

**Parashat Balak
Bamidbar - Numbers (22.2-25.9)**

Miriam and Aaron die and Moses and the Israelites must fight against the Edomites, Canaanites, Amorites and Amorites to continue toward God's Promised land. Each time God helps the children of Israel win. Now, Balak, the King of Moab, saw how the Hebrews had won these wars. Balak sends messengers to Balaam, and son of Beor, to tell him about the powerful Hebrews, "Come with us Balaam to curse these Hebrews. We know that whomever you bless Balaam is blessed and whomever you curse is cursed." Balaam answered. "Spend the night here. God will speak to me and then I will give you an answer." Later God said to Balaam, "Who are these people?" Balaam answered "Balak has sent messengers to ask me to curse the Hebrews and drive them out." God says to Balaam. "No. Do not go with them! You will not curse the Hebrew people for they are blessed." So Balaam told the messengers no. When Balak heard Balaam's answer he sent more important messengers to ask Balaam to curse the Hebrews. But Balaam would not saying, "Even if Balak 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, "You may go but do only what I say to do."

In the morning Balaam saddled his donkey and went with the Balak's officers. God's anger flares as Balaam goes so an angel of God stands in the path to stop him. Balaam's female donkey sees the angel of God standing with a sword in his hand and turns the other way. Balaam hits the donkey to get her back on the path. Three times this angel leads the donkey away from the path and three times Balaam hits his donkey in anger. Then God opens the mouth of the female donkey and she says to Balaam, "What have I done to you that you hit me three times?" Balaam answers, "Because you act against me. If I had a sword in my hand I would kill you." The donkey then says, "Am I not your faithful donkey whom you always ride? Have I ever done this to you before?" When Balaam answers no God suddenly opens his eyes so he could see the angel of God standing in the path with his sword in his hand. Balaam quickly bowed. Then 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 to the angel of God. "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 Balak but say only what I tell you to say."

Balaam reaches Balak and says "Look. I am here but whatever words God puts into my mouth I will say. Now build seven altars and stand beside the ascent offering." And Balak did.

Then Balaam goes to speak with God. When he returns, he says to Balak, "God brought these people out of the land of Egypt. These people are to be blessed not cursed." Balak answered, "You shall not curse them and you

shall not bless them.” But Balaam just said, “I told you that whatever God tells me to say I will say.” Angered Balak brings Balaam to the top of the Field of Seers to show him the mighty Hebrews. Balaam tells Balak to build offerings to God there and stand next to them. Balak does. Then God tells Balaam to say to Balak, “God will not lie nor change the Almighty ruling. These people whom God brought out of the land of Egypt must be blessed and not cursed.” Balak repeats his demand. “If you will not curse them do not bless them.” Balaam answers, “Didn’t I already tell you? All that God speaks, I will do.” Balak says back, “Then I will take you to another place where it may be right in the eyes of God to curse them for me.”

They went to the peak of Peor that looks over the wasteland. After making altars and sacrifices, Balaam could see that in the eyes of God it was right only to bless Israel. When he saw the Israelites camping, the spirit of God came upon him inspiring him to say aloud “How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel. Like brooks are they turned, like gardens by the river, like cedars beside the waters the waters flow from God’s buckets. Israel wins against other nations because God brought you out of the land of Egypt to be God’s people. Those who bless you are blessed and those who curse you are cursed.” Balak was furious, “I have asked you to curse my enemies and three times you bless them. Get away.” Balaam says, “I must do as God asks me to do. Now, I shall give you one piece of advice. What the Hebrews will do to your people will be only in the end of days.” At that Balaam and Balak went their separate ways.

The Hebrews then settle in Shittim and the people began to sin with the daughters of Moab and bow to the Moabite gods. God was angry at the Israelites and said to Moses, “Take all the leaders of the people and hang them in the presence of the sun and then My anger will go away from Israel.” And it was done. Pinhas, a priest, killed the final Israelite man and Midianite woman. Twenty-four thousand lost their lives.

Questions: 1) God sends an angel that the donkey can see immediately. Balaam only sees this angel of God later. Have you ever be sent an angel from God that you couldn’t see until later? How do you recognize an angel sent from God? 2) Can God speak through a donkey? 3) Has God ever spoken to you through an animal or another human being? How?

Illustration Ideas: The messengers going to Balaam...Balaam listening to God...Balaam telling the messengers no...Balak sending more messengers...Balaam going to Balaak...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..Balak and Balaam discussing the curse and blessing...The Hebrews sinning in Moab and then being killed.