

B”H

*Eitz Chayim Hee: A Torah Commentary for Environmental Learning and
Action*

Hebrew/English Source Sheet

Torah Portion of Balak

“nature Imagery in Bilaam’s Prophecies”

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The sources are presented in the order they appear in the commentary

Nechama Leibowitz, Studies in BaMidbar, p. 292

In the third blessing there is, however, no hint of any polemic. Balak disappears completely from the picture along with his demands, machinations, and arguments. Without any preliminary invocation the prophet plunges into his panegyric of Israel. We have here neither vindication nor denunciation but pure prophecy. This third blessing is characterized by a more sublime note, richer and more imaginative language than the previous ones. From the linguistic point of view we may note that there are no figures of speech in the first blessing and there is only one taken from the animal kingdom in the second. The third is rich in figurative description, beginning with the vegetable and ending with the animal kingdom.

Ibid. p. 294

“The prophet after recalling the pristine purity of the perfect world in the Garden of Eden proceeds to dwell on the theme of abundance. But we are not treated here to a description of artificial riches, palaces, and urban magnificence, but rather to a natural abundance of fields and vineyards.”

במדבר כד:ה-ו

מה-טבו אהליך, יעקב; משכנתיך, ישראל. ו כנחלים נטיו, כגנת עלי נהר; כאהלים נטע ה', כארזים עלי-מים.

Numbers 24:5-6

How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, thy dwellings, O Israel! As valleys stretched out, as gardens by the river-side; as aloes planted of the LORD, as cedars beside the waters;

אבן עזרא במדבר כד:ו

”כאהלים”- כמו מר ואהליות. והנה דמה האהלים כנחלים נטיו

Ibn Ezra Numbers 24:6

“As aloes” (*ahalim*)- is similar to the word *ahalot* (aloes) in myrrh and aloes. Note, Balaam compares the tents [of Israel] to stretched-out rivers [next to which cedars and aloe trees are planted].

פירוש 'דעת מקרא' על במדבר כד:ה-ו

בלעם רואה בארבעת החרוזים שלפנינו ארבעה דמויים המתארים את יפים ואת הסדר שבמחנה ישראל הנוטים את שורת האהלים בצורה של צמחיה רבת יופי ומרהיבת עין. אהלי ישראל הם כמו 'נחלים'-אפשר לפרש 'כנחלים'-מתארכים ומתפשטים כעמקים שצל הצמיחה שבהם נוטה ומתארך. השוה: 'כי ינטו צללי ערבי'. גם על פי פרוש זה כל הדמויים לקוחים מעולם הצמחיה

Commentary of Da'at Mikra to Numbers 24:5-6

Bilaam sees in these four passages before us four images describing the beauty and order of the Israelite camp, whose tents are arranged in a plantlike pattern which is beautiful and stunning. The tents of Israel are like 'riverbeds' – which can be interpreted to mean that they stretch out and spread like the lush flora around a riverbed. Compare this to the biblical phrase “stretched out like evening shadows”. Also, according to this interpretation, all the imagery remains plant imagery. (translation- Sareet Benayahu)

תהילים קד:כד

מה רבו מעשיך ה' כלם בחכמה עשית: מלאה הארץ קנייך.

Psalms 104:24

How great are Your works, O Lord! You have made them all with wisdom; the earth is full of Your possessions!

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