

PARASHA BALAK

וירא בלק בן-צפור את כל-אשר-עשה ישראל לאמרי: ויגר מואב מפני העם
מאד כי רב-הוא ויקץ מואב מפני בני ישראל:

In last week's Torah portion, which is called Chukat, the Israelites continued their journey toward the Holy Land. When they arrived in Amorite territory, they requested permission to pass through peacefully. The Amorites, however, denied their request and went to war against them instead. But God was with the Israelites, and they triumphed over the Amorites. In this week's parasha, the Moabite king, Balak, resorts to the power of cursing after seeing Israel's victory over the Amorites. *"And Balak, the son of Zippor, saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites."* (Numbers 22:2) To ensure the downfall of Israel, he offers Balaam, a renowned pagan prophet, fabulous riches in exchange for cursing Israel.

In this week's haftarah Micah gives a series of short prophecies directed at the Israelites in exile, whom he refers to as the "remnant of Jacob." Though the people may feel like droplets of dew, hopelessly spread out upon other nations, their renewal will come from God. They will rise like a lion and trample their foes. This transformation, from a tiny drop of water to the king of all animals, symbolizes the changes that will come to the people of Israel. They will go from being very weak to very strong. Even while Micah is encouraging the exiled nation, he warns them that on the very same day that they vanquish their foes, their own idols and false gods will be demolished. Soothsayers and sorcerers will be destroyed. While God gives His nation strength, he will wreak havoc on those who still believe in other gods. Micah then speaks on God's behalf and invites mountains, hills, and the firm foundation of the world to bear witness as God recounts how poorly His own nation has treated Him. He brought them out of Egypt, and gave them strong leaders—Moses, and Aaron. God reminds His people about the prophecy of Balaam who was commissioned by Balak the King of Moab to curse the Israelites. But when Balaam opened his mouth, God changed Balaam's evil prophecy into one of strength and dignity. This is just one example of God's graciousness. God laments that people seem to think they can please Him with a steady stream of sacrifices, instead of by acting honorably. Finally, Micah closes with a summation of what God wants from His people: *"He has told you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do justice, and to love goodness, and to walk modestly with God."* (6:8) While the story of Balak and Balaam would be a safe way to go with this teaching as the parasha and haftarah work for that... I want to go in another direction. Bear with me... as I talk about two queens and what God wants.

Where you find pride, you will find scorn and despising of other people. Scorn blinds people and makes you think that you are god or better than others and so you start taking matters into your own hands, manipulating, scheming and plotting.

Where there is pride, the feeling of I am better than you will not be absent. Lies too will not be absent. And we know that lies morph until, most clarity if not all is blurred. Talk about a web of deceit that spins and spins until it is out of control. From Lucifer to Adam and Eve to us, from pride to lies to outright blind chaos. So blind are we, when the Messiah came, we ensured he was dead, yet He is the truth and life and laid down His life willingly and took it up again. Look people, a battle against Yeshua cannot be won. Bottom line, part of the moral of this writing is that eventually, whatever is in your heart will be exposed for your glory or for your shame and disgrace.

