

Series Introduction: Eph. 6:10-18

Balak Destroyer Nonnegotiable and Indispensable are Not the Same

Torah: Numbers 22:2-25:9

When Israel was preparing to cross the Jordan and enter the land, after having gone around both Edom and Moab and into the territory which Moab had lost to the Amorites, one of the Moab leaders gathered the leaders of Moab and of Midian (semi-nomadic south Moabites) and hires a prophet for profit to curse the people. He takes the reluctant spokesman to three of the sacred high places of Moab (Bamoth-Baal, the summit of Pisgah, and the summit of Peor) and attempts to curse the people he knows he cannot defeat in actual combat. This is a good introduction to our new series on spiritual combat, because our three adversaries (the flesh, the world and the adversary) know they cannot defeat us, and that their curses are not even effective against us, so they have to seduce us into sinning against G-d, so that we functionally abandon our faith and or our obedience, because, as long as we stay within the protection of these two staples of our lives, we cannot be defeated or even successfully assaulted (Gen. 4:7). And when we examine the life of Balaam, yes I am talking about many of the prophets for profit, whose ministries flood the TV and the internet and who offer their services for a price.

(1) 22:6. ***Come, I pray you and curse this people for me, for they are more powerful than me and if you do, perhaps I will be able to defeat them and chase them out of the country, for I know that the one whom you bless is blessed and the one whom you curse is cursed (so similar to Gen. 12:2, 3).*** Spiritual power should never be for hire and Balaam is going to learn that G-d is never a weapon you can point at someone, nor a dog you can sick on your enemies. Balaam, a worshipper of Baal has recently seen his people chased out of the best part of their land and he has seen these bullies annihilated by people who were way out of his league (kind of like the Italians recently found out in the 2012 Euro Cup lol). Instead of abandoning his defeated god, he wants to import someone who sort of serves the same G-d, in order to curse the people of that G-d. Is. 54:17 says no weapon forged against us will prosper.

(2) 22:26. ***The angel of the L-RD went along further and placed himself so that there was no space to move out of his way, either to the right or to the left.*** From the context, it is possible to understand that Balaam understood that he was being allowed to go, but had not yet committed himself to only saying what the L-RD told him to say. The donkey saved his life, because – one – no one is indispensable and – two – prophets have to restrict themselves to what G-d tells them and neither add nor delete. Balaam agreed, but later reneged on his agreement.

(3) 24:16 – the freebie. ***Word of the one who hears the words of G-d and of the one who knows the plans of the Most High.*** Balaam pronounces three curses on four groups of people who stand in opposition to Israel: Moab (the Moabites, Amalekites, the Kenites and the Assyrians). Balaam knew that no opposition of any people can stop the people of G-d and may be warning Balak not to waste his time bringing in any of the local big guns. Note: in two week, we will finish the story of Balaam, who had a change of heart and revealed our weak spot – we cannot be destroyed, but we can self destruct.

(4) 25:3. ***Israel became attached to Baal-Peor and the wrath of G-d was inflamed against Israel.*** Neither G-d's blessing, nor His protection are possessions which we own and that we can do anything with once we possess them. They are conditional and can be lost through disobedience (either doing what we should not be doing, or not doing what we should be doing). The new generation repeated the same

category of sin as the gold calf and G-d called upon the people to do two things: hang the leaders of the people (crucify) and then kill their followers and 24,000 were killed.

Haftarah: Micah 5:6-6:8

The first captivity is not hard to understand. The people who violated the land, were being removed from it and only a faithful remnant would return, once it had been cleansed and once our people returned, they were cured of criminal idolatry.

(5) 6:3. ***My people, what have I done? In what have I wearied you? Answer me.*** It is never easy to walk with the L-rd, but the problem is never with the L-rd or with His protection and His provision, it is always with how we respond to His word. The universe unfolds as it should, season after season and He protects us generation by generation, but sometimes it is not enough and it is generally, in my humble opinion, a question of control. It is when we want to be in control, rather than under His control that we get into trouble. He is very patient – took Him 800 years before he booted His people out of the land and the second time, it took Him 1,800 years before He let them back in, but He kept His eye on both of them both times. Whatever happens to us, be it ever so good or ever so bad, it is our connection to G-d that should remain our primary concern, because as long as it is intact, everything will eventually work out – if it falters, everything will eventually come unravelled (remember how thoroughly the glory of the Third Reich was pounded into smithereens [Gaelic for very small pieces]).

(6) 6:8. ***It has been made known to you o man, that which is good and that which the L-RD demands of you – that you practice righteousness, that you love mercy and that you walk humbly with your G-d.*** One of the toughest lessons for us to learn is that our spiritual duty is easy to figure out, even when we don't know why things happen the way they do. We should never subject our obedience to the whims of our understanding or our agreement.

