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# Balaam

Balaam was a non-Jew living in the city of Pethor in Mesopotamia. He was a poet and a prophet of sorts, but he doubtless belongs to the Midianites. See Numbers 22 and following for his story.

Balaam possessed some knowledge of Jehovah, the true God; and he acknowledged that his superior powers and knowledge as a prophet came from God. Balaam had become somewhat famous, and he became conceited and covetous.

## **The Israelites Encounter with the Midianites**

The Israelites had camped in the plain of Moab on their second approach to the land of Canaan. Balak, the king of Moab, entered into a league with the Midianites against the Israelites. He sent messengers to Balaam with money to pay him to place a curse on the Israelites.

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Balaam did not trust the messengers and asked them to spend the night so that he could consult with God. And God expressly prohibited Balaam from going back with the men to Moab, so they returned to Balak.

Balak sent some very high officials on another mission to Balaam; and Balaam was promised great reward and much honor. Balaam replied that he could not be tempted by reward but that he would speak what the Lord would reveal. The ambassadors spent the night and Balaam again talked to the Lord. Because of Balaam's persistence, he secured permission from God to accompany Balak's messengers, with the understanding that God would dictate what Balaam would speak.

In the morning Balaam proceeded with the princes of Moab, but "God's anger was kindled against him", and an angel barred his way on the road to Moab. Balaam did not see the angel, but the donkey Balaam was riding saw him and shied away into a field. Then, when Balaam tried to keep the donkey on the trail, the donkey squeezed Balaam's foot against a wall. Finally, the donkey fell down. Balaam became enraged and beat the donkey with a stick. The donkey then questioned Balaam about the beating. Then Balaam was able to see the angel. The angel accused Balaam of

perverseness, but told him to go on to Moab but only to speak the things God would tell him.

When Balaam met Balak, he told him that he would only speak what the Lord told him to. According to Balaam's direction, he and Balak erected seven altars upon each of which they offered a ram and a bullock.

But then, three times Balaam tried to speak a curse against Israel, but his very speaking was overruled by God. Instead of cursings coming out of his mouth there were blessings and magnificent prophecies, reaching forward in time until they told of "a Star rising out of Jacob."

Balak was very disappointed, to say the least. So to assuage Balak's feelings, Balaam advised him that since he could not curse Israel, the Moabites could do just as much damage to Israel by seducing the Israelites to commit fornication with them. And a great deal of damage was done over several generations by this practice.

A battle was fought between the Israelites and Midianites, and Balaam sided with the Midianites and was slain. See Num. 31:8.

Balaam comes down in history as the prototype of the typical hireling prophet eager only to commercialize his gift. 2 Pet. 2:15; Titus 1

The "doctrine of Balaam" mentioned in Rev. 2:14 was the teaching of the mercenary prophet to abandon godly separation and character in favor of worldly corruption and conformity. Balaam taught Balak to corrupt the people that he could not conquer. He was ignorant of God's principles, and too self-centered to use his gift properly.

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