

Balak Bamidbar - Numbers (22.2-25.9)

God has helped the Israelites win wars when different kingdoms would not let them pass peacefully. Now the King of Moab, Balak, saw how they kept winning and was worried. He, along with the King of the Midian, sent messengers to summon the seer, Balaam, who was known for occult magic and visions. They said to Balaam, "Come with us back to the king so you can curse these people. We know that whomever you bless is blessed and whomever you curse is cursed."

Seer Balaam answered. "Spend the night here. God will speak to me and then I will give you an answer." Later God appeared to Balaam and heard about the king's messengers asking him to curse the Israelites and drive them out." God says to Balaam. "No. Do not go with them! Do not curse this nation for it is blessed." So Balaam told the messengers no.

When King Balak heard the seer's answer he sent more important messengers to ask him to return and curse the Hebrews. But seer Balaam refused saying, "Even if the king were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go against God's Word. And now, stay, and I will find out what else God says." This time God tells Balaam, "If the messengers have come to summon you, then go and do exactly as I tell you to do."

In the morning Balaam saddled his donkey and went with the king's officers. But God's anger flared as Balaam left upon the donkey and God sent an angel to stand in his path. Suddenly, Balaam's female donkey sees an angel of God standing with a sword in his hand and turns away. Angered, seer Balaam hits the donkey to get her back on the path. Three times God's angel blocks the way and three times the donkey tries to avoid it. Every time Balaam hits his donkey in anger.

Then God gives Balaam's female donkey the gift of speech. She says to him, "What have I done to you that you hit me three times?" Balaam answers, "You are acting against me and if I had a sword in my hand I would kill you." The donkey says back, "Am I not your faithful donkey whom you always ride? Have I ever done this to you before?" When Balaam answers no, his eyes are opened by God and now, before him, he could see the angel of God standing in the path with his sword in his hand. Balaam quickly bowed.

The angel of God said "Why did you hit your donkey 3 times? Maybe she turned from me in fear. If she had not turned away I would have killed you and let her live." Balaam said, "I have sinned. I did not know that you stood in the way against me. If you want me to go back I will." But the angel of God says, "Go to king Balak but speak only what I tell you to say."

Seer Balaam reaches the king and says "I am here now but I will only say whatever words God puts into my mouth." In the morning the king took him to the altars of idol Baal where they could see the edges of the Israelite camp. The seer told the king to build seven altars and make burnt offerings on each and remain there. Then Balaam left to meditate.

Into Balaam's mouth, God placed a message, which Balaam repeated to the king, "What curse can I conjure if God will not grant a curse? I see a nation dwelling alone in peace. Jacob is like dust, who can count the many numbers of Israel? Let me die the death of the upright and let my end be like his." King Balak said, "I brought you here to curse them but instead you make every effort to bless them." Balaam said, "I told you that whatever God told me to say I will say."

Angered, the king took Balaam to another place, Lookout Field where they could see more of the Israelites camp. Like before, the seer instructs the king to build seven altars, make offerings and stand beside them while he goes to seek a vision. After listening to God's instructions, Balaam returns to the king and said, "God will not lie nor change the Almighty ruling. God is with them and since God brought them out of Egypt, they are the highest expression of God's strength. No magic or occult powers are effective against Israel." The king says, "But, if you will not curse them, then you are not to bless them." But the seer says, "Didn't I already tell you? All that God speaks, I will do." The king says, "Then I will take you where it may be right in the eyes of God to curse them for me."

So it was on the peak of Peor that the seer told the king to make another seven altars and give offerings and wait. Then seer Balaam realized that God desired to bless Israel, he did not seek out occult forces as he had done before but gazed towards the desert. When Balaam raised his eyes and saw Israel dwelling at peace, the spirit of God came upon him, inspiring him to say. "This is the word of the man with the enlightened eye. As one who hears God's sayings, this is my meditative insight and vision of the Almighty as I say, 'How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel. They stretch out like streams, like gardens by the river, like cedars beside the waters. Israel's cup shall overflow and their crops will be abundantly watered. They shall be a great nation.'" Balak was furious, "I have asked you three times to curse my enemies and three times you bless them. Go away." Balaam said, "I must do as God asks me to do. Now, I shall give you one piece of advice. I can see it, not in the near future but in the end of days. A star shall go forth from Jacob and a staff shall arise in Israel to crush all of their enemies." At that they went their separate ways.

The Hebrews then settle in Shittim, where some of them began sinning with the daughters of Moab and Midian and bowing to their gods. God was angry at all the Israelites. God said to Moses, "Have the community leaders impale the idolaters and then My anger will go away from Israel." And it was done. It was the Kohen priest, Pinhas, the grandson of the first High Priest, Aaron's who killed the final Israelite man and Midianite woman when they went in front of the entrance of the Tent of Meeting with God. All total, twenty-four thousand lost their lives.

Questions: 1) Like Balaam not seeing God's angel, have you ever realized much later that someone was a Godsend? When? Who? 2) How do you feel about God speaking through a donkey? How else can God speak? 3) Would you reject God's Words for a whole house of gold and silver? Why or why not? **Illustration Ideas:** The messengers going to seer Balaam...Balaam listening to God then telling the messengers no...the king sending more messengers... the donkey seeing the angel of God with a sword in his hand...Balaam hitting the donkey three times...the donkey speaking to Balaam...Balaam seeing the angel of God...the seven altars and offerings...