



# Background to Balaam

Numbers 22:1-6

# Background

A painting of a man in a brown robe and hat, possibly a soldier or explorer, looking down at a map or document on the ground. The background is dark and textured.

- Numbers begins with the Israelites at Mount Sinai from where they moved out to possess the promised land.
- When they arrived, men were sent to spy out the land.
- Ten of these men feared the Canaanites, so the Israelites rebelled against God and refused to attack them.
- Because of this, God caused the Israelites to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until all of the first generation died.
- The final section of the Book of Numbers deals with the second generation of Israelites as they prepared to enter and possess the land of Canaan.

# Scared to Death



- Balak, the king of Moab, felt threatened by the approaching Israelites.
- Because of the Israelites' kinship with the Moabites, God commanded the Israelites not to harm them.
- Because the Israelites had slain all the Amorites, Balak probably thought they were going to do the same to the Moabites.
- The Moabites fears were actually economic.
- The Moabites formed an alliance with the Midianites, perhaps thinking there would be strength in numbers.
- The Moabites and the Midianites conspired to recruit a man who had connections with the spiritual underworld to put a curse on the Israelites.

# Diviner

A painting of a man in a field, possibly a diviner, with a dog and a staff. The man is wearing a brown tunic and a hat, and is holding a long staff. A dog is lying down in the foreground. The background is a dark, textured landscape.

- One man who was “tops in his field” was Balaam from Pethor.
- Pethor was not far from the great city of Mari, which was discovered in 1933 in the Euphrates Valley.
- Cuneiform tablets at Mari revealed the existence of a cult of prophets and seers whose activities resembled those of Balaam.
- Pethor is about 370 miles from the plains of Moab, an estimated trip of 20-25 days, hence the four journeys in the story took about 90 days.
- Balak probably wanted a diviner who lived a good distance from Moab, so he would be ignorant of the success of the Israelites.
- A man who was too well-informed about Israel, their God, and their history, might decline when asked to curse them.

# Balaam's Call



- Balaam was a well-known “diviner,” with a reputation for effectively cursing nations.
- Balaam’s powers did not come “from above” but “from below.”
- Balak did not bother to inform Balaam how the Israelites’ exodus had come to pass.
- Balak did not tell Balaam that the Israelites destroyed those who opposed them along their way.
- In light of the Abrahamic Covenant, Balak’s plan to curse Israel is destined to bring a curse upon him and the Moabite nation.

# Conclusion

A painting depicting the biblical story of Balaam. Balaam is shown riding a donkey, looking back over his shoulder. The scene is set in a dark, rocky landscape. In the foreground, a skull lies on the ground, symbolizing the consequences of Balaam's actions.

- It is dangerous to be for what God is against, and against what God is for.
- Seeking to curse those whom God had blessed, Balaam will find God to be his adversary.
- Those who would have God as their adversary are those who must someday bow before Him as Lord of all.