

## What Can a Donkey Teach a Jackass? Numbers 22:21-35

### **Slide 1**

In my previous message, we focused on Numbers 22:7-21 and the invitation Balaam received from Balak with a very tempting offer, if he would just come to Moab and curse Israel.

Balaam wanted to accept Balak's offer, but God visited him in a dream and told him that was a bad idea, so Balaam sent them back home empty handed.

Now, Balak wouldn't take no for an answer, so he sent a larger delegation with instructions that Balaam could write his own check.

Again, Balaam invited them to spend the night, but this time he was really hoping that God would change His mind. He didn't understand that when God says "No," He means "No."

But God, using His permissive will, said Balaam could go. This was not an instruction for Balaam to go, but a choice for Balaam to make: Go and disobey God, or stay and obey God. He just didn't understand.

So, this morning, let's see what happens to Balaam on his journey to Moab.

### **Slide 2**

Numbers 22:21, *"Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the Moabite officials."*

This must have been quite a scene to behold as the delegation must have been quite large, since each of these dignitaries probably had their own servants and bodyguards.

While Balaam was only accompanied by two of his own servants. Regardless, he was probably basking in the glory of it all.

After all, this whole caravan was on his account. He was the honored member of a very distinguished group.

What Balaam couldn't see was, that by his choice to accompany this delegation, he had set himself in opposition to God.

Numbers 22:22a, *“But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the LORD stood in the road to oppose him.”*

Balaam hadn't only angered God, but by his actions, he made God his adversary. What a terrifying thought since to deliberately oppose the will of God is to make God your adversary.

This truth is brought forward in the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 10:26-31, *“If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”*

This is why, as they made their way toward Moab, the Angel of the Lord stood in the path of Balaam and his donkey.

Now, the *“Angel of the LORD”* is a fascinating person. In fact, He appears with some frequency in the Old and New Testaments.

There're different views as to Who this was, but at the very least we can say that He was an angel who represented God. Who spoke and acted on His behalf.

At most we could say that He was a visible manifestation of the second person of the Godhead, none other than a preincarnate appearance of Jesus Christ.

If Balak sent his most noble princes to entice Balaam to come to him, God sent His most awesome emissary to oppose his coming.

Now, in Biblical times, a prophet was known as a “seer” because he spoke to men for God concerning the things he “saw.”

That's why it's so amazing that Balaam didn't see the Angel of the Lord, but his donkey did.

Think about it. Balaam can't “see” the Angel of the Lord, but the donkey could, and even rebukes him for his sin. This donkey was a better “prophet” or “seer” than Balaam.

### **Slide 3**

*Numbers 22:22b-23, “Balaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. 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.”*

This first encounter occurred as the path passed through an open field. The donkey saw the Angel standing in his path, so she turned aside.

But Balaam, furious with his donkey for turning off the road, beat it severely, virtually forcing her to get back onto the path.

A little later, as Balaam and his mount were passing between two walls that divided some vineyards, the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord again.

Numbers 22:24-25, *“Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path through the vineyards, with walls on both sides. 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.”*

So, in order to avoid the Angel a second time, the donkey pressed hard against one wall, crushing Balaam’s foot between her body and the wall.

Again, angered by her seemingly senseless behavior, Balaam beat his donkey to get her back on the path.

Finally, the Angel blocked the donkey’s path while she was confined to a very narrow place where she could neither turn to the left or to the right, so she just laid down.

Numbers 22:26-27, *“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. When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, it lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat it with his staff.”*

Now, this really angered Balaam. The donkey was making him look like a fool, so again he used his staff to beat her.

What happened next was incredible. Balaam was so mad he didn’t think twice when his donkey spoke to him.

Numbers 22:28, *“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?”*

Balaam didn't skip a beat. He answered!

Numbers 22:29, *"Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If only I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now."*

In other words, Balaam told his donkey, *"I beat you because you made a jackass out of me. And, so help me, if I had a sword in my hand right now, I'd kill you."*

In effect, Balaam was cursing his donkey, yet she was the only reason Balaam wasn't killed by the Angel of the LORD. Balaam cursed his one and only source of blessing.

#### **Slide 4**

Now, think about what these events looked like to the princes in the caravan.

Balaam, a man highly regarded for his ability to influence or control the "gods," couldn't even make his donkey go where he wanted.

These princes watched as Balaam lost control of himself and struck his donkey repeatedly in the open field, forcing her back onto the path.

They observed Balaam beat his animal again when it suddenly pressed hard against a wall, with his foot catching the worst of it.

Then they looked on, probably with smiles on their faces, as the donkey suddenly laid down beneath Balaam and, again, probably laughed as Balaam beat his donkey until she got to her feet.

Just when it appeared that things couldn't get any more weird, they stared in disbelief as Balaam and his donkey carried on a conversation.

