

Balak	Destroyer	Fast of the 17 Tammuz
Torah:	Numbers 22:2-25:9	
Haftarah:	Micah 5:7(6)-6:8	
Brit Chadashah:	Romans 11:35-32	

Let's deal with first the Fast of the 17 Tammuz, which occurs tomorrow. Zachariah 8:19 mentions four fasts which YHVH recognizes. They are: first, the fast of the fourth month (17th of Tammuz), next, the fast of the fifth month (9th of AV), then, the fast of the seventh month (Yom Kippur) and finally the fast of the tenth month (10th of Tevet – the original date for Christmas before the Gentiles took it over). Of the fasts, the Bible only gives significant detail about how Yom Kippur should be observed.

For the other three, we must rely upon the Talmud, even if the Talmud is not always a reliable source. It contains a puppy's breakfast of fact, legend and speculation, so all that it says must be taken with a big grain of salt. For the 17 of Tammuz, it outlines several special readings: for the Torah: Exodus 32:11–14 and 34:1–10 (the tragic story of the golden calf) The Haftarah: Isaiah 55:6–56:8 (G-d's great mercy towards His people when they repent).

According to the Talmud, the fast actually commemorates five tragic events that occurred on this date:

1. Moses broke the tablets when he saw the Jewish people worshipping the Golden Calf.
2. During the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, the Jews were forced to cease offering the daily sacrifices due to the lack of sheep.
3. The Roman General Apostomos (he may have been Greek during the time of the Maccabees) burned the holy Torah. Either just one scroll or as many as he could find.
4. An idol was placed in the Holy (2nd) Temple during the time of the Maccabees. (or by King Mannasah while the first temple stood).
5. The walls of Jerusalem were breached by the Romans, in 69 CE, after a lengthy siege. (Three weeks later, after the Jews put up a valiant struggle, the Romans destroyed the second Holy Temple on the ninth of Av). The Jerusalem Talmud maintains that this is also the date when the Babylonians breached the walls of Jerusalem on their way to destroying the first Temple, but we have no historical information to support this claim.

When both temples were destroyed our people, it was because they had broken a covenant oath which they made before G-d, so He withdrew His protection of them. He did not cease loving His people and after the 2nd temple was destroyed our people were scattered among the nations (diaspora) and it is only in this generation that we see so many of them coming home to the re-established nation of Israel.

How do we keep the fast of the fourth month (17 of Av)? Three suggestions. First, while you do not have to fast, it would be good to read the special passages and to review the tragedies which occurred on this day. Next, it would be good to pray for our people, so that they would also come to the faith in the Messiah, when they come back to the land. Lastly, it would be good to search your heart and your life, to make sure that no disobedience is lurking anywhere in the shadows. Disobedience by omission (James 4:17) as well as by commission (I John 1:9).

G-d takes us very seriously and reacts to our choices, be they good or bad. He wants us to take His Word seriously, even when others do not. Most traditional churches are not only choked with strange traditions, but many of them have abandoned all or part of the Bible. This is the greatest apostasy which has ever occurred in history and it is even seeping into mainstream Judaism. Theistic evolution is just another form of idolatry.

There are two categories of disobedience: Idolatry (evolution is the worst kind of idolatry) and fornication (supporting same sex marriages and abortion are two of the worst examples of fornication – even though having sexual relations outside of marriage, also falls into this category).

It is also a good time to identify and purge ourselves of all and any false doctrines which are swirling around our darkening modern world. The Gentile church never replaces Israel as the chosen people of G-d (Replacement theology, also called supersessionism). Israel is also not called to absorb all the Gentiles and certain people groups or nations are not members of the ten lost tribes (two house teaching). No tribes were lost. The Bible does not teach that the world is flat any more than it teaches that there are actually rivers in Israel which literally flow with milk and honey. Trees have no hands and do not really clap them. I could go on to mention many more literary references which are not intended to be taken literally. The world has no edge which you can fall over and while the moon orbits the earth, the sun does not.

Keeping ourselves centred in solid biblical doctrine is an on going challenge as the enemy keeps influencing well meaning, but unstable people, to come up with so much strange teaching. Keeping ourselves grounded in a balanced obedience is also a challenge as some people preach lawlessness, while others preach legalism.

May our walk through this darkening world allow us to shine as salty light, so that people may see both our faith and our obedience and give glory to the One we serve. Nothing more and certainly nothing left.

When you go on line to research any topic, you will always encounter Clint Eastwood. You know the Good, the Bad and the Ugly. Anytime you encounter a new teaching or a new approach to an old teaching, talk to your Rabbi and learn not to be deceived!

