

## Who was Balak in the Bible?

Balak was a king of Moab who appears in the Old Testament in Numbers 22–24. His story is in the context of the time of the Israelites' journey to the Promised Land. Moab, the land that Balak ruled, lay on the east side of the Dead Sea.

As the Israelites traveled to Canaan, their reputation preceded them, and the Moabites were well aware of the miracles that had accompanied Israel's exodus from Egypt. The inhabitants of the cities in Israel's path knew God was on the Israelites' side.

King Balak had witnessed the Israelites' destruction of the Amorites, and the entire region of Moab grew afraid as the Israelites approached (Numbers 22:2–3). When the Israelites encamped in territory that had once been Moab's, the king decided it was time to act. Balak and the elders of Moab colluded with the neighboring Midianites to summon a prophet named Balaam to put a curse on God's people (verse 6). Ironically, Balaam went to God and asked Him for guidance before he would agree to Balak's plan.

God's answer to Balaam was, of course, a resounding "no" (verse 12). Following God's command, Balaam refused Balak's offer. But Balak would not be put off—he sent even more powerful men and sweetened the deal to tempt Balaam into agreeing to the plan (verse 15).

Balaam eventually set out to meet Balak, and during his journey the famous incident of the talking donkey occurred—God's message to Balaam that he should not curse the Israelites (Numbers 22:21–35).

When Balaam stood before Balak, the king likely believed he had won and that the

Israelites would soon be cursed. But instead of cursing the Israelites, Balaam blessed them three times. Balak's "anger burned against Balaam" (Numbers 24:10), and he sent Balaam away without a reward.

Balak's plot to curse Israel through a hired prophet failed, but that was not the end of Moabite opposition. Later, the men of Israel were judged by God for idolatry and committing fornication with Moabite women (Numbers 25:1-9). As it turned out, this was the result of a plot from Balaam and Balak to corrupt Israel from within (see Revelation 2:14).

What can we learn from Balak's story? First of all, it is important to recognize Israel's place as God's chosen people. He has promised to bless those who bless them and curse those who curse them (Genesis 12:3). King Balak of Moab chose to curse Israel, but the curses were thwarted and turned into a blessing in Balaam's mouth. God's ultimate plan is to bring the remnant of Israel to Himself during the future seven-year tribulation (see Romans 11:26; Jeremiah 33:8).

Second, Balak's story is a wonderful proof of God's sovereignty over all. No plans made by men—even the most powerful and influential men—will prosper without the Lord's permission. "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails" (Proverbs 19:21).