

Geulas Yisrael #107
Balak: The Keini Challenge
Moshe Taragin

Bilam was certainly persistent. He desperately tried to jinx the Jewish people with pagan spells. When his attempts were repeatedly thwarted, he finally realized that everything, including human speech, is mandated by Hashem. He returns to his homeland of Midyan in shame, deprived of the riches and rewards he so desperately coveted. This has been a wasted road trip for the legendary prophet from Midyan.

Before he departs though, he delivers a final message, this time a prophecy, rather than a curse. Casting his gaze to the end of time, he maps the Messianic era. After portraying the arrival of Moshiach as a meteoric star which shoots across heavens, Bilam chronicles the fall of Edom, Amalek and Ashur, all of whom will be punished for their historical crimes against Jewish history. Bilam's Messianic landscape is extremely binary: we are redeemed while our enemies, effectively enemies of Hashem, are vanquished. There is no space for neutrality.

Yet, there is one nation whose fate isn't predetermined, and they receive historical advice from Bilam. This visionary prophet encourages the tribe of Keini to construct a durable home or a "nest" as strong as a boulder. Who are the Keini tribe and what role do they play within Bilam's Messianic system?

To better understand the Keini model we must inspect an interesting contradiction about the role of gentiles in the Messianic era.

Two Messianic Models

Our prophets presented two conflicting Messianic fates for the international community. Many prophecies describe gentile nations enjoying universal spiritual and material prosperity. Humanity finally acknowledges the Jews as divine agents, tasked with educating Man about monotheism and morality. By contrast, other Messianic prophecies depict violent apocalyptic wars with mass casualties and major population destructions.

Often the very same navi formulates contradictory narratives. In perek 49 Yeshayahu depicts foreign nations fostering and nurturing Jewish destiny- והיו מלכים אומניך ושרותיהם מניקותיך. Yet, in perek 63, Yeshayahu describes Hashem as figuratively returning from battle with bloodied clothing or חמוץ בגדים.

Evidently, some gentiles survive the Messianic era and others do not. Righteous nations benefit from Messianic prosperity while the wicked do not. None of these prophecies though, list the precise qualifications for survival or annihilation.

Historical Affiliation

Presumably, the most important factor influencing Messianic fate is the historical role of various gentile nations. Nations which were kind or even embracing of Jews, and certainly those which aided Jewish history, join the Messianic era. By contrast, those who persecuted Jews, and, certainly, those who clashed with Jewish history will be punished and discarded from that era.

It remains unclear how this historical accountability will unfold. After all, should a modern-day Roman be held accountable for the despicable actions of Vespasian? Should an average German citizen be sentenced for the crimes of the Nazi regime? Our moral sensibilities rail against collective punishment, not to mention historical culpability for sins committed centuries ago, but our prophecies do imply intergenerational responsibility. These are difficult questions, which only Moshiach himself will answer, but Bilam informed the world that decisions of nations affect their long-term historical trajectories in the Messianic era.

The Keini

Which brings us to the curious case of the Keini tribe. They originally occupied a tract of land near Israel, which was included in the territory divinely gifted to Avraham. Ultimately, this nomadic people wandered the ancient Middle East, inhabiting areas south of Israel, as well as southern regions of Israel proper.

Living in these precincts, they could have easily associated with our sworn enemies, the Midyanites and Amalek, each of which lived in that general vicinity. Recognizing this scenario, Bilam strongly encouraged

them to cast their lot with the Jews and to build a solid nest for their future. Fortunately, for their sake, they obliged and affiliated themselves with Jewish history.

Yitro, a Midyanite priest who hailed from Keini origin, was the first to choose Jewish destiny for his tribe, by marrying his daughter to Moshe Rabeinu. Decades later, Otniel a Keinite half-brother of the righteous spy named Calev, spearheaded the conquest of an Israeli city named Kiryat Sefer, receiving Calev's daughter's hand in marriage as reward. By following Bilam's historical instructions, Keini continued to make the right choice,

Of course, the most epic Keini decision occurred when a woman named Yael subdued a Midyanite general named Sisra, clinching our victory in a very tense war. She just happened to be the wife of Chovav, a Keini chieftain who had relocated to the north of Israel. By consistently siding with our people, Keini secured a strong Messianic future.

The Keini Template

This Keinite experience serves as a template for general gentile nations: affiliation with the Jewish nation assures Messianic relevance, whereas hostility to Jews assures historical oblivion.

As history begins to end, and the arc of redemption becomes clearer, we acquire a better sense of which nations have passed the Keini challenge. Our people's return to our homeland would not have been possible without the support of the West. Fresh off their impressive victories in two major 20th century wars, the Western alliance, led by the United States, threw its full diplomatic weight behind the formation of the state of Israel. These nations seem to be Keini successes.

Closer to home, we have benefitted from staunch support of the local Druze population which has valiantly defended our people and our homeland, equal partners in building Israeli society. They are literally walking in the footsteps of the Keini.

By contrast some of the assistance we have received from gentile religions has been perplexing. Evangelical Christians view our return as confirmation of their own Messianic narratives and enthusiastically

support our people. This awkward and unprecedented situation causes much ideological discomfort and no clear answers.

When Moshiach finally arrives, we will know the full Keini roster. Until then, we wait patiently, celebrating the renewed gentile support of our people and looking to the day that most of humanity will bask in the knowledge of Hashem.