

week seven

NUMBERS 22-25

A TALKING DONKEY



BALAK HIRES BALAAM

¹The Israelites traveled on and camped in the plains of Moab near the Jordan across from Jericho. ²Now Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. ³Moab was terrified of the people because they were numerous, and Moab dreaded the Israelites. ⁴So the Moabites said to the elders of Midian, “This horde will devour everything around us like an ox eats up the green plants in the field.”

Since Balak son of Zippor was Moab’s king at that time, ⁵he sent messengers to Balaam son of Beor at Pethor, which is by the Euphrates in the land of his people. Balak said to him, “Look, a people has come out of Egypt; they cover the surface of the land and are living right across from me. ⁶Please come and put a curse on these people for me because they are more powerful than I am. I may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I know that those you bless are blessed and those you curse are cursed.”

⁷The elders of Moab and Midian departed with fees for divination in hand. They came to Balaam and reported Balak’s words to him. ⁸He said to them, “Spend the night here, and I will give you the answer the LORD tells me.” So the officials of Moab stayed with Balaam.

⁹Then God came to Balaam and asked, “Who are these men with you?”

¹⁰Balaam replied to God, “Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, sent this message to me: ¹¹‘Look, a people has come out of Egypt, and they cover the surface of the land. Now come and put a curse on them for me. I may be able to fight against them and drive them away.’”

¹²Then God said to Balaam, “You are not to go with them. You are not to curse this people, for they are blessed.”

¹³So Balaam got up the next morning and said to Balak’s officials, “Go back to your land, because the LORD has refused to let me go with you.”

¹⁴The officials of Moab arose, returned to Balak, and reported, “Balaam refused to come with us.”

¹⁵Balak sent officials again who were more numerous and higher in rank than the others. ¹⁶They came to Balaam and said to him, “This is what Balak son of Zippor says: ‘Let nothing keep you from coming to me, ¹⁷for I will greatly honor you and do whatever you ask me. So please come and put a curse on these people for me!’”

¹⁸But Balaam responded to the servants of Balak, “If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go against the command of the LORD my God to do anything small or great. ¹⁹Please stay here overnight as the others did, so that I may find out what else the LORD has to tell me.”

²⁰God came to Balaam at night and said to him, “Since these men have come to summon you, get up and go with them, but you must only do what I tell you.” ²¹When he got up in the morning, Balaam saddled his donkey and went with the officials of Moab.

BALAAM’S DONKEY AND THE ANGEL

²²But God was incensed that Balaam was going, and the angel of the LORD took his stand on the path to oppose him. Balaam was riding his donkey, and his two servants were with him. ²³When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing on the path with a drawn sword in his hand, she turned off the path and went into the field. So Balaam hit her to return her to the path. ²⁴Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow passage between the vineyards, with a stone wall on either side. ²⁵The donkey saw the angel of the LORD and pressed herself against the wall, squeezing Balaam’s foot against it. So he hit her once again. ²⁶The angel of the LORD went ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn to the right or the left. ²⁷When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she crouched down under Balaam. So he became furious and beat the donkey with his stick.

²⁸Then the LORD opened the donkey’s mouth, and she asked Balaam, “What have I done to you that you have beaten me these three times?”

²⁹Balaam answered the donkey, “You made me look like a fool. If I had a sword in my hand, I’d kill you now!”

³⁰But the donkey said, “Am I not the donkey you’ve ridden all your life until today? Have I ever treated you this way before?”

“No,” he replied.

³¹Then the LORD opened Balaam’s eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the path with a drawn sword in his hand. Balaam knelt low and bowed in worship on his face. ³²The angel of the LORD asked him, “Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? Look, I came out to oppose you, because I consider what you are doing to be evil. ³³The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If she had not turned away from me, I would have killed you by now and let her live.”

³⁴Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, “I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing in the path to confront me. And now, if it is evil in your sight, I will go back.”