Message: **His Boomerang Turns Curses into Blessings** (Numbers 22:2-25:9)

The Bible does not give us any details about the wandering years. Our people come out of the wilderness and two major characters die, first Miriam, then Aaron. As well, Moses hit the rock, instead of speaking to it and lost his right to lead the people into the land.

The people go around the land of Edom and slaughter the two biggest bullies on the block, Sihon and Og, who took the plains of Moab from Moab and chased this defeated people into the mountains. Moab fortified their border with these two conquerors and were very distressed to see the mighty hosts of Israel camping on land which they had been driven out of while Israel was in the safety of Egypt.

We are introduced to the destroyer (which is the Hebrew meaning of Balak) who is part of a series of chiefs or princes who rule over a people that is both called Moab and Midian (south Moab). They realize that a military victory over Israel is an impossibility, so they have to rely on someone who is powerful enough to curse their enemies into oblivion. They do not yet realize that any attempt to curse Israel is like launching a boomerang which will not only bring the curse back to trouble you, but will also turn it into a blessing for Israel.

They send emissaries to a powerful prophet, Balaam, who lives in Abraham's original homeland (Padam Aram). His name is a combination of two Hebrew words: "bala" (to swallow) and "am" (people). We are only given the name which the Hebrews gave him and do not know what his name was originally. So you have the people swallower joining forces with the destroyer to try and defeat Israel by wizardry or witchcraft.

Balaam has some kind of relationship with YHVH, who was likely the most powerful one of the gods he served. He is initially forbidden by G-d to go with the Moabite emissaries. When they come back a second time (and offer an even bigger payment), Balaam is allowed to go with them on condition that he only says what YHVH tells him to say. I wish more believers would follow this command and would quit adding chaff and straw to the mighty, fiery hammer of G-d's Word (Jer. 23:28, 29). G-d's Word never needs to be edited or added on to. Also when He speaks to us, we need to be sure that we do not change or alter what He says and for that, we need to submit it to be judged by reliable people in our midst.

Balaam prepares to leave, but has not yet fully agreed to the limitation which G-d puts on what he can share. On his way, we encounter one of the strangest encounters in the Bible. His donkey sees an angel with a flaming sword and tries to take Balaam out of harm's way. He is beaten for his efforts and G-d grants the donkey speech. He says to Balaam that he has never acted in disobedience before this and only wanted to protect his master.

Then Balaam's eyes are opened and he gets on his knees and bows his forehead to the ground, because he recognizes that the angel is the computer screen through which G-d is speaking to him. In conversation with the angel, he finally commits to only say what he is told to say and offers to return home if YHVH disapproves of his going to meet Balak. He agrees to G-d's terms and promises to be good. Have you also promised to be good?

In his first meeting with Balak, he reiterates that he is only willing to say that which G-d will say through him. He is taken to at least two or three Moabite sacred places on the border which have the camp of Israel in sight. It is Balak's expectation that he pronounce curses on Moab's enemy. It is known that whatever Balaam says comes true and Balak wrongly assumes that Balaam has control over what he says and that this control can be bought.

We can never influence G-d to do or to say anything against His will, even when we name it and claim it at the top of our lungs. I firmly believe in divine healing, but it is never something which anyone can oblige G-d to do, as if He were some kind of circus performer. We ask, we do not claim and we need to be willing to accept whatever G-d decides to do. Pouting will only take us back into a wilderness of our disobedience and remove us from the protection and provision of G-d.

G-d is not a force that we can learn to manipulate, He is a person whose control we need to learn to live under. We still ask, we still trust and when we face our problems from this perspective, He will see to it that we make it home to his house in Glory and get covered in the riches which He reserves for His faithful servants. How is your accumulation of spiritual riches doing? The lost generation failed to follow G-d. Do not fall into the same error.

At the first place Balaam is taken to, he says that he cannot curse the one whom G-d has not cursed. He tells them to build seven altars upon which they are to sacrifice seven bulls and seven rams. Much to Balak's chagrin, Israel is first described as the summit of the peoples and is as numerous as what is surprisingly called the dust of Jacob (23:10). Balaam desires to die the death of the righteous and have the same destiny as Israel.

Well Balak is nothing if he is not stubborn. Balaam is taken to another sacred place and Balak builds seven more altars. The text said that YHVH came to Balaam and put words in his mouth. Balaam reminds Balak that YHVH is not a man to lie or a man to repent. What He says, that is what He will do and what He has declared, He will execute. Balaam says that no enchantment (spells or curses) will work against Israel. This people are described as a mighty lion who lies down to devour his prey and by association, is not a group of people that you want to mess with. Israel will not stop until he has drunk the blood of the wounded who have come against him. Destruction awaits all those who come against the people of G-d. The boomerang effect is still alive today and just as active.

