

-Save This Page as a PDF-

Balaam’s First Encounter with God

22: 7-14

Balaam’s first encounter with God DIG: What did the offer of the payment for sorcery imply? Why did Balaam refuse to go with the princes in this first encounter?

REFLECT: In what ways are God’s people to be separate from the world? How do you work this out in your own life? How can we do this and still reach out to the world?

You are not to curse the Israelites, because they are blessed.

Convinced of **Mo’ab’s** military weakness before **Isra’el**, **King Balak** resorted to unconventional warfare. **He** sent **messengers** to **Balaam**, asking **him** to come and curse **Isra’el**, because **“they are stronger than I am” (22:6a)**. As the story unfolds, the irony of **Balak’s** final words in **his** message will come back to haunt **the king**, **“ . . . for I know that whoever you bless is in fact blessed, and whoever you curse is in fact cursed” (22:6b)**.

The princes (22:7): The messengers that **Balak** sent to summon **Balaam** were not mere servants sent to run an errand, **they were the princes of Mo’ab and Midian**. In doing so, **Balak** treated **Balaam** like **he** was a head of state. The actual details of such a meeting would have entailed the standard hospitality process of formal greetings, the sharing of preliminary gifts, the sharing of a meal, and probably an extended discussion of the events leading up to the visit, and then a formal presentation of a letter.⁴⁶² **They also took with them the payment for sorcery**, a common practice in ancient times (**1 Samuel 9:8; 1 Kings; 2 Kings 8:8-9; Micah 3:11**), and **relayed the message sent by King Balak**. **They** assumed that paying **him** for **his** services would guarantee that **he** would say only what **they** wanted **him** to say, namely, to put **a curse** on **their** supposed enemy **Isra’el**.

The Midianites were a semi-nomadic people who also claimed **Abraham** as **their**

ancestor. **Midian** was a son of **Abraham’s** second wife **Ketura** following the death of Sarah. Since then, **the Midianites** were seen in the Torah as the merchant caravan that purchased **Joseph** from **his brothers** and brought **him to Egypt** (see the commentary on **Genesis, to see link click Jb - Joseph’s Brothers Sold Him for Twenty Shekels of Silver**). **Moses** had lived among a clan of **the Midianites** during **his** forty years living there. **His** first wife **Zipporah** was a **Midianite**. But now, we find **the Midianites** conspiring along with **Balak**.

Joshua 13:21 explains that **the princes of Midian** were **Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba**, representing **Sihon**, who probably appointed five **Midianite** warlords as administrators over the territory **he** had conquered. **The Midianite** forces were probably something of a militia army under **Sihon**. So, after **the Israelites** defeated **Sihon** and **the Amorites** (see **Dk - The Defeat of Sihon of Heshbon**), **the Moabites and the Midianites** thought that **they** were the next target. Thus, **they** banded together and weighed **their** options. You know that things are desperate when relying on **sorcery** is your best bet.⁴⁶³

The negotiations (22:8): Balaam said to them, “Stay here tonight, and I will bring you back whatever answer ADONAI tells me.” So the princes of Mo’ab and Midian stayed with Balaam. Notice the name **Balaam** uses: **ADONAI**. This means that intellectually, **he** was familiar with **God** therefore and went to **Him**. It seems probable that **Balaam** was a polytheist who regarded **the LORD** as one god in the pantheon of gods. But why did **he** go to **YHVH** and not some of the other gods **he** obviously worshiped? That was because of a pagan concept which was that a people’s own god’s had the greatest power over them for good or bad. In theory, had **he** been hired by **Isra’el** to curse **the Moabites**, **he** would have inquired of Chemosh, the god of **the Moabites**. Thus because **Balaam** knew that **ADONAI** is **the God of Isra’el**, **he** went to **Him**.⁴⁶⁴ However, **Balaam** was about to encounter **YHVH** in a way that would transcend any other deity that **he** had ever experienced; and in addition, **he** was about to become an unwitting instrument of **God** for revelation and the **blessing** of **Isra’el**.⁴⁶⁵

Not only was **Balaam** familiar with **ADONAI**, but **he** considered **himself** to be the premier prophet of **God**. **He** referred to **himself** proudly as **the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God, and knows the knowledge of the Most High, and who sees the vision of the Almighty (24:15-16)**. **Balaam** is the model of spiritual pride. **He** thought **he** had **God** figured out. **He** thought that **he** had the corner on spiritual truth and revelation. The

story of **Balaam** is further evidence that it is possible to be utterly self-deceived about one’s relationship with **God**. **Balaam** was like the patron saint of spiritual pride. And, as we shall see in **his** story, spiritual pride equals spiritual blindness.⁴⁷⁰