Now, it's doubtful that they saw the Angel of the Lord. It would've been like what Saul's fellow-travelers on the road to Damascus experienced when Jesus appeared to him.

*Acts 9:7, "The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone."*

And then, everyone must have gaped, wide-eyed, when they saw Balaam fall prostrate to the ground. What in the world was this man doing? Had he completely lost his mind?

### **Slide 5**

Remember, Balaam was supposed to be "in touch" with the spiritual forces, especially those on the dark side. He was a man who was consulted for guidance regarding the future.

A diviner predicted the future based upon the arrangement or relationships of physical elements (e.g., the pattern of tea leaves in a cup, or the physical organs of an animal prepared for sacrifice).

It wouldn't take a rocket scientist to discern that there was something significant in the way the donkey was acting. There was a lesson here, but Balaam completely missed it.

*Numbers 22:30, "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."*

I believe her words were meant to be understood something like this:  
*"Stop and think about this for a moment, master. How long have I been your beast of burden? A long time, right? And have I ever acted in this fashion before? You know that I haven't. And if I haven't acted this way before, through all the years you have ridden me, doesn't this suggest to you that something out of the ordinary is going on here? Don't you think that there may be a message for you in all of this?"*

*If I turned off the path three times for what appeared to be no reason at all, doesn't this cause you to wonder if you are on the right path or not?"*

Numbers 22:31, *"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 facedown.*

Balaam's eyes were suddenly opened. He could actually see the Angel of the Lord standing on the path, with His sword drawn. Instantly, Balaam's on his face, prostrate before this Angel.

The Angel then asks Balaam essentially the same question, *"Why have you beaten your donkey these three times?"* This is a rhetorical question as the Angel doesn't wait for Balaam to respond.

Instead, the Angel explains, *"I came out here to oppose you, because what you're doing is perverse. The donkey is a better 'seer' than you. She saw me and turned back these three times. This was to save you from certain death. Had she continued on, I would have killed you and let her live. You were about to kill her for saving your life. She is a far better prophet than you."*

Is the connection between this incident and what Balaam sought to do to Israel not clear? God had blessed Israel and promised to make her a source of blessing to all who treated His people with favor.

Balaam was seeking to turn God's blessing into a curse, and by so doing, he was bringing a curse upon himself.

Balaam could think of no excuse that would adequately explain or justify his actions other than he didn't realize it was God who opposed him.

Numbers 22:34, *“Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, “I have sinned. I did not realize you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now if you are displeased, I will go back.”*

He offered to go back home *“if”* it was evil in the Angel’s sight. Did you catch that? Balaam said *“if”* it was displeasing to the Angel. How could it be otherwise? How could he not see this?

But, instead of ordering Balaam to go back home though, the Angel told him to continue, reminding him that he must only speak that which God tells him to say.

Numbers 22:35, *“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.”*

And so, once again, Balaam’s on his way, but his mission would produce the opposite of what the Moabites wanted, and nothing like Balaam hoped.

If Balaam had learned but one lesson, it should have been this: A person who speaks for God must do so precisely, just as God has spoken—no additions or omissions, no embellishments or watering down of the truth.

## **Slide 6**

### Conclusion

Our text has many lessons, so let me conclude by pointing out two of them.

*1. Beware of the grave danger of seeking to “use” God.*

If our text teaches us anything, it's that Balaam didn't appreciate the monumental differences between the one true God, the God of Israel, and the "gods" of the heathen nations.

Balaam was skilled in the manipulation of pagan "gods," but he couldn't comprehend just Who God was.

This is really no different than today, because many Christians still seek to use God rather than serve Him.

We try to convince God that our happiness is more important than our holiness. We believe our pleasures are more important than pleasing Him.

How often do we know that what we're pursuing is in violation of His Word? Yet, we persist at trying to change His mind, or at least in seeking to convince ourselves that what we want isn't really that bad.

Pagan gods weren't real. They were just the product of man's fallen imaginations, the way many would like God to be. Their gods could be manipulated and used because they were man-made.

We serve the God Who made man, and Who'll not be manipulated. It's our duty and privilege to conform to Him, rather than for us to seek to conform Him to our wants and wishes.

*2. There's nothing more important than being on the right path, nor more dangerous than being on the wrong one.*

When you read the Book of Proverbs, you'll find two paths constantly being described.

One path is the way of righteousness, which is the way of life. The other path is the way of sin, which is the way that leads to death.

There're only two paths, only two "ways." Jesus is the one and only Way to eternal life. Sin and self-interest are the way that leads to eternal destruction.

Balaam was on the wrong path. It was a path that would inevitably lead to his death. Even Balaam's donkey could see the danger, but not Balaam.

Which path are you on? If you haven't trusted in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and the gift of eternal life, you're on the path to destruction.

Today is the day to turn from that path by trusting in Jesus Christ, Who died for your sins, and Whose righteousness alone can justify you in God's sight.