

A photograph of a grey donkey in a green field. The donkey is shown in profile from the chest up, facing left. Its mouth is open, and its tongue is visible. The background is a lush green field with various plants and grasses. The text "Balaam" is written in a large, white, cursive font across the upper middle of the image. Below it, the text "And His Talking Donkey" is written in a smaller, white, cursive font. In the bottom right corner, there is a small, white, cursive signature that reads "Compiled by Dr. Harold Bollinger".

Balaam

And His Talking Donkey

Compiled by Dr. Harold Bollinger

Overview:

BALAAM ACKNOWLEDGED THAT YAHWEH WAS A POWERFUL GOD.

Balaam was one of those noteworthy Old Testament characters who, though not one of God's chosen people, was willing to acknowledge that Yahweh (the Lord) was indeed a powerful God. But he did not believe in the Lord as the only true God.

His story exposes the deception of maintaining an outward facade of spirituality over a corrupt inward life. Balaam was a man ready to obey God's command as long as he could profit from doing so. This mixture of motives—obedience and profit—eventually led to Balaam's death.

Although he realized the awesome power of Israel's God, his heart was occupied with the wealth he could gain in Moab.

There he returned to die when the armies of Israel invaded.

Discover Balaam in the Scriptures

Balaam, the son of Beor was from Mesopotamia

Deuteronomy 23:4

These nations did not welcome you with food and water when you came out of Egypt. Instead, they tried to hire Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram-naharaim to curse you.

We ought to value the privileges of God's people, both for ourselves and for our children, above all other advantages. No personal blemishes, no crimes of our forefathers, no difference of nation, shuts us out under the Christian dispensation. But an unsound heart will deprive us of blessings; and a bad example, or an unsuitable marriage, may shut our children from them.

Balaam was a prophet

Numbers 24:2-9

And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the spirit of God came upon him.

And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: He hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open:

How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters.

He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted.

God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of a unicorn: he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows.

He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesses thee, and cursed is he that curses thee.

Balaam spoke not his own sense, but the language of the Spirit that came upon him.

Many have their eyes open who have not their hearts open; are enlightened, but not sanctified. That knowledge which puffs men up with pride, will but serve to light them to hell, whither many go with their eyes open.

The blessing is nearly the same as those given before. He admires in Israel, their beauty. The righteous, doubtless, is more excellent than his neighbour. Their fruitfulness and increase. Their honour and advancement.

Their power and victory. He looks back upon what had been done for them. Their power and victory. He looks back upon what had been done for them.

Their courage and security. The righteous are bold as a lion, not when assaulting others, but when at rest, because God maketh them to dwell in safety. Their influence upon their neighbours. God takes what is done to them, whether good or evil, as done to himself.

Balaam loved the wages of the unrighteous.

2 Peter 2:15-16

Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet.

Impure seducers and their abandoned followers, give themselves up to their own fleshly minds. Refusing to bring every thought to the obedience of Christ, they act against God's righteous precepts.

They walk after the flesh, they go on in sinful courses, and increase to greater degrees of impurity and wickedness. They also despise those whom God has set in authority over them, and requires them to honour. Outward temporal good things are the wages sinners expect and promise themselves.

And none have more cause to tremble, than those who are bold to gratify their sinful lusts, by presuming on the Divine grace and mercy.

Balak sends for Balaam to curse Israel

Numbers 22:5-7

He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me:

Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blesses is blessed, and he whom thou curses is cursed.

And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand; and they came unto Balaam, and spake unto him the words of Balak.

The king of Moab formed a plan to get the people of Israel cursed; that is, to set God against them, who had hitherto fought for them.

He had a false notion, that if he could get some prophet to pray for evil upon them, and to pronounce a blessing upon himself and his forces, that then he should be able to deal with them.

None had so great a reputation as Balaam; and Balak will employ him, though he send a great way for him. It is not known whether the Lord had ever spoken to

Balaam, or by him, before this; though it is probable he had, and it is certain he did afterwards.

Yet we have abundant proof that he lived and died a wicked man, an enemy to God and his people. And the curse shall not come upon us if there is not a cause, even though men utter it.

To prevail with Balaam, they took the wages of unrighteousness, but God laid restraint upon Balaam, forbidding him to curse Israel.

Balaam was no stranger to Israel's cause; so that he ought to have answered the messengers at once that he would never curse a people whom God had blessed; but he takes a night's time to consider what he should do.

When we parley with temptations, we are in great danger of being overcome. Balaam was not faithful in returning God's answer to the messengers. Those are a fair mark for Satan's temptation, who lessen Divine restraints; as if to go against God's law were only to go without his leave.