So, we have two queens. Two ladies connected to immense wealth and strategic position. Abigail and Michal were contemporaries. Queen Michal of Israel formerly Princess Michal of Israel and Queen Abigail of Israel formerly Mrs. Abigail Nabal wife of Nabal the wealthy drunken fool. Both were beautiful, co wives. Each experienced a marital relationship with David and with another man, for Abigail it was Nabal the rich fool and for Michal, Adriel the man who wept after her like a love-sick puppy dog till he was rudely and abruptly dismissed by Abner and promptly left. I bet if David met him, David would have spat in absolute disgust and contempt. Anyway, back to our teaching, these two ladies had the best the world had to offer in addition to being married to a king. Privileged women. Not your typical Cinderella story of rags to riches. Real queens of Israel. King David series. In this episode we are giving Queen Bathsheba a break. However, one key difference among the two women. Their attitude towards God, sacred things, holy things and David. Small pointer when Abigail met David she prophesied, 1 Samuel 25:23-31, when Michal saw David in service to Adonai, she despised him, she scorned him in her heart and told him so to his face and David mentioned her dead father unfavorably in the ensuing couple word throw fest and their differences were irreconcilable from then on. Cruel? Maybe. But she had also mentioned or alluded to David's Father who was also David's God and so all bets were off. Ladies and gentlemen, get angry at me if you want but don't start fights with your spouse over family, it's a lose/lose situation. We see Abigail honoring David, bowing low before him. Using wise words in what is undoubtedly a serious life-threatening situation caused by her husband, a situation that endangered her life and other lives. We see her active in thought and womanly responsibilities that are discussed openly in Titus 2 but shunned by women nowadays, including women who call themselves children of God yet they have chaotic homes and can't even cook a pancake but will blame the man for all the ills in her life and the world while she has spends her days lazily self-absorbed, sulking around with a long face watching vain people on screens. Yet, men can be no better.

Back to Abigail and Michal, one being able to walk out of a cursed situation into royalty simply by using wisdom and womanly intuition, another walking into barrenness and loneliness by being selfish and using her words. See Michal. No doubt a little bit spoilt no fault of her own, but when the time came for her real heart to be exposed, as will one day come for all of us, Michal despised David and his worship of Adonai.

She spoke rudely and condescendingly to him. Before that she lied to her own father. She could have let David escape and borne the consequences and bravely faced up to her father like Jonathan did. In addition, the Bible does not indicate that she resisted marriage to another man while David was still alive despite the bride price David paid for her. As someone said, don't trust people who betray their own relatives. Let's look at the ending, Michal disappears but even her big sister's children are taken and killed because of their father Saul and his disregard for God and sacred instructions. She dies childless. But wait a minute! What kind of childlessness is this that extends to the whole family? This sister of hers, Merab was promised to David but given to another man. One feels for Michal at this stage in her life. Doubtlessly in tormenting sorrow, all the male relatives in her line were killed. Do not let a David, a man of God deservedly curse you, you will be a barren desert. Repent. Seek the mercy of God early. Could she have been the lifeline for Saul's family? Was she supposed to bear an heir for David? Was she supposed to have been used to bringing mercy and some kind of redemption and comfort to Saul's family as David's wife? We may never know on this plane but if she was to do so, it all went down the drain when she spoke insolently to her husband, who as some say never touched her again alluding to the fact that she was capable of reproduction just that her husband was not intimate with her ever again.

Contrast with Abigail, humble woman who honors greatness and recognized and abhorred foolishness although she lived with him daily but learnt to cover him until God Himself handled her situation. Lived graciously and with wisdom with both a fool and a king. Her reward, she ended up in a palace with a son in David's line. Note that her son is not known for the dramatic events that caused upheaval in the house of David. David and his two queens, one rash and proud, one righteous and humble. So what? How does this concern me and you? Put another way, many ask, "What does the Lord want of me?" Part of the answer is in Micah 6:6-8. Adonai requires you to: Act justly, Love mercy, and Walk humbly. God gives us the freedom to choose how we will respond to Him. So, what does this mean? We continue with our two ladies of the teaching, both of them married to David. Two queens. Michal and Abigail. Let us examine their similarities. No doubt extremely beautiful and classy ladies, both from wealthy backgrounds. Michal, the daughter of Israel's first king, Abigail, wife of a wealthy man. Both are associated with flawed men. Michal's father Saul had problems with Adonai and so did Abigail's first husband, Naboth. Both Saul and Naboth died unnatural deaths. Both were David's wives, and both were loved and needed by God and David. Both had a God given purpose in the life and times of David. I will stop with the similarities here. Let us go to the differences.

I will base these differences on Micah 6:6-8. Abigail was just. When her husband did wrong to David, she rose and remedied the wrong and saved David from unnecessary bloodshed.