³⁵ Then the angel of the LORD said to Balaam, “Go with the men, but you are to say only what I tell you.” So Balaam went with Balak’s officials.

³⁶ When Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went out to meet him at the Moabite city on the Arnon border at the edge of his territory.

³⁷ Balak asked Balaam, “Did I not send you an urgent summons? Why didn’t you come to me? Am I really not able to reward you?”

³⁸ Balaam said to him, “Look, I have come to you, but can I say anything I want? I must speak only the message God puts in my mouth.”

³⁹ So Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kiriath-huzoth. ⁴⁰ Balak sacrificed cattle, sheep, and goats and sent for Balaam and the officials who were with him.

⁴¹ In the morning, Balak took Balaam and brought him to Bamoth-baal. From there he saw the outskirts of the people’s camp.

23 BALAAM’S ORACLES

Then Balaam said to Balak, “Build me seven altars here and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me.” ² So Balak did as Balaam directed, and they offered a bull and a ram on each altar. ³ Balaam said to Balak, “Stay here by your burnt offering while I am gone. Maybe the LORD will meet with me. I will tell you whatever he reveals to me.” So he went to a barren hill.

⁴ God met with him and Balaam said to him, “I have arranged seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.” ⁵ Then the LORD put a message in Balaam’s mouth and said, “Return to Balak and say what I tell you.”

⁶ So he returned to Balak, who was standing there by his burnt offering with all the officials of Moab.

BALAAM’S FIRST ORACLE

⁷ Balaam proclaimed his poem:

Balak brought me from Aram;
the king of Moab, from the eastern mountains:
“Come, put a curse on Jacob for me;
come, denounce Israel!”

⁸ How can I curse someone God has not cursed?
How can I denounce someone the LORD has not denounced?

⁹ I see them from the top of rocky cliffs,
and I watch them from the hills.
There is a people living alone;
it does not consider itself among the nations.

¹⁰ Who has counted the dust of Jacob
or numbered even one-fourth of Israel?
Let me die the death of the upright;
let the end of my life be like theirs.

¹¹ “What have you done to me?” Balak asked Balaam. “I brought you to curse my enemies, but look, you have only blessed them!”

¹² He answered, “Shouldn’t I say exactly what the Lord puts in my mouth?”

BALAAM’S SECOND ORACLE

¹³ Then Balak said to him, “Please come with me to another place where you can see them. You will only see the outskirts of their camp; you won’t see all of them. From there, put a curse on them for me.” ¹⁴ So Balak took him to Lookout Field on top of Pisgah, built seven altars, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

¹⁵ Balaam said to Balak, “Stay here by your burnt offering while I seek the LORD over there.”

¹⁶ The LORD met with Balaam and put a message in his mouth. Then he said, “Return to Balak and say what I tell you.”

¹⁷ So he returned to Balak, who was standing there by his burnt offering with the officials of Moab. Balak asked him, “What did the LORD say?”

¹⁸ Balaam proclaimed his poem:

Balak, get up and listen;
son of Zippor, pay attention to what I say!

¹⁹ God is not a man, that he might lie,
or a son of man, that he might change his mind.
Does he speak and not act,
or promise and not fulfill?

²⁰ I have indeed received a command to bless;
since he has blessed, I cannot change it.

- ²¹ He considers no disaster for Jacob;
he sees no trouble for Israel.
The LORD their God is with them,
and there is rejoicing over the King among them.
- ²² God brought them out of Egypt;
he is like the horns of a wild ox for them.
- ²³ There is no magic curse against Jacob
and no divination against Israel.
It will now be said about Jacob and Israel,
“What great things God has done!”
- ²⁴ A people rise up like a lioness;
they rouse themselves like a lion.
They will not lie down until they devour the prey
and drink the blood of the slain.

²⁵ Then Balak told Balaam, “Don’t curse them and don’t bless them!”

²⁶ But Balaam answered him, “Didn’t I tell you: Whatever the LORD says, I must do?”