Balak pleads with Balaam and says that if he is not going to curse Israel, at least do not bless them. He takes Balaam to another high place and builds seven more altars and offers seven more bulls and seven more rams to YHVH. To Balak's great chagrin, Israel's tents are described as beautiful and this nation will stretch out in all directions. Israel will devour nations which come against her and will be a blessing to all those who bless her and a curse to all those who curse her. Our people have suffered greatly over the millennia, but all of our enemies and persecutors have always come to a horrible end. Am Yisreal chai, l'olam va'ed – the people of Israel are alive forever more!

Balak gets frustrated with Balaam and tells him to go home, likely without the promised reward. As a parting shot, Balaam gives a very powerful Messianic prophecy. A star shall come out of Jacob and a sceptre will rise out of Israel and will subdue all of its enemies as this One conquers all of Israel's enemy and renders them as dust below His feet. The description of the enemies to be defeated has one name which is problematic. Israel shall humiliate the Hebrew. In this instance Hebrew refers to those who wander and not to the people of G-d.

Balaam goes home and we do not hear from him until the text mentions that it was him who recommended that the Moabites cause Israel to disobey YHVH and practice both idolatry and fornication. He did not share this as a word from G-d, but just as his own evil advice. The next time we encounter this prophet, he is dwelling in the midst of Moab and is executed as part of the punishment imposed upon Moab.

The people are camped at Shittim, just north of the Dead Sea and are getting ready for the second rendering of the Law for the new generation. Moabite priestesses infiltrate the camp and invite the men of Israel to participate in ritual debauchery with them as part of the worship of their gods. Balaam told Balak that Israel cannot be defeated, but will self destruct if they abandon YHVH and practice what became her two besetting sins: Idolatry and fornication. YHVH tells Moses to gather the elders of the people and have them hang the guilty ones before YHVH in front of the sun, which they were sinfully worshipping as a god.

These ladies were temple prostitutes who engaged in every kind of sexual immorality, including encouraging men to practice homosexuality and all kinds of sexual perversions and perverted sexual acts. The people of Israel had as of yet never encountered this sophisticated, and disgusting sexualized religious practice and many of them were overcome by it and began to indulge in this perverted sexualization.

Our society is becoming increasingly sexualized and both men, women and even children are becoming objects of what is becoming acceptable sexual lust. So much of the advertising industry is using men and women in sexual situations and it is becoming common to see both guys and girls walking around in their underwear.

Sex outside of a monogamous marriage between a man and a woman, is fornication and is severely condemned by both the Torah and the Gospel. Men are now increasingly joining women in portrayals of sexual nudity and while the sexual exploitation of children is still condemned, the age of consent is becoming lower and lower and may soon even extend to prepubescent children. I am also thoroughly disgusted that sex with animals is being decriminalized. Much of this is being promoted through segments of what is called the LGBTQ community which wants to see the straight community accept homosexuality as a normal, acceptable way to express gender and sexuality. It will never be acceptable behavior.

Even athletes of both genders are “coming out”. They can now get married legally and even adopt children. My respect for all of our major political parties has evaporated as they seek to fully embrace the gay agenda. Most major religious denominations are jumping on the wagon, with the exception of the Roman Catholic Church (and the Orthodox churches) and mainline Islam. Russia also refuses to decriminalize homosexuality, even though the whole world faces increasing pressure to blindly follow the Gay agenda.

Human rights activists are now fighting for people’s right to practice homosexuality on the same level as they are fighting racism and economic inequality – AND their favourite – climate change. I support human rights, but homosexuals are not a persecuted or misunderstood visible minority which needs protection and climate change refuses to acknowledge the existence of millennial weather patterns as the real cause for global warming.

Homosexuality may have the protection of the Law, but it is still entirely and fully condemned by the Bible and believers should never backslide into believing that it is an acceptable form of human sexuality. It is an abomination and has always been an abomination.

In our portion, Phineas, the dark skinned grandson of Aaron sees a man taking a Moabite prostitute into his tent and kills them both with a single thrust of his spear. This stopped the plague which G-d had sent to punish the idolatrous fornicators. 24,000 people had already died from the plague, which would have only struck those who had succumbed to the sexualized worship of Baal Peor.

We learn in the next portion that a punitive action is going to be taken against the Moabites and Midianites who took Balaam’s advice and sent their women into the camp of Israel as sexual warriors who defeated at least 24,000 of the people. We should never let the values and beliefs of the world defeat us and we need to stand firm on the teachings of the Bible even when they call us dirty names and threaten us with legal action. Beware of all the modern day Balaam’s that are on the prowl, sniffing out ways to sink our faith and our morality. Shavua Tov and Shabbat shalom. G-d can cause any donkey to speak His Word, no matter which pulpit he or she is speaking from!