She could have folded her hands and said, *"It's about time; I was delivered from this terrible marriage."* But she didn't, she remedied the situation and did not talk to her husband about it. She waited until he could handle it. Anyway, later God killed him, and she married David. Abigail did not scheme or play games; she just did what was required and played the role of protecting the man who was her husband. Never mind that he was a drunken fool. And God rewarded her by giving her a better incomparable husband, a king, David himself. Like it or not, it's the truth. Michal was not just and as said earlier honesty was a difficult thing for her. She lied to her father. Her own biological father! I heard a certain preacher saying that if you betray your own relatives, you are on a sure downhill slide. Who will trust you then? They will use you, then dump you. He said that it is better to keep quiet than openly and publicly fight your kin. Wash dirty linen in private especially when it concerns your kin. Remember Cain. And for sure, I know David thought, if she can do this to her own father, what will she do to me, a former shepherd? But being David, a man full of grace, he took it in his stride and gave her space and time to remedy what was in her heart. After events, Michal was married to another man, and David being David sent for her when he became king, and she was brought back to his palace leaving husband number two falling apart in tears. David understood her and the situation and gave their marriage another chance. But clearly, her heart was not changed, and the root showed clearly with the strong words she spoke to David concerning his worship of Adonai, the Most High. The words she spoke revealed her true heart, she did not, let's say know God and was not concerned about His matters as much as David was.

There is an exchange recorded in 2 Samuel 6: 20-23. I can only imagine it. Those who have been married can know. This exchange marked the end of Michal and possible the end of her second chances with David and who knows maybe with God. What was the problem with Michal? Michal lied. These lies of hers showed her pride, her proneness to self-sustenance and survival. She did not repent of her lies to her father. Secondly, she did not believe David would ever be king, she was in it for herself, maybe because he was handsome and virile. If she had believed in David's anointing, like Jonathan, her brother did, she would have given up everything for him and would have resisted Saul's remarriage plan. She cooperated with David for her own benefit, to prove a point to both David and Saul or for her own selfish gains. But then she cooperated with Saul concerning remarriage and later when the grass turned green for David, she left the previous green pasture marriage and went back to David. Later on, she said the unthinkable to David, reflecting and revealing her opinion of God and His people and her fate was sealed. Like father like daughter. Indeed, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The first sign of injustice is usually a lie brewed to distort the true image or picture of things. This world nowadays is full of lies and liars. The father of lies and his deception machinery is fully active. Full of deception. So deceived that some do not know whether they are male or female, yet it is clear to us all.

So deceived that those who know the truth and speak the truth are hounded and bullied into silence, a kind of deception. Deceptive vanities that are passing away. Beloved, do not be deceived and do not deceive. Bare your heart before Adonai. Ask Him to clean and remove the spirit of lies and deception, which works with scorn and behind them all is pride, deadly pride. They may look unrelated but ask yourself, why do you lie? Answer, to save face. There you have it. People, I truly believe that only the pure in heart will see God. In the Psalms, David craves a pure heart, a clean heart. He begs for it, not wanting to be cast away from the presence of God. Who knows if what he saw in Michal made him do some serious and intense soul searching. Let us walk in truth, let us walk in Yeshua, our Messiah. He said, *"I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by me."* Embrace truth, it will lead you to doing justice to yourself and others and you will reap the benefits not only on this earth but also in the world to come. I know that God was extending His hand of mercy to the household of Saul through Michal, but she flatly rejected the offer. Imagine if Michal and David had a child, how different things would have been. Adonai is moving mountains to redeem you and your family from the darkness of the past. Just as He did with Saul's family through Michal. Why not cooperate with Him? You may ask how, by doing the right thing according to the Word of God. It will work in your favor. Trust in Adonai and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path. Stop all this scheming and plotting, all this using of the people of God to further your own ends. It will backfire ...badly.

