

REMEMBER BALAK'S ROLE

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Although Bilaam is the major villain of the piece in this week's parsha, we should not overlook Balak's nefarious role in the events described therein. Balak is the instigator of the whole plot to curse and destroy the Jewish people. He finances Bilaam and is most persistent in pursuing his evil goal. Even when Bilaam apparently despairs of the success of his mission and so informs Balak,

Balak nevertheless insists that he continue, for perhaps he will yet be able to curse the people of Israel. Often in Jewish history we find this scenario repeated, with those behind the scenes persistently encouraging the masses to destroy the Jews while they stay a pious distance behind, causing, but somehow apparently not participating in, the murderous mayhem.

As hate filled as Bilaam is he cannot operate alone. He needs financial and social backing for him to do his worst. Bilaam is eventually killed by the very people he attempted to destroy. But Balak always lives on to try again to accomplish the destruction of the Jewish nation. Balak never makes peace with the idea that the Lord does not allow him his goal. His tenacity for hatred and evil behavior is his true hallmark of his identity.

Centuries later the prophet reminds us of Balak's scheme and advice to Bilaam and warns us somehow not to overlook Balak's role in this story of aggression and unreasoned hatred. Through remembering the original Balak, the prophet informs us that we will be better able to identify and deal with his successors in deceit and hatred throughout the ages.

It is not the suicide bomber - Bilaam - that is the only guilty party in terrorist attacks. It is the Balaks who send them and support them that are certainly equally as guilty. The pious human rights organizations that promote only hatred and violence under the guise of doing good deeds are also responsible for the loss of the precious lives of innocents caused by those whom they so nurture and support.

The Talmud stated this reality by coining the famous Jewish aphorism: "It is not the mouse alone that is the thief. It is rather the hole in the wall that allows the mouse entry into the house that is the real thief." It is the persistence of those that are determined to undermine the Jewish people and the State of Israel that places them as direct immoral descendants of Balak.

In the Pesach Hagadah we read that in every generation we face this challenge. No matter how many Bilaams we are able to dispose of, Balak somehow survives to continue to try again. The words of the prophet in this week's haftorah - to remember Balak's role in the story of the Jewish

people in the desert of Sinai - are addressed to us and our times as well.

We should not be shocked, though our sadness over this fact is understandable, that the malevolence against Jews of the 1930's can repeat itself in 2011. As long as Balak still remains a force in the world the Jewish problem will not go away.

Shabat shalom,
Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com