



PhiloTorah D'var Torah

Parshat Balak = 95 & 9

As mentioned in the Sedra Summary, Parshat Balak's parsha-breakdown is unique and very telling.

Parshiyot in the context of the Torah - not to be confused with Parshat HaShavua - are the paragraphs (for lack of a better word) into which the Torah is divided. A Sefer Torah does not indicate the end of one pasuk and the beginning of another. It does not indicate sedra breaks. The only "spacings" (if that's the right word) in a Torah Scroll are the four empty lines between Books, and the spaces between PARSHIYOT. Those spaces come in two forms: A Parsha P'tucha (open paragraph) begins on a new line, the previous parsha being followed by leaving the rest of the line on which it ends, blank. A Parsha S'tuma (closed paragraph) beginning on the same line on which the previous parsha ended, with a blank space between them. There are 295 parshiyot p'tuchot in the Torah and 379 s'tumot, for a total of 674 parshiyot.

With 54 weekly sedras, the average number of parshiyot per sedra is about 12.5 - the range is from 1 to 44. Vayeitzei and Mikeitz are each a single long parsha and Ki Teitzei has 44 parshiyot.

This "report" serves to highlight the

unusual parsha makeup of Parshat Balak.

Balak has 104 p'sukim. The first 95 p'sukim are in a single parsha s'tuma, containing the whole story of the Balak-Bil'am alliance and their failed attempts to curse Bnei Yisrael in the hope (Balak's) that Moav would then be able to chase Bnei Yisrael from their border.

Some commentaries express the idea that HKBH considered (so to speak) the threat so serious that He took care of the situation on His own (again, so to speak) and did not involve Bnei Yisrael in the events. The only way we know what happened is that HaShem included the story in the Torah. The People did not witness what was happening. This, as opposed to all of the Books of Sh'mot, Vayikra, Bamidbar, and D'varim - the events of which were witnessed by millions of Bnei Yisrael.

Ninety-five p'sukim that elicit our gratitude to HKBH for His protection and for His having chosen us as His treasured nation.

And then comes the second and final parsha (a p'tucha) of Parshat Balak. Only 9 p'sukim long, this parsha tells us of the results of the parting advice that Bil'am and Balak shared - namely, if we can't harm these people because of God's relationship with them, then let's see if we can cause that relationship to suffer and let the chips fall where they may.

And so, the women of Moav and Midyan (including the princess of Midyan) seduced the Israelite men to the orgiastic, immoral worship of Baal P'or. This plan of B&B sadly succeeded where their first plan failed so miserably, with a plague that claimed 24,000 Israelite lives, and would have continued except for the zealous act of Pinchas. All of this within this 9-pasuk parsha.

Bottom line message from Parshat Balak - When we find favor in G-d's Eyes (to speak anthropomorphically, as the Torah often does), no one can harm us. And when we rebel against G-d or turn away from the Torah Life He wants for us and commands us to follow, then...

Oversimplified? Perhaps. But many episodes in Jewish History - including current events - fall somewhere between the extremes of the 95 and the 9 of Parshat Balak. It is up to us - as individuals and as part of Klal Yisrael, to work hard to bring about a more harmonious relationship with HKBH. And we know what's involved in that. **PTDT**