Abigail loved mercy. She showed compassion and mercy to Naboth, David and his men and by extension to her own household. As said previously, we do not hear of Abigail and her son being involved in any of the dramas that erupted in David's household. The expression of mercy is always a symptom of great wisdom and humility. A symptom of forgiveness hidden in the heart. See the parable of the servant who was forgiven his debts but could not forgive another who owed him way less. Wasn't he a fool? He ended up losing everything. When you show mercy and compassion, which walk together with forgiveness, you are wise, because you will reap the same heaped down, shaken together and running over. In contrast, Michal was a self-seeking princess and queen who lost it all and died barren. I don't think her barrenness only concerned children. I think isolation from David yet still being in the palace, seeing the destruction of her father's house and seeing the establishment of David's throne eternally must have worked negatively for her. She once had it all and lost it all. Character, beloved, character! God gives us the freedom to choose how we will respond to Him. Abigail accepted her position as Naboth's wife and worked towards fulfilling it not against terminating her marriage and not against him which if she had would have been shooting herself in the foot. Many ladies... I also add gentlemen, today scheme against their own husbands and family members. They do things that make you wonder if they will escape the result. As the old proverb goes, those who live in glass houses should not throw stones, whether they are outside or inside, I dare add.

As said earlier, beware of those who betray their kin. The choice is yours, beloved, whether you will be lowly, humble and wise like Abigail and let Yeshua take the wheel or whether you will sort yourself out like Saul and his princess Michal. Note that Yeshua takes the wheel is also a symptom of loving and trusting Yeshua deeply. Remember Beloved, even victims have choices. No matter how much we have been sinned against we still have the power to choose the attitude of our heart and how we shall react to situations.

We must walk humbly. As children, we were told take pride in your work, take pride in your appearance, be proud of yourself. Value yourself. The intention behind the seeming encouraging words from our teachers and parents may have been good. But according to Paul, it's all dung. All these things we value, hide our real selves while doing. Scripture teaches humbling yourself and says explicitly that those who raise themselves up will be brought down and those who humble themselves will be lifted. Everything we say and do will be tested by fire and only what can withstand the fire will remain. Am I saying be a doormat? No. I'm saying, know and understand your place, know and fulfill your role and responsibility. Know and understand submission and who you should submit to. Know your God and His requirements of and from you. Then fulfill these requirements and trust Him in the result. Don't play God. Like Abigail and Michal, we may find ourselves in situations not of our own making and not of our liking. We may have many questions. But to some questions only God has the answers. It is we who choose how we respond to what life brings or permits our way. We can be bitter and angry and vengeful like the prostitute who demanded the baby be sawed in half. Interestingly, the baby was not sawn in half, but instead the baby was handed over to the rightful owner and the liar exposed and disgraced. Beloved, once again, lying will get you nowhere. We can also plot and scheme our way through life, being unstable in our ways, jumping from green pasture to greener pasture and back and find out that the grass was green because it was a swamp with no footing. As scripture says, unstable people will get nothing from Adonai. People, you must stick to the path The Most High has ordained for you. He has good plans for you, and no one can thwart these plans except yourself. Scripture says, many are the afflictions of the righteous, but Adonai delivers him/her from them all. Scheming and plotting have a way backfiring and leaving you with egg in your face.

As I wrap up, I want to focus in on *Micah 6:8* a little more... It says, *"He has told you, humanity, what is good, and what Adonai is seeking from you: Only to practice justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."* The Bible is filled with great men and women who walked with God: • Adam walked with God • Enoch walked with God. • Noah walked with God. • Abraham walked with God. • Hannah walked with God. • Jacob walked with God. • Moses walked with God. • Deborah walked with God. • Elijah walked with God. • Elisha walked with God. • Isaiah walked with God. • Jeremiah walked with God. • John walked with God. • Mary walked with God. • Paul walked with God. • Peter walked with God.

We all know that we are supposed to walk with God. We know that we are commanded to read the Bible and pray every day. Sadly, many Believers do not have a daily, fruitful, enjoyable, consistent walk with God. Why? There are two reasons: 1) They don't want to. That is, it isn't a priority for them and, 2) They don't know how to. That is, they have tried and failed. You must walk with God. That is the purpose for which God created you. You can walk with God. But, how?

