

Balaam and his Donkey

Numbers 22-25

2 Peter 2:15-16 They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the *son* of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; ¹⁶ but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet.

- Sometimes, weird things happen in the Bible. Why?
- Did the donkey really speak? If so, was the donkey also given reason and knowledge of how to communicate?
- What is happening?

One problem is that we can get so caught up in the fact that a donkey talked, we miss the first part of this verse from Peter "They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the *son* of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness"

God loved His people so much that He even used a talking donkey to restrain a mad prophet.

Back to the beginning of the account:

Numbers 22:1 Then the children of Israel moved, and camped in the plains of Moab on the side of the Jordan *across from* Jericho.

- Israel is on the threshold of the promised land at the beginning of Numbers 22.
- God had told Israel not to conquer Moab
 - **Deuteronomy 2:9** Then the LORD said to me, "Do not harass Moab, nor contend with them in battle, for I will not give you *any* of their land as a possession, because I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot as a possession.' "
 - This is important to remember as we retell this account

Balak is the King of Moab.

- He just witnessed the defeat of the Amorites (giants)
- He is scared that Israel will destroy them
- He decides to hire a prophet, Balaam, to curse Israel.
- He is not interested in consulting God, just straight to cursing Israel
- Note how steeped in the supernatural they are. His first thought is to ask a prophet to curse them. Not find an ally. This culture is very steeped in the supernatural.
- Balak sends representatives with money to Balaam to hire him to curse Israel.

Numbers 22:10-13 So Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, *saying*, ¹¹ "Look, a people has come out of Egypt, and they cover the face of the earth. Come now, curse them for me; perhaps I shall be able to overpower them and drive them out.' " ¹² And God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they *are* blessed." ¹³ So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, "Go back to your land, for the LORD has refused to give me permission to go with you."

- Who is Balaam? He is not part of Israel. He refers to them as a people that came out of Egypt.
- Balaam is a prophet that had heard about Israel, but was not a part of Israel.
- He clearly can hear God's voice, but he also worships other gods. And he may speak with and fear God, but as you will see he is not interested in surrender to God.
- Balaam was not an Israelite. He was not a prophet of God, but did worship God and was able to hear from God. But **he had divided loyalty. He was loyal to God, but not to God's people.**
- God will speak to those that pursue Him. Even those that do not put their trust in Him. We see this throughout Scripture:
 - People of Nineveh, Hagar, Ahab praying and fasting and God answering him, the Gentile woman Jesus cast a demon from, Cornelius, Nebuchadnezzar, etc...

- But what does God explicitly tell Balaam? DO NOT GO!
- And Balaam obeys.

But Balak really wants Israel cursed. So he sends more people, more money, truckloads of gold to entice Balaam.

At first, Balaam seems to resist the temptation of riches and honor.

- **Numbers 22:18** Then Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more.
- What a great statement. We can only do what God says. Nothing less and nothing more. This is a perfect life motto.
- It reminds me of Jesus.
 - **John 5:19** Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.

But Balaam is not like Jesus. This is where he starts to go wrong:

Numbers 22:19 Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the LORD will say to me."

- He did not need to go and ask God again. God already told him no.
- When God tells us no why do we keep going back to Him?

Numbers 22:20-22 And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men come to call you, rise *and* go with them; but only the word which I speak to you—that you shall do." ²¹ So Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab. ²² Then God's anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the LORD took His stand in the way as an adversary against him. And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants *were* with him.

- Some people read this and think that God changed His mind. Or tricked Balaam. He said he could go, but then got mad that he went.
- But that is not the case. Balaam did not obey.
- The men did not come to call him, Balaam predicted that they would and just went.
- Balaam was too quick to act. He did not listen closely to what God said.
- He decided what God meant and did that.

How quick are we to decide what God's will is before spending time on our knees with Him?

The Donkey

Numbers 22:23-27 Now the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the way and went into the field. So Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back onto the road. ²⁴ Then the Angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, *with* a wall on this side and a wall on that side. ²⁵ And when the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she pushed herself against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck her again. ²⁶ Then the Angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place where there *was* no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. ²⁷ And when the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam's anger was aroused, and he struck the donkey with his staff.

- Why does the donkey see the Angel of the Lord but Balaam does not? God chooses whom He reveals Himself to. Balaam is in direct disobedience to God.
- Balaam is frustrated at the donkey, but that was God's mercy.
- Sometimes not getting what you want is both frustrating and God's mercy at the same time.

