to curse them, okay, I can't go against you, you can't go against that, but who forced you to bless them? At least just be silent, if God only wants to bless, just be quiet.

Bilam's Response: A Positive Commandment to Speak

And Bilam answers, no, you didn't understand what I said. I didn't only mean to say, Hashem is always, Hashem means I will keep, I will not go against Hashem, that's true, but besides from me not being able to go against Hashem, I also have a positive commandment, whatever Hashem tells me to do, I have to do it, it's like a *mitzvah* [commandment], I will do. So you asked me to get out of the problem by being silent, like doing a pocket veto, that's not going to work. If Hashem tells me to say something, I must say it.

Setup for the Third Cycle: Rosh HaPeor

Okay, now Balak is not discouraged yet, he's still trying a third time. Balak tells Bilam, okay, let me take you to another place. Now we already understand that it's God that we have to placate here, that we get it, maybe we'll take you to a third place, maybe we'll be direct, maybe we'll be correct in the eyes of God, and you'll curse him, curse the people for me from there.

The Interpretive Possibilities of Location Changes

So again, it seems like these places are somehow supposed to show the weakness of the people, maybe as we see, Balak, Bilam is continuously being impressed by the weakness of the people, or by the strength of the people, and we could also interpret this if you want, spiritually he's seeing their good deeds, they're being good people, maybe from the other side, he'll be able to see some weakness, he'll find. We can interpret this in strategic terms, he's looking for a way to get in for a kind of weakness, and then apparently understands that what God is doing is also the strength that they have, so he's going to find some weakness, some angle to get in. Or you can interpret this spiritually as finding some sin or some problem, like we said, *l'habit aven b'Yaakov* [to see sin in Yaakov], maybe we'll find some *aven*.

The Third Location: Rosh HaPeor

So that's what he does, he takes them to a third place, **Rosh HaPeor**. And Peor apparently is also the name of a mountain, and of course we know that there's also Baal Peor, the Baal of Peor, that's the literal meaning of it, right, the God called Baal, Baal is just a word for *adon* [lord], right, the Lord of Peor. **V'hanishkaf al pnei hayeshimon** [And overlooking the Yeshimon] — from which there's a view of the *yeshimon*, and of this place called Yeshimon.

And the same process, the seven *mizbachot* [altars], with seven oxen, seven rams, and they do that. And now we are going to stop, because the chapter stops here, for whichever weird reason, so we will stop also, and continue the third prophecy and the fourth, which is not really part of the story, because there isn't the whole process in it, in the next chapter.