BALAAAM’S THIRD ORACLE

²⁷ Again Balak said to Balaam, “Please come. I will take you to another place. Maybe it will be agreeable to God that you can put a curse on them for me there.” ²⁸ So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, which overlooks the wasteland.

²⁹ Balaam told Balak, “Build me seven altars here and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me.” ³⁰ So Balak did as Balaam said and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

24 Since Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not go to seek omens as on previous occasions, but turned toward the wilderness. ² When Balaam looked up and saw Israel encamped tribe by tribe, the Spirit of God came on him, ³ and he proclaimed his poem:

The oracle of Balaam son of Beor,
the oracle of the man whose eyes are opened,

- ⁴ the oracle of one who hears the sayings of God,
who sees a vision from the Almighty,
who falls into a trance with his eyes uncovered:
- ⁵ How beautiful are your tents, Jacob,
your dwellings, Israel.
- ⁶ They stretch out like river valleys,
like gardens beside a stream,
like aloes the LORD has planted,
like cedars beside the water.
- ⁷ Water will flow from his buckets,
and his seed will be by abundant water.
His king will be greater than Agag,
and his kingdom will be exalted.
- ⁸ God brought him out of Egypt;
he is like the horns of a wild ox for them.
He will feed on enemy nations
and gnaw their bones;
he will strike them with his arrows.
- ⁹ He crouches, he lies down like a lion
or a lioness—who dares to rouse him?
Those who bless you will be blessed,
and those who curse you will be cursed.

¹⁰ Then Balak became furious with Balaam, struck his hands together, and said to him, “I summoned you to put a curse on my enemies, but instead, you have blessed them these three times. ¹¹ Now go to your home! I said I would reward you richly, but look, the LORD has denied you a reward.”

¹² Balaam answered Balak, “Didn’t I previously tell the messengers you sent me: ¹³ If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go against the LORD’s command, to do anything good or bad of my own will? I will say whatever the LORD says. ¹⁴ Now I am going back to my people, but first, let me warn you what these people will do to your people in the future.”

BALAAAM’S FOURTH ORACLE

¹⁵ Then he proclaimed his poem:

The oracle of Balaam son of Beor,
the oracle of the man whose eyes are opened;
¹⁶ the oracle of one who hears the sayings of God
and has knowledge from the Most High,
who sees a vision from the Almighty,
who falls into a trance with his eyes uncovered:
¹⁷ I see him, but not now;
I perceive him, but not near.
A star will come from Jacob,
and a scepter will arise from Israel.
He will smash the forehead of Moab
and strike down all the Shethites.
¹⁸ Edom will become a possession;
Seir will become a possession of its enemies,
but Israel will be triumphant.
¹⁹ One who comes from Jacob will rule;
he will destroy the city's survivors.

²⁰ Then Balaam saw Amalek and proclaimed his poem:
Amalek was first among the nations,
but his future is destruction.

²¹ Next he saw the Kenites and proclaimed his poem:
Your dwelling place is enduring;
your nest is set in the cliffs.
²² Kain will be destroyed
when Asshur takes you captive.

²³ Once more he proclaimed his poem:
Ah, who can live when God does this?
²⁴ Ships will come from the coast of Kittim;
they will carry out raids against Asshur and Eber,
but they too will come to destruction.

²⁵ Balaam then arose and went back to his homeland, and Balak also
went his way.

25 ISRAEL WORSHIPS BAAL

While Israel was staying in the Acacia Grove, the people began to prostitute themselves with the women of Moab. ²The women invited them to the sacrifices for their gods, and the people ate and bowed in worship to their gods. ³So Israel aligned itself with Baal of Peor, and the LORD's anger burned against Israel. ⁴The LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the LORD so that his burning anger may turn away from Israel."

⁵So Moses told Israel's judges, "Kill each of the men who aligned themselves with Baal of Peor."