Let's examine some principles that will help you walk with God:

1) See yourself as you really are. You cannot walk with God while you think yourself to be more than you are. Pride will hinder your prayers from being heard and close your eyes to the truths of the Bible. How do you see yourself as you really are? Consider the example of King David: *Psalm 51:4-5, Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me.* Be honest and open with God. Admit your sinfulness and confess openly and thoroughly to God. *Genesis 18:27 "Then Avraham answered and said, "Look, pray, I have decided to speak to my Lord, though I am dust and ashes:"* God does not walk with proud people!

2) See God as He is. Before you pray or read your Bible, take a moment to remind yourself of the greatness and majesty with Whom you are about to fellowship. *Psalm 46:10 "Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth."* There is a balance of intimacy and reverence that we must achieve in our walk with God. Remind yourself of the greatness of God before you come into His presence. Think of His great power, holiness, glory and strength. Know His providence in your life.

3) Convince yourself of the need to walk with God. You will never have a consistent walk with God until you have learned what a great privilege and priority it is to do so. Walking with God is not very important to most Believers. How do I know that? Because they spend more time getting showered and ready for the day than they do with God. You must deliberately convince yourself that you need to walk with God, or else you may never do so. How can you convince yourself? Obey Scripture: *Micah 6:8* says, *"He has told you, humanity, what is good, and what Adonai is seeking from you: Only to practice justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."* Then *1 Peter 2:2*, *"As newborn babes, long for pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow toward salvation."* See your great need for God. Yield to your desire as a child of God. Be around others who walk with God and read biographies of those who walked with God.

4) Purpose in your heart to walk with God every day. You must make a solemn decision to walk with God every day. It may be necessary to make a public decision or tell a close friend of your decision. *Daniel 1:8* tells us, *"Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself."*

5) Set a daily time for your walk with God. Again, in *Daniel 6:10*, "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforesaid." The reason that many Believers do not have a consistent walk with God is simple: Walking with God is not a habit for them. Make your walk with God a part of your daily schedule, just like eating, sleeping, driving to work, going to school, etc. Make it a part of your daily routine and set aside at least an hour.

6) Choose a place where you can walk with God. We read in *Genesis 19:27*, "And Avraham got up early in the morning to the place where he stood before Adonai:" Find somewhere convenient where you can read the Bible and pray without interruptions and distractions. This will reinforce the habit of walking with God. Then have a place where you meet God each day. It will become a holy, special place, and it will help you to walk with God.

7) Do not squeeze God out of your schedule! If you are too busy to walk with God, you are too busy! *Matthew 6:33* says, "But seek you first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Also in *Exodus 20:3* we read that "You shall have no other gods before me." Why don't many Believers walk with God? Because it is not a priority for them. You must choose to make it a priority.

8) Plan your Bible reading and prayer time. *Proverbs 30:25* tells us, "The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer;" The ants are wise enough to plan for the cold winter months when they will have no food. Yet, most Believers are not wise enough to plan their lives. There's a saying, "When you fail to plan, you plan to fail." Plan what you will do in your Bible reading, and in your prayer time. Write out a strategy and stick to it. Plan your work, then work your plan.

9) Be patient and persistent. It's never easy to walk with God: We read in *Matthew 26:41*, "Keep watching and praying, so that you won't enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." It's hard because it is spiritual, and nothing spiritual is easy. Sometimes you may feel like you are getting nothing out of your Bible reading. You may be confused, and even bored at times. Sometimes you will wonder if God even hears your prayers. You often will not feel like praying, or you may fall asleep in prayer. Should you quit because it is hard? NO! *Galatians 6:9* says, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season, we shall reap, if we faint not."

You will never be a joyful, useful and fruitful Believers if you do not learn to walk with God. Your personal life, your marriage, your children and your career will never reach their full potential if you don't walk with God. You can walk and must walk with God. Will you?

b'Shem Yeshua, haMelech v'haMashiach Shelanu! Amein.
(*"in the name of Yeshua, our King and the Messiah! Amein."*)