The divine revelation (22:9-11): That **night, Elohim, the powerful One, came to Balaam**. It is important to realize that it was **Elohim** who **came to Balaam**, not **Balaam** who brought **himself** to **Elohim**. And just because **Elohim came to Balaam**, it did not mean that **Balaam** was a prophet of **God**. Because we know at certain times, that **YHVH** revealed **Himself** to pagans. **He** did so with **Abimelech** (see the commentary on **Genesis Fe - Then God Came to Abimelech in a Dream**); **He** did this with **Pharaoh** (see **Genesis Jr - Joseph Interprets Pharaoh’s Dreams**); **He** did this with **Laban** (see **Genesis Hr - Laban Pursues Jacob**); and twice we see this in the book of **Dani’el**, first with **Nebuchadnezzar’s dream** (see **Dani’el Aq - Nebuchadnezzar’s First Dream**), and secondly with **Nebuchadnezzar’s vision** (see **Dani’el Bt - The Dream of the Great Tree**).⁴⁷¹

ADONAI asked: **Who are these men with you (22:9)?** The question posed to **Balaam** was rhetorical, since **YHVH** obviously knew who those **men** were and why **they** were there. This method of beginning an encounter with **God** and **man** recalls similar expressions in **Genesis 3:9** between **God** and **Adam**, and in **Genesis 4:9** between **God** and **Cain**.⁴⁷² The questions in **Genesis** were to get **Adam** and **Cain** to admit what **they** had done; here, however, the question was to get **Balaam** to think about what **he** was doing. **Balaam said to the God of Isra’el, “Balak the son of Zippor, king of Mo’ab, has sent me this message: ‘The people who came out of Egypt have spread over the land; now, come and curse them for me; maybe I will be able to fight against them and drive them out’ (22:10-11).”**



God’s blessing (22:12): But **Elohim** answered **Balaam**, and made **His** will very clear: **You are not to go with them; you are not to curse those people,**

because they are blessed (22:12). That is quite a statement to make in light of the fact that **Isra’el** had been under divine judgment for the preceding thirty-eight years. But this shows the difference between **Isra’el’s** position and **her** experience as related to **YHVH**. Positionally, **Isra’el** had always been in a place of **blessing** because of **her** conventional standing (see the commentary on **Genesis Dt - I Will Bless Those Who Bless You and Whoever Curses You I Will Curse**), but experientially, **she** could experience **cursing** for disobedience (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Ff - Curses for Disobedience**). The story of **Balaam** is thus an example of the madness of attempting to destroy **the** eternal **blessing** of **the children of Abraham**. And those who oppose **Isra’el** today, and wish for **her** destruction, should take note.

God’s rejection (22:13-14): Balaam got up the next morning and said to Balak’s princes, “Return to your own land, because **ADONAI** refuses to give me permission to go with you.” The princes of Mo’ab got up, returned to Balak a month later and said, “Balaam refuses to come with us.” Balaam responded obediently to the revelation granted to **him** by **God**, but **Balak** only knew that **the sorcerer** had refused the invitation, not that it was **Isra’el’s God** who prevented **him** from going. **Balaam** was on the horns of a dilemma, trapped between the demands of **Balak** and the commands of **ADONAI**. It is this conflict that sustains the whole drama that follows.⁴⁷³

*Dear **Heavenly Father**, Praise **You** that when there is drama and uncertainty for what the future holds, **You** are completely omniscient, loving and Almighty. Those who love **You** can hold tightly to **Your** hand, look up into **Your** wise face, and trust completely that **You** are totally in control in all situations. **Your** Almighty power is greater than any evil force that may try to come against **You** or **Your** children. **Your** omniscient wisdom already knows the plan of anyone who may try to harm **Your** children and you have already moved with precision the right people and events into place to ensure that **Your** will is ultimately done.*

You are a holy **God (Isaiah 6:3)** who cannot tolerate evil. **You** timed everything perfectly when you brought out **Your people** from Egypt. **You** who knew all that would happen in the future, and waited till **the sin of the Amorites** had reached its full measure. **Your** timing was neither too early nor too late, but your timing was just right! **But I am going to judge the nation that they will serve. Afterward they will go out with many possessions. But you, you will come to your fathers in peace. You will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here - for the iniquity of the Amorites is not**

yet complete (Genesis 15:14 and 16).

You disciplined **Isra’el** for **their** refusal to obey **You** and enter **the Land**. You made them wander a year for each of the forty days the spies were in the land (**Numbers 14:26-35**). **Their** years of wandering were coming to a close and the new generation was ready to follow and obey **You**. **Your** heart of love was about to bring the new obedient generation into the Promised Land. No way would you allow them to be **cursed**.

What comfort it is that the power of victory is not in who is the enemy, but the power of victory is in **Your** hands of our Loving and Almighty Heavenly **Father**. It is **Your** power that wins battles and **Your** love and power that gives eternal life to all trust **You** as their **Lord** and **Savior**. **For if you confess with your mouth that Yeshua is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart it is believed for righteousness, and with the mouth it is confessed for salvation. For the Scripture says, “Whoever trusts in Him will not be put to shame.” (Romans 10:9-11)**. Your powerful hands hold **Your** children tightly. **I give them eternal life! They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand (John 10:28)**. Thank **You** for being such a wonderful Heavenly **Father** that we can trust when there is drama, for we know it is all in **Your** Almighty hands! In **Messiah Yeshua’s** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen