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The Story of Balaam

22:2 to 24:25

After the death of **the Exodus generation** and the birth of **the wilderness generation**, **God** confirmed the divine commitment to **bless Isra'el** through some of the most lavish words of **blessing** and **promise** in the entire Torah. Moreover, **ADONAI** speaks these words of **blessing** and **promise** not through an **Israelite**, but through **an Aramean sorcerer!** As **Hobab** had joined **YHVH** in **guiding Isra'el** (**to see link click [Bn](#) - Leaving Sinai: Hobab the Midianite**), so **Balaam the sorcerer** was used by **God** to **bless Isra'el**.

Four main characters are at work in this enigmatic story.



The first main character is Balaam, a Gentile, and master **sorcerer**, who lived in **Pethor**, four hundred miles north of **Mo'ab** on the banks of **the Euphrates River** in **Babylon** (**Numbers 22:5** and **Deuteronomy 23:4**). **He** had a reputation as **a sorcerer** and traveled extensively throughout the Near East to **curse** military enemies for money. **He** was a kind of unattached hired gun, a mercenary, but **his** only weapons were words that had the power to **curse** or to **bless**.⁴⁵⁰ **He** was not a good "prophet" who went bad, or a bad "prophet" trying to be good. **He** was altogether outside **Isra'el's** prophetic tradition, but **he** must have thought that **ADONAI Elohim, the God of Isra'el** was like any other deity **he** could manipulate with **his** black magic. But **he** found out differently.⁴⁵¹ On **His** way to Jerusalem, **Yeshua** sent out **seventy messengers, two by two ahead of Him**, to **all the towns** in order to give people opportunities to accept **the Good News**. After completing the ministry entrusted to **them**, **they returned to Him with joy** and said: **Lord, even the**

demons submit to us in Your name (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Gv - Jesus Sends Out the Seventy](#)). Therefore, just because the **demon** possessed **Balaam** submitted to the will of **ADONAI**, did not mean **he** was a righteous man; but like a **demon**, would have carried out **his** own wicked desires if only **he** had been left alone to do so. In other words, had it not been for the intervention of **the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**, **Balaam** surely would have put a **curse on Isra'el**.

The second main character is Balak. Mo'ab was the nation that shared a border with Canaan on the eastern edge of the Promised Land. **Balak, the king of Mo'ab**, was merely a vassal **king**, ruling a puppet government under **Sihon, king of the Amorites** (see [Dk - The Defeat of Sihon of Heshbon](#)). **The Israelites** had crushed **the Amorites** in battle, so **Balak** reasoned correctly that **Mo'ab** would be no match militarily. So, having no faith in **his** own army, **Balak** decided to turn to a non-military means of attacking **Isra'el**. As a result, **he** tried to hire **the sorcerer Balaam** to put a **curse on the Israelites**.

The third main character is ADONAI, who has several different names in this text, a reflection of various early and later traditions that were brought together to form the story. **He** is called **God** (Hebrew: *Elohim*) in **22:9**; **ADONAI** (Hebrew: *YHVH*) in **22:13**; **Elyon** (Hebrew: *Almighty*) in **24:16**; **Almighty** (Hebrew: *Shaddai*) in **24:16**. While **King Balak** thinks **he** has found a way to curse **Isra'el** and thus shape the course of **Isra'el** history, God emerges as the one character who truly has the power and will to ensure **Isra'el's** ultimate destiny. **ADONAI** determines that destiny to be one of **blessing** rather than a **curse**.

The fourth main character are those who had no active role at all in the drama. Throughout the story **Balaam, the people of Isra'el** were passively **camped in the plains of Mo'ab beyond the Jordan River, opposite Jericho (22:1)**. There was an invisible war going on, and **the Israelites** were completely oblivious to the intense life and death struggle going on between **Balak's** desire to **curse Isra'el** and **God's** commitment to **bless them**. Another character was **Balaam's donkey** who has a brief speaking part in **22:28-30**.

The **Balaam** cycle in **Numbers 22:2 to 24:25** falls into three large sections: First, **Numbers 22:2-40**, **Balaam's** three encounters with **God** as **King Balak** calls **Balaam** to **curse Isra'el**; second, **Numbers 22:41 to 24:14** describe **Balaam's** three attempts to **curse Isra'el** foiled by three **blessings** of **Balaam**, who **could only say what ADONAI had put in his mouth**; and third, **Numbers 24:15-19**, **Balaam's** fourth and climactic far eschatological **blessing** beyond the present generation of **Israelites**.⁴⁵²