

"Balaak, the son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, sent messengers to Bilaam, the son of Beor in Pethor, which is by the Euphrates, in the land of his kinfolk, to invite him saying, 'There is a people that came out of Egypt; it hides the earth from view, and it is settled next to me. Come then and put a curse on this people for me, since they are too numerous for me; perhaps I can thus defeat them and drive them out of the land. *For I know that he whom you bless is blessed indeed, and he whom you curse is cursed!*'"

Numbers 22:4-6

☞Why did God give Bilaam the power of prophecy, power to bless and curse?☞

**Ramban:** There is a big difference between the prophecy of a Moses and a Bilaam. Moses did not run after prophecy; in fact, he tried to avoid it. He sensed his own inadequacy. Bilaam meant to use his gift for high paying magic tricks. He wanted to harness the Divine Will for his own purposes.

**Sifrei:** There has been no prophet in Israel like Moses, but the gentiles had their Bilaam, the son of Beor.

**Tanhuma:** God did not want the heathen world to say that they had never been given a chance to understand the Divine Will. God did not want them to have an excuse, saying that God had kept them at a distance, and did not give them the same chance Israel had. Israel had kings, prophets, and sages, all of whom were tested by God. The heathens also had their fair share, but they did not learn the lessons. The Israelites had their Solomon, but Babylon had their Nebuchadnezzar. Solomon built a Temple for God, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it. God gave David wealth and he used it to finance the Temple. God gave Haman wealth. He used it to trap and attempt the destruction of all the Jewish people in his realm.☞God appointed Moses for Israel, and spoke with him whenever he wanted. God appointed Bilaam for them and spoke with him whenever he wanted. One used his gifts to help God forge a people into a nation who would obey and serve God. Bilaam used his gifts to undermine morality and defy God.

**Tanna deRebbi Eliyahu:** God withheld nothing from Bilaam. God did not want it ever said that the heathens had not been given a chance to live by the Torah. On the Day of Judgment, God does not want the heathen prophets to come before the Throne and complain that they would have accepted the Torah if they had one like Moses. Bilaam was superior in wisdom to Moses, but he misused his gifts.

**Micah 6,5:** My people, remember now what Balaak the king of Moab counseled and what Bilaam the son of Beor answered. Bilaam only came to Balaak to curse Israel. Bilaam was asked to come curse Israel. Bilaam should have refused Balaak, but he rejoiced at the opportunity to curse Israel, even more than Balaak had asked or

expected.

**Professor Urbach:** Prophecy was not an exclusive gift for Israel. There was no racial or cultural characteristic involved here. On the contrary, prophecy, the ability to directly communicate with God, was bestowed on all human creatures. The gift of prophecy was given to all human beings, to impress upon the world that the choice of Israel was not arbitrary. The choice of Israel was their reward for being ready and willing to accept the Torah. The Hebrew prophets not only preoccupied themselves with the reform of their own people, but also with that of other peoples as well. Bilaam, on the other hand, went out to corrupt and destroy Israel. Bilaam is the type of person who has been given the opportunity to scale the loftiest spiritual heights; but fails to stand the test and forfeits his status.

**Rabbi Yochanan:** God offered the Torah first to all nations, one by one, but all refused. Only Israel accepted. Prophecy was a gift to all nations so that none should ever say, "You didn't offer us Your Torah!"

**Leibowitz:** A person's natural qualities do not determine their spiritual status, nor do their God given talents. Even the supreme gift of prophecy cannot turn one into a saint against their will, or without their efforts. A person's own will is the sole factor determining whether one will use their qualities, talents, and gifts for good or evil. It depends solely on one's free will to aspire to the sainthood of a Moses or to descend to the villainy of a Bilaam.