

# Men in the Bible - Men Like You and Me

## Balaam in a nutshell

It is uncertain when exactly the prophet Balaam lived, but he is mentioned already in an inscription from the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC. It seems Balaam had a good reputation as a man of god everywhere around. When the Moabite King Balak sends for him to curse his enemy, the Israelites, Balaam is reluctant at first (see above). Finally, Balak talks him into doing it, but rather than a curse, he speaks – driven by God – a blessing. After this happens for the third time, Balak gives up. Balaam's succinct comment: "How should I curse whom God does not curse?" Unfortunately for him, he will be slain by the Israelites nevertheless in the end.

## And this is what YOU do:



Read the bible text on page 2. Have a look at page 3 for "Something to Think about".



Share your inspirations.



Discuss your insights.

- What problem did Balak face, and what problem did Balaam face?
- Which approach to solve it each of the two pursued at first?
- What did become of it?
- How do such problems look today?
- Which approaches to solve them would be available today?
- What might become of it?



Prepare your presentation.

Sum up the results of your discussion in a 5-minute-presentation which can be performed as a role play, an interview, a short talk etc. Be creative!

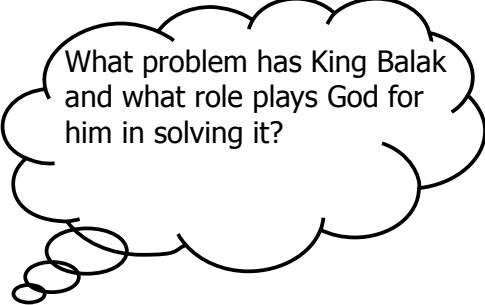
😊 **Have fun!**

## **Balaam (Numeri 22)**

1 Then the Israelites travelled to the plains of Moab and camped along the Jordan opposite Jericho. 2 Now Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites, 3 and Moab was terrified because there were so many people. Indeed, Moab was filled with dread because of the Israelites. 4 The Moabites said to the elders of Midian, 'This horde is going to lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field.' So Balak son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, 5 sent messengers to summon Balaam son of Beor, who was at Pethor, near the River Euphrates, in his native land. Balak said: 'A people has come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the land and have settled next to me. 6 Now come and put a curse on these people, because they are too powerful for me. Perhaps then I will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that whoever you bless is blessed, and whoever you curse is cursed.' 7 The elders of Moab and Midian left, taking with them the fee for divination. When they came to Balaam, they told him what Balak had said. 8 'Spend the night here,' Balaam said to them, 'and I will report back to you with the answer the Lord gives me.' So the Moabite officials stayed with him. 9 God came to Balaam and asked, 'Who are these men with you?' 10 Balaam said to God, 'Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, sent me this message: 11 "A people that has come out of Egypt covers the face of the land. Now come and put a curse on them for me. Perhaps then I will be able to fight them and drive them away." ' 12 But God said to Balaam, 'Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed.' 13 The next morning Balaam got up and said to Balak's officials, 'Go back to your own country, for the Lord has refused to let me go with you.' 14 So the Moabite officials returned to Balak and said, 'Balaam refused to come with us.' 15 Then Balak sent other officials, more numerous and more distinguished than the first. 16 They came to Balaam and said: 'This is what Balak son of Zippor says: do not let anything keep you from coming to me, 17 because I will reward you handsomely and do whatever you say. Come and put a curse on these people for me.' 18 But Balaam answered them, 'Even if Balak gave me all the silver and gold in his palace, I could not do anything great or small to go beyond the command of the Lord my God. 19 Now spend the night here so that I can find out what else the Lord will tell me.' 20 That night God came to Balaam and said, 'Since these men have come to summon you, go with them, but do only what I tell you.'

21 Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the Moabite officials. 22 But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the Lord stood in the road to oppose him. Balaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. 23 When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, it turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat it to get it back on the road. 24 Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path through the vineyards, with walls on both sides. 25 When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat the donkey again. 26 Then the angel of the Lord moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. 27 When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat it with his staff. 28 Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth, and it said to Balaam, 'What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?' 29 Balaam answered the donkey, 'You have made a fool of me! If only I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you here and now.' 30 The donkey said to Balaam, 'Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?' 'No,' he said. 31 Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell face down. 32 The angel of the Lord asked him, 'Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me. 33 The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If it had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now, but I would have spared it.' 34 Balaam said to the angel of the Lord, 'I have sinned. I did not realise you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now if you are displeased, I will go back.' 35 The angel of the Lord said to Balaam, 'Go with the men, but speak only what I tell you.' So Balaam went with Balak's officials.

## Something to Think About

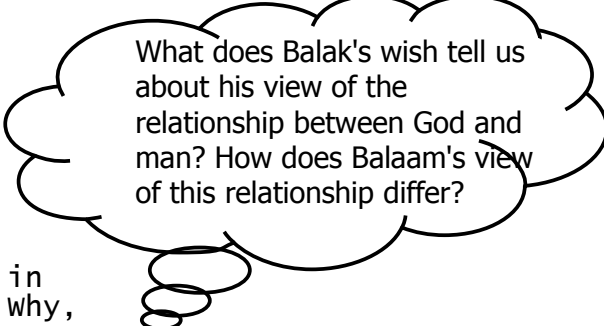


What problem has King Balak and what role plays God for him in solving it?

Why might Balak be so stubborn? What can this tell us about Balaam?

What kind of person is Balaam - rather straightforward or rather opportunistic, trying to exploit his opportunities in the most profitable way?

What problem does Balaam get by Balak's persistence? What is God's role here?



What does Balak's wish tell us about his view of the relationship between God and man? How does Balaam's view of this relationship differ?

How does God act in this Bible text? Why, probably? How do you explain the discrepancy between verses 20 and 22, which is even further confirmed in verse 35?

Why is the prophetic seer Balaam unable to see the angel? Why does God let the donkey speak?

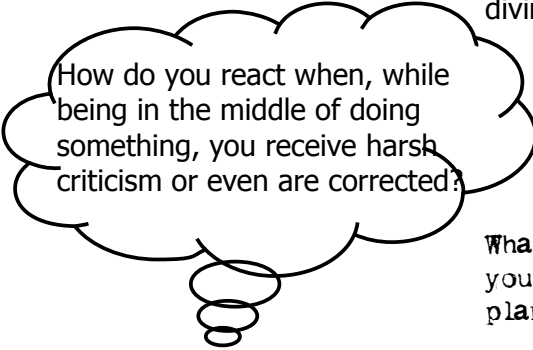
Why is the angel blocking the road? What does God want to draw Balaam's attention to?

Would you refer to Balaam as a "serious prophet" - or what else?

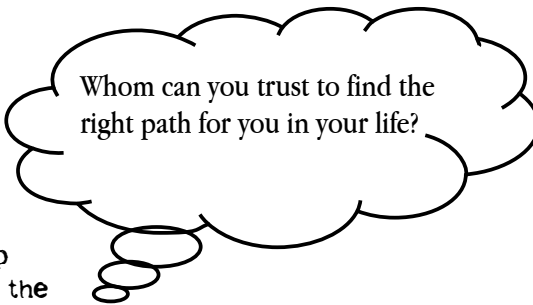
How should one react if someone tries to coax him to do something wrong? How did Balaam respond? How would you react?

In what situations do you find yourself in Balaam's place like in this story?

Did you ever encounter such a divine roadblock?



How do you react when, while being in the middle of doing something, you receive harsh criticism or even are corrected?



Whom can you trust to find the right path for you in your life?

What is required to keep your plans in sync with the plans of God?