

# PROPHET MOTIVE

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

We find that the words of Bilaam which were intended as a curse, in the end were high praise for the Jewish Nation. They not only made it into the Torah for all time but also into our daily liturgy, "How goodly are your tents oh Yaakov, your dwelling place Yisrael..." (Numbers 24:5) How could this prophetic personality have missed the mark so badly? Why was he so inept at employing the power of speech and his prophetic wisdom to land one punch on, the often criticized, Nation of Israel? How did this most unlikely of characters, Bilaam become one our greatest advocates and most flattering spokesman?

Two professors were called in from a distance to give a model lecture for one job slot. They were put into adjoining rooms in the same hotel. One man practiced his speech over and over again in loud and demonstrative tones constantly refining his brilliantly crafted lecture. The other man, hearing his competition, realized he was no match in either content or delivery. So, in an act of unjustifiable desperation, he listened well through the ultra-thin walls taking copious notes.

As fate would have it, the next morning at the university the man with the plagiarized speech was chosen to deliver first. To the other man's utter astonishment he had the nerve to present word for word, intonation for intonation the exact lecture he had worked so hard to develop. When he was finished, the review board was so marvelously impressed that they could hardly hold back the spontaneous applause elicited by his ill gotten albeit brilliant remarks.

The next candidate was now called to follow this impossibly hard act. His own script, his very own words were torn right out of his mouth. How was he now to respond? What was he to say? He simply acknowledged the brilliance of the prior presenter and explained why his words were so inspiring and meaningful to him. He told those present that he sincerely believed that anything worth saying is also worthy of being repeated. Anything worth saying is also worthy of being repeated. So word for word, intonation for intonation he repeated the brilliant speech. There was no spontaneous outburst of applause but the observers were sufficiently amazed by his remarkable memory for every detail, his personal humility and appreciation for quality thinking that they offered him the job.

Bilaam spoke not according to his own will or agenda although he would have loved to. The words he uttered so brilliantly and poignantly were not his own. This is the bind of real prophecy. He can be no more than a mouthpiece or amplifier of words beyond himself. A prophet is like a window that allows light to enter a room and less like an original source of light. Therefore the lesson plan he was

forced to deliver was by definition a piece of truth not his own. Wonderful praise for a noble nation flowed from his lips though his heart melted within.

As the tape recorder to the recorded message or the mirror to the reflected image, Bilaam's words, in spite of himself, ring true. Bilaam delivered a marvelous lecture but the words, not his own were not at peace with him. He actually wanted to bludgeon, abuse, and profit from the power of his speech. Not like the mother when complimented on the precious appearance of her baby remarked, "If you think he's cute, you should see the pictures!" We dare not elevate above or even equate the messenger and the message. The one who truly deserves the job is willing to \_give\_ credit rather than take it, lives up to and according to his own words, and has no ulterior prophet motive.

Good Shabbos!

---

Text Copyright &copy 2000 [Rabbi Dovid Green](#) and **[Project Genesis, Inc.](#)**

---