

Balaam's Donkey

(Numbers 22, 23, 24)

Introduction

Do you know the difference between knowing God in your head and knowing God in your heart? In today's lesson we will learn about a guy who said he was a follower of God, but if you could see inside his heart, you'd know that he didn't know God at all.

He was more interested in the things of this world. And, God had to use a donkey to teach him a good lesson.

Opening Prayer

Father, we want to be true followers of You. We want to be sure that we really know You—not just about You. Give us a heart to be faithful and true to You. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. (Ephesians 4:29)

Lesson

We have been learning about how the children of Israel have been traveling across the desert for 40 years, heading for the Promised Land.

We pick up the story today when they arrive in the lowlands of Moab. They have set up their tents along the Jordan River.

Numbers 22:1

Then the people of Israel traveled to the plains of Moab and camped east of the Jordan River, across from Jericho.

All the people in the area were terrified of the Israelites. They had heard about all the amazing things that the God of Israel had done for

them: how He opened the Red Sea so they could escape from the Egyptians on dry land, how He had provided Manna from heaven for them every day for 40 years, and many other amazing things.

Balak, the king of Moab, had heard how the Israelites were marching through the country conquering the land. When he heard of their arrival in Moab he was terrified.

Numbers 22:3

And when the people of Moab saw how many Israelites there were, they were terrified.

There was a man named Balaam who lived in Moab. He said he was a prophet of God and many important people came to him for help. There was just one thing wrong with Balaam: He didn't really know God personally; he was greedy and made people pay him for helping them.

One day Balak, the king of Moab, sent a messenger to Balaam to ask him for help. He wanted Balaam to ask God to curse the children of Israel! Why anyone would think that they could get God to bring great evil upon His own chosen people, I do not know! But, Balak sent this message to Balaam:

Numbers 22:6

Please come and curse these people for me because they are too powerful for me. Then perhaps I will be able to conquer them and drive them from the land. I know that blessings fall on any people you bless, and curses fall on people you curse."

Balaam asked God what to do. But, if he really knew God, he would have known that God would NOT let him bring great evil upon His people! God's word promises us if we believe in Jesus, He will protect us from all evil. (See Isa 54:7, Prov 26:2)

Numbers 22:12

But God told Balaam, "Do not go with them. You are not to curse these people, for they have been blessed!"

At first, Balaam did what was right.

Numbers 22:13

The next morning Balaam got up and told Balak's officials, "Go on home! The LORD will not let me go with you."

When the king of Moab heard Balaam's answer, he was upset. So he sent other messengers to ask Balaam to help him.

Numbers 22:16-17

They went to Balaam and delivered this message to him: "This is what Balak son of Zippor says: Please don't let anything stop you from coming to help me. I will pay you very well and do whatever you tell me. Just come and curse these people for me!"

Balak wanted to make sure that Balaam knew that he would be given much money if he came and cursed the children of Israel.

Again Balaam asked God if he could go. I guess he was hoping God would change his mind. And surprisingly, God does grant permission.

Numbers 22:20

That night God came to Balaam and told him, "Since these men have come for you, get up and go with them. But do only what I tell you to do."

God tells Balaam that he can go to the king of Moab, but he was to speak only what God told him to say.

So the next morning, off he went...

Numbers 22:21

So the next morning Balaam got up, saddled his donkey, and started off with the Moabite officials.

Even though Balaam seemed to be following God, God knew that he had other plans in his heart. God knew that Balaam was greedy for money. It seems that Balaam wanted to do what God told him to do, but his desire to please himself was stronger than his desire to please God.

God knows the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. We may say all the right things, but God knows what we are really thinking and planning in our hearts.

Numbers 22:22a [Teacher, read...]

But God was angry that Balaam was going, so he sent the Angel of the LORD to stand in the road to block his way.

While Balaam was riding along, his donkey did some strange things!

Numbers 22:22b-23 [Teacher, read...]

As Balaam and two servants were riding along, Balaam's donkey saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand. The donkey bolted off the road into a field, but Balaam beat it and turned it back onto the road.

Because of his spiritual blindness, Balaam could not see the Angel of the Lord standing in the way with His sword drawn, but the donkey could. When the donkey saw the Angel, she turned off the road into a field. Balaam could not believe what his donkey was doing. He beat the donkey for going off the path.

Numbers 22:24-25

Then the Angel of the LORD stood at a place where the road narrowed between two vineyard walls. When the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, it tried to squeeze by and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall. So Balaam beat the donkey again.

Again, Balaam was furious and beat the donkey again.

Numbers 22:26-27

Then the Angel of the LORD moved farther down the road and stood in a place too narrow for the donkey to get by at all. This time when the donkey saw the Angel, it lay down under Balaam. In a fit of rage Balaam beat the animal again with his staff.

For a third time, the Angel stood near a narrow place with no room to go around. Frightened and bewildered, the donkey just gave up and lay down in the road. And for a third time, Balaam beat the donkey.

Numbers 22:28-29

Then the LORD gave the donkey the ability to speak. "What have I done to you that deserves your beating me three times?" it asked Balaam. "You have made me look like a fool!" Balaam shouted. "If I had a sword with me, I would kill you!"

