

*In memory of my mother's yartzheit Chaya Shaindel bat R' Alexander Halevi, 15th of Tammuz*

יֵחָר אֶף אֱלֹקִים כִּי הוֹלֵךְ הוּא (כב:כב) - (22:22) - "And G-d's anger was kindled because he went"

Why was G-d angry at Bilaam for going with the messengers of Balak, if he was doing exactly what he been granted permission to do?

Rashi (1040-1105) explains that G-d's anger was because Bilaam knew that G-d did not want him to go, yet he went anyway.

The Ibn Ezra (1089-1167) continues this idea. The permission that G-d granted here is like the story of the spies. Permission was given only because it was the will of the people, yet the nation was guilty of not relying on G-d and requesting that spies be sent. Here too, G-d gave permission to Bilaam with hesitance, only because he asked an additional time after first being refused. "G-d leads man along his chosen path" (Makot 10b). G-d may assist a person to do what he desires, even though G-d is disappointed with the choice.

The Ramban (1194-1270) disagrees with this idea of G-d permitting someone to do something, against the will of G-d. Rather, G-d gave Bilaam permission to go because He wanted Bilaam to bless the Israelites, not curse them. "But only the words that I give you to say, that you should do" (22:20), meaning G-d is reiterating his ability to go but not specifically to curse but to bless. Bilaam, in his haste to seize the opportunity to go, gave the impression that G-d changed His mind, failing to inform the agents his direct instructions.

- Shabbat Shalom