Brit Chadashah: Rom. 11:25-32

(7) 11:29. ***For the gifts and the calling of G-d are irrevocable.*** Israel is the people of G-d and will always be the apple of His eye because of the strength of the promise He made to Abraham, to Moses and to David and the prophets. Not every single last Jewish person will be saved, because there have always been golden calf worshippers (worshippers of Baal-Peor), but eventually, all Israel will get it together and generationally, all Israel shall be saved – in other words as Israel was first in the Gospel, Israel will also be the last to enter, just before the end and even her wandering through the centuries never diminished her calling or the gifts (Torah, Sabbath, Circumcision, Kosher and Israel) she was entrusted with. His calling was a promise to bless the generations of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and neither any one particular generation or even every single generation. The conditions of blessing still apply and should be a lesson to the gentile church, because no one generation is indispensable.

Psalms 79 Jewish Hero: The Talking Donkey

When I was asked recently to preach for Edmonton Chinese Baptist (a relationship that goes back at least 16 years), I wanted to establish a series, in case I was asked to preach four or five messages in a row until they get a new English pastor. Also, in the last Yeshiva series, I was going to end the season with an examination of one of my favorite passages on spiritual warfare: ***Eph. 6:10-18*** – but it didn't work out that way. As well, the summer time is always an interesting time for preaching for two reasons. First people are ***coming and going*** and their thoughts are on sunshine and picnics – so you need something a little

more spicy to keep them awake. Secondly, the **prophetic portions** for the next ten weeks are not going to be connected with the Torah portions, but are going to be focusing on the destruction of the first and second temples and the spiritual preparation we need to engage in to be ready for our annual spiritual virus check and life hard drive defragging: The High Holy Days and Sukkoth. So as a counter balance, here is my series on **dynamic spiritual martial arts**.

Let me first say what I have often said in the past – **spiritual health** is not the same as **spiritual life**. Spiritual life depends on G-d and is the gift we receive when we accept Him into our hearts and lives. Spiritual health depends on how well we learn to have faith in His promises and how well we learn to walk in obedience according to His Word. We need to cherish both of these.

We feed our spiritual life by **resting in the promises** of His Word and rigorously applying Deut. 29:29 to every situation and stage of our tumultuous lives, personally and generationally (internationally). We need to sharpen our spiritual health by learning **the habits of offensive and defensive spirituality** and in this passage Paul uses the weaponry of the then **high tech, unstoppable Roman legionary** to outline a sevenfold empowering we are called to attain and to maintain.

The first thing we have to understand is that our true enemies are NOT flesh and blood (not the Egyptians, not the Assyrians or the Babylonians, not the Romans, the Nazis, or any of the pole in our lives (especially close friends and family) who have ever hurt us or betrayed us in any way shape or form). It is the **fourfold frontal attack of our enemy in the spiritual realm**.

Translations of the four words used in Eph 6:12 may vary, but let me use the NRSV terminology:

(1) First, the spiritual **rulers**, they are **spiritual influences** which affect the secular rulers who rule in our world, because no secular rulers themselves anywhere on the political spectrum are really our enemies – the problem is the influences they are affected by and to which they give in (or resist).

(2) Next the spiritual **authorities**, which are the evil influences that affect **judicial authorities**, whose job it is to uphold (dispense) the law and provide us with protection and justice and also those who are in any position of authority or **supervision** which affects our lives. Policemen, bosses, lawyers and bank managers are not the enemy, but they can be used by the enemy to damage our lives, if we are not careful to live by a strong commitment to biblical **morality** and to biblical **values**. We either go along with things we know are wrong, or we stand against them.

(3) Then the **cosmic powers**. This attack of spiritual attack refers to **world cultural influences and tendencies** and **fashions**, where **unrighteousness** and **cheating** and even **murder** are portrayed as acceptable in the place of telling the truth and doing that which is right. Contemporary **sexual ethics** and the **materialism** of our **pleasure oriented society** are constant sources of **spiritual challenges** for believers who are called not to be conformed to a world that is lost and focused on things which do not matter. What are you focused on – the local version of Vanity Fair or the eternal beauty of holiness?

(4) Lastly there are the **spiritual forces**, where we are warned that there will be **individual, personal attacks of evil** against us as people, which will try to influence us to commit acts of **personal spiritual wickedness** where we break the laws of G-d and **voluntary become disobedient**.

How should we deal with this level of attack – how should we prepare to face it and overcome it?

