

DONKEY TALK

Numbers 22:1-24:13

The people of Israel traveled to the flatlands of Moab. They camped along the Jordan River across from Jericho. Balak saw everything that Israel had done to the Amorites. Balak was the son of Zippor. The people of Moab were terrified because there were so many Israelites. In fact, Moab was filled with panic because of the people of Israel.

The Moabites spoke to the elders of Midian. They said, "This huge mob is going to lick up everything around us. They'll lick it up as an ox licks up all of the grass in the fields."

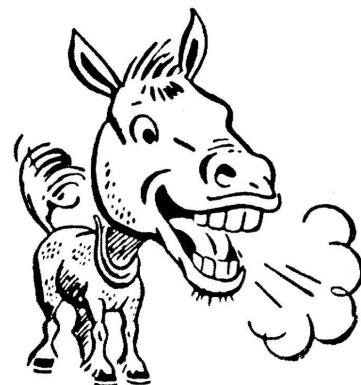
Balak, the son of Zippor, was the king of Moab at that time. He sent messengers to get Balaam. Balaam was the son of Beor. Balaam was at the city of Pethor near the Euphrates River. Pethor was in the land where Balaam had been born. Balak told the messengers to say to Balaam,

"A nation has come out of Egypt. They are covering the face of the land. They've settled down next to me. So come and put a curse on those people. They are too powerful for me. Maybe I'll be able to win the battle over them. Maybe I'll be able to drive them out of the country. I know that those you bless will be blessed. And I know that those you put a curse on will be cursed."

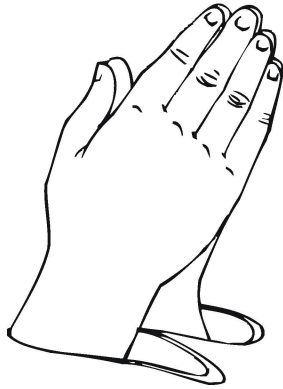
The elders of Moab and Midian left. They took with them the money they knew Balaam would ask for. They wanted him to use magic and figure things out for them. They came to where Balaam was. And they told him what Balak had said.

"Spend the night here," Balaam said to them. "I'll bring you back the answer the Lord gives me." So the princes of Moab stayed with him.

God came to Balaam. He asked, "Who are these men who are with you?"



Balaam said to God, "Balak king of Moab, the son of Zippor, sent me a message. He said, 'A nation has come out of Egypt. They are covering the whole surface of the land. So come. Put a curse on them for me. Maybe I'll be able to fight them. Maybe I'll be able to drive them away.' "



But God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people. I have blessed them."

The next morning Balaam got up. He said to Balak's princes, "Go back to your own country. The Lord won't let me go with you."

So the princes of Moab returned to Balak. They said, "Balaam wouldn't come with us."

Then Balak sent other princes. They were more important than the first ones. And there were more of them. They came to Balaam. They said,

"Balak, the son of Zippor, says, 'Don't let anything keep you from coming to me. I'll make you very rich. I'll do anything you say. Come. Put a curse on those people for me.' "

But Balaam gave them his answer. He said, "Balak could give me his palace filled with silver and gold. Even then, I still couldn't do anything at all that goes beyond what the Lord my God commands. Stay here tonight, just as the others did. I'll find out what else the Lord will tell me."

That night God came to Balaam. He said, "These men have come to get you. So go with them. But do only what I tell you to do."

Balaam got up in the morning. He put a saddle on his donkey. Then he went with the princes of Moab. But God was very angry when Balaam went. So the angel of the Lord stood in the road to oppose him. Balaam was riding on his donkey. His two servants were with him. The donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road. The angel was holding a sword. He was ready for battle. So the donkey left the road and went into a field. Balaam hit the donkey. He wanted to get it back on the road.

Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path. The path went between two vineyards. There were walls on both sides. The donkey saw the angel of the Lord.

So it moved close to the wall. It crushed Balaam's foot against the wall. He hit the donkey again.

Then the angel of the Lord moved on ahead. He stood in a narrow place. There was no room to turn, either right or left. The donkey saw the angel of the Lord. So it lay down under Balaam. That made him angry. He hit the donkey with his walking stick.

Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth. It said to Balaam, "What have I done to you? Why did you hit me those three times?"

Balaam answered the donkey. He said, "You have made me look foolish! I wish I had a sword in my hand. If I did, I'd kill you right now."



The donkey said to Balaam, "I'm your own donkey. I'm the one you have always ridden. Haven't you been riding me to this very day? Have I ever made you look foolish before?"

"No," he said.

Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes. He saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road. He saw that the angel was holding a sword. The angel was ready for battle. So Balaam bowed down. He fell with his face to the ground.

The angel of the Lord spoke to him. He asked him, "Why have you hit your donkey three times? I have come here to oppose you. What you are doing is foolish. The donkey saw me. It turned away from me three times. Suppose it had not turned away. Then I would certainly have killed you by now. But I would have spared the donkey."

Balaam spoke to the angel of the Lord. He said, "I have sinned. I didn't realize you were standing in the road to oppose me. Tell me whether you are pleased with me. If you aren't, I'll go back."

The angel of the Lord spoke to Balaam. He said, "Go with the men. But say only what I tell you to say." So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

Balak heard that Balaam was coming. So he went out to meet him. They met at a Moabite town near the Arnon River. The town was on the border of Balak's territory. Balak spoke to Balaam. He said, "Didn't I send messengers to you? I wanted you to come quickly. So why didn't you come? I can make you very rich."