The messengers also are not faithful in returning Balaam's answer to Balak. Thus many are abused by the flatteries of those about them, and are prevented from seeing their own faults and follies.

Joshua 24:9

Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and warred against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you:

We must never think our work for God done, till our life is done. If he lengthen out our days beyond what we expected, like those of Joshua, it is because he has some further service for us to do.

He who aims at the same mind which was in Christ Jesus, will glory in bearing the last testimony to his Saviour's goodness, and in telling to all around, the obligations with which the unmerited goodness of God has bound him.

The assembly came together in a solemn religious manner. Joshua spake to them in God's name, and as from him. His sermon consists of doctrine and application. The doctrinal part is a history of the great things God had done for his people, and for their fathers before them.

The application of this history of God's mercies to them, is an exhortation to fear and serve God, in gratitude for his favour, and that it might be continued.

Nehemiah Turns Out the Mixed Multitude

Nehemiah 13:2

Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing.

Israel was a peculiar people, and not to mingle with the nations. See the benefit of publicly reading the word of God; when it is duly attended to, it discovers to us sin and duty, good and evil, and shows wherein we have erred.

We profit, when we are thus wrought upon to separate from evil. Those that would drive sin out of their hearts, the living temples, must throw out its household stuff, and all the provision made for it; and take away all the things that are the food and fuel of lust; this is really to mortify it.

When sin is cast out of the heart by repentance, let the blood of Christ be applied to it by faith, then let it be furnished with the graces of God's Spirit, for every good work.

Micah 6:5

O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord.

God's Controversy with Israel

The people are called upon to declare why they were weary of God's worship, and prone to idolatry. Sin causes the controversy between God and man.

God reasons with us, to teach us to reason with ourselves. Let them remember God's many favours to them and their fathers, and compare with them their unworthy, ungrateful conduct toward him.

Angry when rebuked by his donkey

Numbers 22:22-35

But God was furious that Balaam was going, so he sent the angel of the Lord to stand in the road to block his way. As Balaam and two servants were riding along, Balaam's donkey suddenly saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand. The donkey bolted off the road into a field, but Balaam beat it and turned it back onto the road.

Then the angel of the Lord stood at a place where the road narrowed between two vineyard walls. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing there, it tried to squeeze by and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall. So Balaam beat the donkey again.

Then the angel of the Lord moved farther down the road and stood in a place so narrow that the donkey could not get by at all. This time when the donkey saw the angel, it lay down under Balaam. In a fit of rage Balaam beat it again with his staff.

Then the Lord caused the donkey to speak. "What have I done to you that deserves your beating me these three times?" it asked Balaam.

"Because you have made me look like a fool!" Balaam shouted. "If I had a sword with me, I would kill you!"

"But I am the same donkey you always ride on," the donkey answered. "Have I ever done anything like this before?"

"No," he admitted.

Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the roadway with a drawn sword in his hand. Balaam fell face down on the ground before him.

"Why did you beat your donkey those three times?" the angel of the Lord demanded. "I have come to block your way because you are stubbornly resisting me.

Three times the donkey saw me and shied away; otherwise, I would certainly have killed you by now and spared the donkey."

Then Balaam confessed to the angel of the Lord, "I have sinned. I did not realize you were standing in the road to block my way. I will go back home if you are against my going."

But the angel of the Lord told him, "Go with these men, but you may say only what I tell you to say." So Balaam went on with Balak's officials.

The Opposition to Balaam by the Way

We must not think, that because God does not always by his providence restrain men from sin, therefore he approves of it, or that it is not hateful to him. The holy angels oppose sin, and perhaps are employed in preventing it more than we are aware.

This angel was an adversary to Balaam, because Balaam counted him his adversary; those are really our best friends, and we ought so to reckon them, who stop our progress in sinful ways.

Balaam has notice of God's displeasure by the donkey. It is common for those whose hearts are fully set in them to do evil, to push on violently, through the difficulties Providence lays in their way.

The Lord opened the mouth of the donkey. This was a great miracle wrought by the power of God. He who made man speak, could, when he pleased, make the donkey to speak with man's voice.

The donkey complained of Balaam's cruelty. The righteous God does not allow the meanest or weakest to be abused; but they shall be able to speak in their own defence, or he will some way or other speak for them.

Balaam at length has his eyes opened.

God has many ways to bring down the hard and unhumiliated heart. When our eyes are opened, we shall see the danger of sinful ways, and how much it was for our advantage to be crossed. Balaam seemed to relent; I have sinned; but it does not appear that he was sensible of this wickedness of his heart, or willing to own it.