We have to first **stand**, and that means to set limits for our own conduct and organize our lives in terms of **spiritual priorities** where we take a stand for the Saviour and for His Word. **Next**, whether or not we are prepared for spiritual combat, we will encounter **spiritual conflicts** and the saddest thing about our world today is that most people have either lost the fight against evil in their own lives or are losing ground rapidly, without knowing it. **Abortion** and **sexual misconduct** and **carnal consumerism** are seen as **basic rights**, instead of **basic evils** and too many believers are losing moral ground in their lives along with the world. How about you, are you **withstanding** or are you **succumbing**? We have to win on the personal level before we deal with the community or societal (national, international) level. Finally, once we stand and once we fight, we have to be able to **remain standing** and get ready for **future conflicts** because the war will not be over in this age –it will be a lifelong conflict for all believers and a generational battle for body of our Messiah. How well are you **equipped**? How **ready** are you? How **successful** are you in spiritual warfare?

Throughout this series I will be coming back to the same three questions and I want to introduce them to you here:

(1) How is your equipment doing? Is any of it missing or in poor shape – and are you in good spiritual shape

(2) Do you know how to use it? Does the enemy use any of it against you? Let's quickly look again at the sevenfold equipment:

(a) How good are you at using the (belt of) **truth**? A Rabbi Mike saying: it is only those who tell the truth who actually know the truth.

(b) How is your (breastplate of) **righteousness** doing or are there holes in your armour (things out of control in your life).

(c) How are your **shoes of proclamation** doing – are you involved in redemptive dialogues with those in your world? Or do you avoid sharing because you are afraid of not being cool or of appearing to be religious in a world that is hostile to faith?

(d) Can your **faith** shield you against the fiery darts of the wicked? Romans would soak the leather covers of their shields so fire arrows would sizzle and not ignite. Is your life often ignited? Have you answered all the challenges to your faith or do you sometimes drop your shield when things heat up and run for cover?

(e)How's you **salvation helmet** doing? Is your grasp of the truths of the Bible firm or shaky? Is you head being knocked around by evolutionary propaganda? Are you falling under the influence of relativism and materialism and secular humanism?

Do you have spiritual answers that first make sense to you and then that provide you with answers to the challenges to our faith that the world and the enemy and even our own flesh keep throwing at us?

(f) Do you know how to use the **sword of G-d's Word**? Bible knowledge needs to be solid and current. Is the Bible a closed book for you that you do not really know you way around in? Mormons claim that their

biggest growth group is Baptists who are weak in Bible knowledge – and other cults could make the same claim with other groups of believers, because unless we know our Bible, **this ignorance can be used against us.**

(g) Are you a frequent, effective user of ***the spiritual artillery of prayer***? Not abusing it to get an edge, but using to focus His power and truth on the world around you, to counter the influences of evil and rescue those who have fallen under its occupation, both believers and nonbelievers. I have unbelieving family, friends and coworkers who will not listen to me, but whom I can impact with my prayers.

We need to be laying down a ***constant prayer barrage***, especially when we come under attack. So instead of hiding or running, we need to take aim and fire and pray about things which trouble us and about people who trouble us, until we are able to **see** things G-d's way and are prepared to **do** things G-d's way in every area of our lives.

(3) Finally, the third question **Is it up to date?** Finally is your spiritual equipment ***up to date***? Personal and societal attacks will take different forms and we have to deal with the ability of the enemy, the flesh and the world to ***clone fresh attacks*** with ***newer*** and ***improved*** versions of the same old standard attacks. These basically fall into two broad categories (attacking our faith and our obedience to lead us into functional idolatry and fornication) and will come in three waves (temptation, condemnation and confusion).

Throughout this series I will be wanting to ***refresh our understanding*** of what spiritual warfare really involves and how we need to ***relate successfully*** to it, even if we have to suffer repeated defeats (and fight a rear guard retreat in some areas of our lives, until we are ready to launch our own spiritual versions of D-Day against some of the occupied territories of our lives).

We need to access the **arms of the Spirit** and learn how to become proficient in their use and we need to be able to use them against our real enemies and not allow the enemy to influence us to use them against those who are not our real enemies – but who are either ***fellow victims*** or ***allies*** in the same struggle.

There are ***four levels*** of **spiritual attack** (rulers, authorities, cosmic powers and spiritual forces) we have to be on aware of.

There are ***three levels*** of **preparedness** we need to maintain (standing, withstanding and getting ready for the next attack)

There are ***seven categories*** of **spiritual weaponry** we have to maintain (a belt of truth, a breastplate of righteousness, shoes of proclamation, a doubt quenching shield of faith, a hard headed helmet of salvation, a spiritual sword and an artillery battery of prayer).

In order to engage in ***dynamic spiritual martial arts***, we have to know who our enemy is, we also have to get in shape and stay in shape (and know when to fight and when to run away) and we have to keep our weapons in good repair.

How is your equipment doing?

Do you know how to use it?

Is it up to date?

Let's pray.