- You may say – But God said He would give me the desires of my heart! – Yeah – when we delight in Him. **Not when we are walking in open disobedience!**

Numbers 22:28-30 Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" ²⁹ And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have abused me. I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!" ³⁰ So the donkey said to Balaam, "*Am* I not your donkey on which you have ridden, ever since *I became* yours, to this day? Was I ever disposed to do this to you?" And he said, "No."

- The donkey speaks to Balaam
- Balaam answers – and escalates his response to violence!
- The donkey, then using logic and reasoning points out that this is unusual behavior and wins the debate.
- If you are ever losing a debate to the logic and reasoning of a donkey – just give up.
- The donkey is more reasonable than Balaam and points out that her behavior is out of the ordinary.
- When something out of the ordinary happens – ask God what is happening, don't get mad at the situation.

Did the donkey actually talk?

- Yes. We always take Scripture at its literal meaning unless it is obvious to take it another way (Like Jesus calling us sheep. He doesn't really think we are sheep).
- This is a supernatural miracle. The text says God opened the mouth of the donkey.
- I believe that it is God speaking through the donkey. It is not the donkey that came up with logical points.

Why does the donkey speak?

- In the next verse Balaam's eyes are opened to see and hear the Angel of the Lord.

- Balaam is steeped in the supernatural.
- Balaam prided himself on being a seer. Yet here, his donkey could see what he could not.
- God is not so subtly reminding Balaam that Balaam is not in control of what happens in the supernatural, God is the one that controls what we can see and hear and experience.
- We cannot make God act. We cannot force God's hand.
- God is all-powerful and is not controlled or manipulated by anyone or anything.
- God is reminding Balaam of his previous statement, "I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more."
- Balaam is on his way to curse Israel. In effect, to make God do something God does not want to do. God is reminding Balaam that that is not how it works.

Numbers 22:31-33 Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand; and he bowed his head and fell flat on his face. ³² And the Angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because *your* way is perverse before Me. ³³ The donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times. If she had not turned aside from Me, surely I would also have killed you by now, and let her live."

- The donkey saved Balaam from Divine judgement.
- Also, the donkey is probably feeling pretty good about herself right now.

Numbers 22:34 And Balaam said to the Angel of the LORD, "I have sinned, for I did not know You stood in the way against me. Now therefore, if it displeases You, I will turn back."

- Balaam humbled himself under threat of judgement.
- But he does not turn back

So instead, Balaam goes to Balak. There they set up altars and sacrifices to curse Israel. But instead of cursing them, Balaam blesses Israel. Which really angers Balak. They do this 3 times.

After the 3rd time, Balak gets really mad and tells Balaam he will not get paid for this betrayal.

Balaam then gets another blessing for Israel from God so he basically tells Balak he gets the fourth one for free.

During the 4th blessing he prophesies that the Messiah will come out of Israel.

Let's stop here and reassess the situation.

1. Israel is walking in the blessing of God.
2. Moab is actually protected by God and their lives are not under threat.
3. Balaam has blessed Israel and is no longer walking in disobedience.

Everything is good at his point. If only the story ended here.

Numbers 24:12-14 So Balaam said to Balak, "Did I not also speak to your messengers whom you sent to me, saying, ¹³"If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD, to do good or bad of my own will. What the LORD says, that I must speak'? ¹⁴ And now, indeed, I am going to my people. Come, I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the latter days."

Micah 6:5 O My people, remember now What Balak king of Moab counseled, And what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, From Acacia Grove to Gilgal, That you may know the righteousness of the LORD."

- Balaam's downfall
- Balaam basically said If you can't curse Israel, lead them to live in disobedience to God and they will bring a curse on themselves.

- And that is what they did.

Numbers 25:1-3 Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. ² They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. ³ So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.

- First time Israel is introduced to Baal.

What is the result of this?

- **Numbers 25:6-9** And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. ⁷ Now when Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw *it*, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand; ⁸ and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel. ⁹ And those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand.
- **Numbers 31:15-17** God commands Israel to destroy Moab.
- **Joshua 13:22** The children of Israel also killed with the sword Balaam the son of Beor, the soothsayer, among those who were killed by them.

Everybody was OK. But because of disobedience Israel suffered a plague. Moab was destroyed. Balaam was killed.

The spiritual powers could not curse Israel. But their compromise and disobedience brought judgement and curse on them.

There are people, principalities and powers that are against the church and the Kingdom of God on this earth. They want to curse it. They can't.

God is greater than all that which would come against His people.

But idolatry, immorality, compromise and disobedience will destroy us.

God did not leave the fate of believers to the enemy, or to evil people.

God can use a person and they still end in ruin.

God is for His people, but disobedience invites discipline.