



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

Bilaam's Sinister Speech

Sicha Summary

Chelek 18 | Matos | Sichas 1

The Verse:

The Jewish people waged a war of revenge against Midian, but spared the females. Moses admonished the military captains for this misplaced act of compassion:

“Moses said to them, ‘Did you allow all the females to live? It was they who caused the children of Israel, by the word of Balaam, to betray G-d regarding the matter of Peor, resulting in the plague among G-d’s congregation.’” (*Bamidbar* 31:15-16)

The Rashi:

By the word of Balaam — He said to them, “Even if you assemble all the multitudes of the world, you will not be able to overcome them. Are you more numerous than the Egyptians, who had six hundred chosen chariots? Come, and I will advise you. Their G-d hates immorality. [thus, entice them to sin with your women...],” as appears in the chapter of *Cheilek* (*Sanhedrin* 106a) and in *Sifrei* (*Mattos* 43).

The Questions:

Rashi previously related Balaam’s scheme in his commentary on Balaam’s words (in *parshas Balak*), “Come, I will advise you.” (*Bamidbar* 24:14) There, however, Rashi does not include Balaam’s preface: “Even if you assemble all the multitudes of the world, you will not be able to overcome

them. Are you more numerous than the Egyptians, who had six hundred chosen chariots?”

- 1) Why does Rashi find it necessary to cite this lengthy preface here and not in *parshas Balak*?
- 2) Why does he only mention the “six hundred chosen chariots” (*Shemos* 14:7) and not the far more imposing description later in that verse, “all the chariots of Egypt, with officers over them all”?

The Preface to the Explanation:

In *parshas Balak*, the Torah only mentions Balaam’s “advice” — “come, I will **advise** you.” Rashi, therefore, only mentions his plot, “Their G-d hates immorality [thus, entice them to sin with your women].”

Here, however, Moses speaks about “Balaam’s **words**,” implying that Balaam’s advice was part of a lengthier speech that was relevant to Moses’ admonition of the military officers.

The Explanation:

Bilaam explained to Balak that the Jewish people could not be overcome by physical force. Balak knew this; he saw how they defeated the mighty armies of Sichon and Og. Balak thought, however, that he could hurt them through spiritual, occult forces, such as Bilaam’s sorcery.

Therefore, Bilaam continued, saying that the Jews were impervious even to those who had spiritual advantages: “Are you more numerous than the Egyptians, who had six hundred chosen chariots?” These chariots, Rashi explains in *Shemos*, “belonged to those who feared the word of G-d,” yet still they failed to overpower the Jews. The only way to defeat the Jews, Bilaam concluded, was to wage a war of seduction against the Jews: “Their G-d hates immorality.”

Moses was angered that the soldiers spared the females, not because of their past behavior, but because they were on the front lines in the Midianite campaign against the Jews. As the Torah notes, “by the word of Bilaam,” the Jews could only be weakened through immorality.

Further Question:

How could the Jews have fallen so easily? To address this deeper question, Rashi points the reader to “*Sifrei*.” This *Midrash* describes how the Jews grew gluttonous and decadent once they had indulged in the spoils of Sichon and Og. Thus softened, it was not long before the Jews fell for the Midianites’ seductions.

The Inner Dimension:

G-d described the war against Midian as revenge for the “Children of Israel.” (31:2) Moses, in relaying it to the people, described it as “taking G-d’s vengeance.” (31:3) Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson explained that G-d cared for the Jewish people’s honor, and Moses cared for G-d’s honor. (*Likkutei Levi Yitzchak on Zohar, Shelach*)

This mutual care was expressed in this particular war because it contained both elements: It was a physical assault on the Jewish people, but it was aimed at provoking G-d: “Their G-d hates immorality.”