Suddenly, the donkey started talking! She asked Balaam why he beat her three times. Balaam told the donkey that he beat her because she had made a fool out of him in front of the special messengers sent by the king of Moab. He was more concerned about what others thought of him than in pleasing God.

Numbers 22:30

"But I am the same donkey you have ridden all your life," the donkey answered. "Have I ever done anything like this before?" "No," Balaam admitted.

Finally, Balaam could see the Angel of the Lord...

Numbers 22:31-32

Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the roadway with a drawn sword in his hand. Balaam bowed his head and fell face down on the ground before him. "Why did you beat your donkey those three times?" the Angel of the LORD demanded. "Look, I have come to block your way because you are stubbornly resisting me.

Next, the Angel explains that the donkey had saved his life three times by blocking him for going to Moab. God knew what Balaam wanted to do.

Numbers 22:33

Three times the donkey saw me and shied away; otherwise, I would certainly have killed you by now and spared the donkey."

Balaam knew that God saw his greedy heart and the sin that was inside. He had only been thinking about the money; not about God's people! So, he fell to his knees and asked forgiveness.

Numbers 22:34

Then Balaam confessed to the Angel of the LORD, "I have sinned. I didn't realize you were standing in the road to block my way. I will return home if you are against my going."

The Angel told him to go to the king of Moab, but he was to speak only what God told him to say.

Numbers 22:35

But the Angel of the LORD told Balaam, "Go with these men, but say only what I tell you to say." So Balaam went on with Balak's officials.

Balaam wanted to curse God's people because the king of Moab had promised to pay him a lot of money to do that! But now he saw the Angel of the Lord and knew that God wanted him to bless His people.

Numbers 22:38

Balaam replied, "Look, now I have come, but I have no power to say whatever I want. I will speak only the message that God puts in my mouth."

Balaam may have looked like a follower of God on the outside, but inside, he really was doing whatever he could to get money and worldly possessions. Balaam might have fooled many people, but he did not fool God.

We may fool others and they may think that we believe in Jesus and know Him. But, God knows our hearts. He knows if we really trust Him or just say we do in front of others. God sees us wherever we are and knows if we act one way in church and another way at home or at school.

It's one thing to come to church on Sunday and sing praise songs and pray; but what really counts is how we act when we're not at church.

Do people know that you are a follower of Jesus by the way you act at home or at school or in your neighborhood?

Our words matter. Our words can bring life or death to others. God wants us to use words that bring joy and blessing.

God wants you and me to be His messengers to all the people that we come in contact with all week long. The Bible says, "Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." (John 13:35) God wants us to love people by being kind and helpful and courteous.

We are to honor God with our words and actions.

God wants us to be true believers in Jesus. He will do anything He can to get our attention. He really wanted Balaam to be a true believer and in order to get his attention he used a donkey to do it!

Closing Prayer

Father, I pray that You will help us to have right attitudes this week. Help us to live what we say we believe. Give us a desire in our hearts to want to be more and more like Jesus in every way. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Activity Center

Act out the story! Let the children retell the story in their own words, make a cartoon strip of the story, or play *Pin the "Balaam" on the Donkey*.

Game Center

Or, use the following review questions in a game of your choice:

1. Why was the king of Moab afraid of the children of Israel?

(Because there were thousands of people coming into his country and he was afraid they would try to conquer his land and take it away from him.)

2. Why did many important people come to Balaam for help? (He said he was a prophet of God.)
3. What was wrong with Balaam? (He was greedy for money; he charged people to help them.)
4. What did the king of Moab ask Balaam to do? (Curse the children of Israel.)
5. When Balaam wouldn't come to Moab to curse the people, what did the king of Moab do? (He was mad and offered him more money.)
6. At first God told Balaam not to go to Moab; then he changed mind. What did God tell Balaam to do the second time? (Go, but only say what He told him to say.)
7. What did Balaam's donkey see that Balaam didn't see on their way to Moab? (The Angel of the Lord.)
8. How many times did Balaam's donkey see the Angel before Balaam saw it? (Three)
9. What did Balaam do when his donkey seemed to be misbehaving? (He beat it.)
10. Then, suddenly, what amazing thing did the donkey do? (He started speaking to Balaam.)
11. What did the donkey say to Balaam? ("What have I done to you that you have struck me these three times?")
12. Why did Balaam say he beat his donkey? (Because she had made a fool out of him.)

13. What did the Angel tell Balaam about his donkey? (She had saved his life three times.)
14. What did Balaam finally tell the king of Moab when he got there? (The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak.)

Review Questions for Younger Kids

1. Who was the king of the Moabites who wanted to hurt God's people? (Balak)
2. Who did Balak try to pay to curse the Israelites? (Balaam)
3. What did Balaam's donkey see in her path? (An angel with a drawn sword)
4. What did Balaam do every time his donkey tried to get out of the way of the angel? (He beat her)
5. What did Balaam's donkey do that no other donkey has ever done? (She talked to him)
6. Did Balaam curse God's people like King Balak wanted him to? (No, he blessed them.)
7. Why did Balak want Israel to be cursed?
8. Who did God send to stop Balaam from cursing God's people? (The Angel of the LORD)

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