"Well, I've come to you now," Balaam replied. "But I can't say just anything. I can only speak the words God puts in my mouth."

Then Balaam went with Balak to Kiriath Huzoth. Balak sacrificed cattle and sheep. He gave some to Balaam. He also gave some to the princes who were with him.

The next morning Balak took Balaam up to Bamoth Baal. From there he saw part of the people of Israel.

Balaam said to Balak, "Build me seven altars here. Prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me to sacrifice." Balak did just as Balaam said. The two of them offered a bull and a ram on each altar. Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stay here beside your offering. I'll go and try to find out what the Lord wants me to do. Maybe he'll come and meet with me. Then I'll tell you what he says to me." So Balaam went off to a bare hilltop.

God met with him there. Balaam said, "I've prepared seven altars. On each altar I've offered a bull and a ram."

The Lord put a message in Balaam's mouth. The Lord said, "Go back to Balak. Give him my message."

So Balaam went back to him. He found Balak standing beside his offering. All of the princes of Moab were with him.

Then Balaam spoke the message he had received from God. He said,

"Balak brought me from the land of Aram.

The king of Moab sent for me from the mountains in the east.

'Come,' he said. 'Put a curse on Jacob's people for me.

Come. Speak against Israel.'

But how can I put a curse on

people God hasn't cursed?

How can I speak against

people the Lord hasn't spoken against?

I see them from the rocky peaks.
I view them from the hills.
I see a group of people who live by themselves.
They don't consider themselves to be one of the nations.
Jacob's people are like the dust of the earth.
Can dust be counted?
Who can count even a fourth of the people of Israel?
Let me die as godly people die.
Let my death be like theirs!"

Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I brought you here to put a curse on my enemies! But all you have done is give them a blessing!"

He answered, "I have to speak only the words the Lord puts in my mouth."

Then Balak said to Balaam, "Come with me to another place. You can see the people of Israel from there. You will see only some of them. You won't see all of them. From there, put a curse on them for me." So Balak took Balaam to the field of Zophim. It was on the highest slopes of Pisgah. There he built seven altars. He offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

Balaam said to Balak, "Stay here beside your offering. I'll meet with the Lord over there."

The Lord met with Balaam. He put a message in Balaam's mouth. The Lord said, "Go back to Balak. Give him my message."

So he went to him. He found him standing beside his offering. The princes of Moab were with him. Balak asked him, "What did the Lord say?"

Then Balaam spoke the message he had received from God. He said,
"Balak, rise up and listen.
Son of Zippor, hear me.
God isn't a mere man. He can't lie.
He isn't a human being. He doesn't change his mind.
He speaks, and then he acts.
He makes a promise, and then he keeps it.
He has commanded me to bless Israel.
He has given them his blessing. And I can't change it.

"I don't see any trouble coming on the people of Jacob.

I don't see any suffering in Israel.

The Lord their God is with them.

The shout of the King is among them.

God brought them out of Egypt.

They are as strong as a wild ox.

There isn't any magic that can hurt the people of Jacob.

No one can use magic words to harm Israel.

Here is what will be said about the people of Jacob.

Here is what will be said about Israel.

People will say, 'See what God has done!'

The people of Israel are going to wake up like a female lion.

They are going to get up like a male lion.

They are like a lion that won't rest

until it eats what it has caught.

They are like a lion that won't rest

until it drinks the blood of what it has killed."

Then Balak said to Balaam, "Don't put a curse on them at all! And don't give them a blessing at all!"

Balaam answered, "Didn't I tell you that I have to do only what the Lord says?"

Then Balak said to Balaam, "Come. Let me take you to another place. Perhaps God will be pleased to let you put a curse on them for me from there." Balak took Balaam to the top of Mount Peor. It looks out over a dry and empty land.

Balaam said, "Build me seven altars here. Prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me to sacrifice." Balak did just as Balaam said. He offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

Balaam saw that the Lord was pleased to give his blessing to Israel. So he didn't try to use evil magic as he had done at other times. Instead, he turned and looked toward the desert. He looked out and saw Israel. They had set up their camps tribe by tribe. The Spirit of God came on him.

Balaam spoke the message he had received from God. He said,

"Here is the message God gave Balaam, the son of Beor.

It's the message God gave to the one who sees clearly.

It's the message God gave to the one who hears the words of God.

He sees a vision from the Mighty One.
He falls down flat with his face toward the ground.
His eyes have been opened by the Lord.
"People of Jacob, your tents are very beautiful.
Israel, the places where you live are very beautiful.
"They spread out like valleys.
They are like gardens beside a river.
They are like aloes the Lord has planted.
They are like cedar trees beside a stream.
Their water buckets will run over.
Their seeds will have plenty of water.
"Their king will be greater than King Agag.
Their kingdom will be honored.
"God brought them out of Egypt.
They are as strong as a wild ox.
They eat up nations that are at war with them.
They break their bones in pieces.
They wound them with their arrows.
Like a male lion they lie down and sleep.
They are like a female lion.
Who dares to wake them up?
May those who bless you be blessed!
May those who call down a curse on you be cursed!"

Then Balak's anger burned against Balaam. He slapped his hands together. He said to Balaam, "I sent for you to put a curse on my enemies. But you have given them a blessing three times. Get out of here right away! Go home! I said I'd make you very rich. But the Lord has kept you from getting rich."

Balaam answered Balak, "Here is what I told the messengers you sent me. I said, 'Balak could give me his palace filled with silver and gold. Even if I wanted to, I still couldn't do anything at all that goes beyond what the Lord commands. I have to say only what the Lord tells me to say.'