PHINEHAS INTERVENES

⁶An Israelite man came bringing a Midianite woman to his relatives in the sight of Moses and the whole Israelite community while they were weeping at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ⁷When Phinehas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw this, he got up from the assembly, took a spear in his hand, ⁸followed the Israelite man into the tent, and drove it through both the Israelite man and the woman—through her belly. Then the plague on the Israelites was stopped, ⁹but those who died in the plague numbered twenty-four thousand.

¹⁰The LORD spoke to Moses, ¹¹"Phinehas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the Israelites because he was zealous among them with my zeal, so that I did not destroy the Israelites in my zeal. ¹²Therefore declare: I grant him my covenant of peace. ¹³It will be a covenant of perpetual priesthood for him and his future descendants, because he was zealous for his God and made atonement for the Israelites."

¹⁴The name of the slain Israelite man, who was struck dead with the Midianite woman, was Zimri son of Salu, the leader of a Simeonite family. ¹⁵The name of the slain Midianite woman was Cozbi, the daughter of Zur, a tribal head of a family in Midian.

VENGEANCE AGAINST THE MIDIANITES

¹⁶The LORD told Moses, ¹⁷"Attack the Midianites and strike them dead. ¹⁸For they attacked you with the treachery that they used against you in the Peor incident. They did the same in the case involving their sister Cozbi, daughter of the Midianite leader who was killed the day the plague came at Peor."

Sermon Notes

Sermon Notes

Life Group Discussion Guide

RHYTHM REMINDER  **Serve the Community**

LEAN IN

Have you ever followed bad advice or directions that led you the wrong way—what happened, and how did you find your way back? _____

LOOK DOWN

Read Numbers 22:22–35 (pg. 125). How does God respond to Balaam’s journey? Who sees the angel of the Lord? What might it mean that the donkey sees what Balaam cannot, and how does Balaam respond to God’s rebuke? _____

LOOK OUT

How can the misuse of spiritual influence—especially by leaders—harm faith communities from within, and why is it important to hold leaders to a higher standard? _____

LOOK IN

For you, which personal motivations (like security, approval, or influence) are hardest to surrender when caring for others—and how does Jesus’ example of faithful leadership challenge the way you lead or serve? _____



CHRIST CONNECTION

By Jeremy Robertson | Lead Pastor of Mariners Yorba Linda

Revelation 2:14, 2 Peter 2:15, and Jude 11 are warnings that point back to the story of Balaam found in the book of Numbers 22–25. In these chapters, Balaam was summoned by Balak, king of Moab, to curse Israel. Yet God restrains him and turns his words into blessings. Even so, Balaam’s heart is drawn toward personal gain, and his influence ultimately contributes to Israel’s fall into idolatry and immorality. Balaam’s story shows how someone who hears God’s voice can still lead others toward compromise when their heart is divided.

Against this background, the faithfulness of Jesus Christ becomes even clearer. Where Balaam’s influence contributed to the spiritual stumbling of God’s people, Jesus leads His people in truth and righteousness. Jesus never used His authority for personal gain. Instead, He gave Himself for the sake of those He loves. He leads His people not to compromise but into truth, holiness, and life. Balaam’s story reveals the danger of misused spiritual authority, but Jesus embodies perfect obedience and love.



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Balaam's Donkey
Original Artwork by Jan Snyder

volunteer contributions

A RATHER HUMOROUS YET HOLY WAR OF WORDS

A comic tale with divine interruption

By Lorraine O'Keefe

A king, a sorcerer, and a donkey walk into a Bible story...

It sounds like the setup to a joke, right? But it's Scripture (Numbers 22–24)—a divine comedy, a cautionary tale, a holy interruption.

Each voice reveals something about human nature—and God's nature—when words are wielded, withheld, or divinely redirected.

When Balak the king speaks:

He sees the battle as one of words, fearing Israel's spread and impact more than its swords.

He believes more in Balaam's words—to bless or curse—than in his own gods.

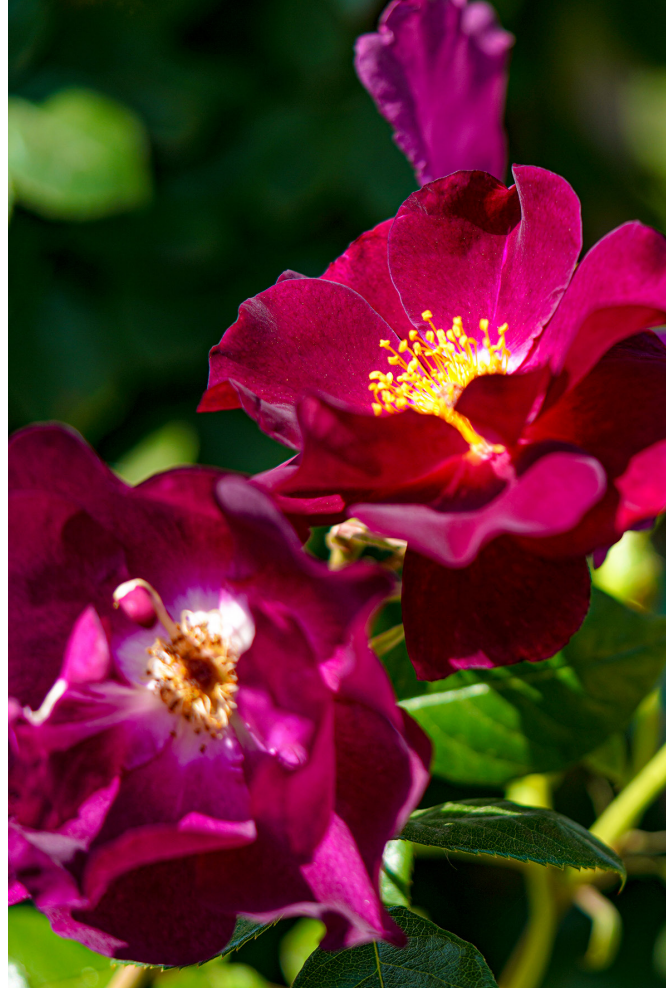
He piles on payment for paid curse services that, instead, become public worship gatherings.

He moves across multiple high places and altar resets, thinking it's about *location, location, location*—and a bigger pile of so-called sacrifices.

He becomes the tragic foil in a divine comedy, eventually reduced to begging the sorcerer to not speak at all.

When Balaam the sorcerer speaks:

His mouth is holier than he is—it's smooth lip service for personal gain.



He attempts to obey God’s words while angling for a better deal—a higher diviner’s fee.

He’s anything but a “sacred” seer, blinded by his personal profit and professional image.

His actions say it all, treating the supernatural—unfazed by a talking donkey—as a workaday friction, attempting to beat her into submission.

He utters false teachings steeped in greed, becoming known forever as “the guy with the donkey”...a man of stumbling-block seduction whom Peter, John, and Jude later make a point not to follow.

When the donkey speaks:

It is only when God opens her mouth, after hearing (and listening) to Him.

She is the true seer—repeatedly seeing the angel with a drawn sword—and turns aside into a field, pressing against a wall, and finally lays down.

She is the sorcerer’s unwitting savior as the angel declares her owner would have been killed, not her, had she not intervened.

She does so as a humble, reliable, workaday servant—with peace, protection, and gentleness.

She’s a comic truth-teller to her owner—in his deadpan willingness to argue back without any recorded surprise—demonstrating how dulled he is to genuine miracle and rebuke.

When God speaks:

It’s a divinely witty comeback, from a donkey, that finally stops a wizard in his tracks—

And opens his ears to hear God...at least temporarily.

It’s a line so human, so holy, and so funny-not-funny.

Wait for it...

“Am I in the habit of treating you like this?” (Numbers 22:30)

The DONKEY delivers the line. And we’re left—like Balaam—speechless.