If he finds he cannot go forward, he will be content, since there is no remedy, to go back. Thus many leave their sins, only because their sins have left them. The angel declared that he should not only be unable to curse Israel, but should be forced to bless them: this would be more for the glory of God, and to his own confusion, than if he had turned back.

2 Peter 2:16

But Balaam was stopped from his mad course when his donkey rebuked him with a human voice.

Impure seducers and their abandoned followers, give themselves up to their own fleshly minds. Refusing to bring every thought to the obedience of Christ, they act against God's righteous precepts.

They walk after the flesh, they go on in sinful courses, and increase to greater degrees of impurity and wickedness.

They also despise those whom God has set in authority over them, and requires them to honour. Outward temporal good things are the wages sinners expect and promise themselves. And none have more cause to tremble, than those who are bold to gratify their sinful lusts, by presuming on the Divine grace and mercy.

Many such there have been, and are, who speak lightly of the restraints of God's law, and deem themselves freed from obligations to obey it. Let Christians stand at a distance from such.

Counsel of Israel's corruption with the Midianites

Numbers 31:16

"These are the very ones who followed Balaam's advice and caused the people of Israel to rebel against the Lord at Mount Peor. They are the ones who caused the plague to strike the Lord's people.

The sword of war should spare women and children; but the sword of justice should know no distinction, but that of guilty or not guilty.

This war was the execution of a righteous sentence upon a guilty nation, in which the women were the worst criminals. . In the course of providence, when famine and plagues visit a nation for sin, children suffer in the common calamity.

Revelation 2:14-15

And yet I have a few complaints against you. You tolerate some among you who are like Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel.

He taught them to worship idols by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual sin. In the same way, you have some Nicolaitans among you—people who follow the same teaching and commit the same sins.

At Pergamos

The word of God is a sword, able to slay both sin and sinners. It turns and cuts every way; but the believer need not fear this sword; yet this confidence cannot be supported without steady obedience.

As our Lord notices all the advantages and opportunities we have for duty in the places where we dwell, so he notices our temptations and discouragements from the same causes.

In a situation of trials, the church of Pergamos had not denied the faith, either by open apostasy, or by giving way so as to avoid the cross.

Christ commends their steadfastness, but reproves their sinful failures. A wrong view of gospel doctrine and Christian liberty, was a root of bitterness from which evil practices grew.

Repentance is the duty of churches and bodies of men, as well as of particular persons; those who sin together, should repent together.

Here is the promise of favour to those that overcome. The influences and comforts of the Spirit of Christ, come down from heaven into the soul, for its support.

This is hidden from the rest of the world. The new name is the name of adoption; when the Holy Spirit shows his own work in the believer's soul, this new name and its real import are understood by him.

Covetousness of Balaam

Jude 1:11

How terrible it will be for them! For they follow the evil example of Cain, who killed his brother. Like Balaam, they will do anything for money. And like Korah, they will perish because of their rebellion.

An Awful Description of These Seducers and Their Deplorable End

False teachers are dreamers; they greatly defile and grievously wound the soul. These teachers are of a disturbed mind and a seditious spirit; forgetting that the powers that be, are ordained of God, Ro 13:1.

As to the contest about the body of Moses, it appears that Satan wished to make the place of his burial known to the Israelites, in order to tempt them to worship him, but he was prevented, and vented his rage in desperate blasphemy.

This should remind all who dispute never to bring railing charges. Also learn hence, that we ought to defend those whom God owns. It is hard, if not impossible, to find any enemies to the Christian religion, who did not, and do not, live in open or secret contradiction to the principles of natural religion.

False teachers are to expect the worst punishments in this world and in that to come. They glare like meteors, or falling stars, and then sink into the blackness of darkness forever.

We have no mention of the prophecy of Enoch in any other part or place of Scripture; yet one plain text of Scripture, proves any point we are to believe.

We find from this, that Christ's coming to judge was prophesied of, as early as the times before the flood.

The Lord cometh: what a glorious time will that be! Notice how often the word "ungodly" is repeated. Many now do not at all refer to the terms godly, or ungodly, unless it be to mock at even the words; but it is not so in the language taught us by the Holy Ghost.

Hard speeches of one another, especially if ill-grounded, will certainly come into account at the Day of Judgment. These evil men and seducers are angry at everything that happens, and never pleased with their own state and condition.

Their will and their fancy, are their only rule and law. Those who please their sinful appetites, are most prone to yield to ungovernable passions.

The men of God, from the beginning of the world, have declared the doom denounced on them. Such let us avoid. We are to follow men only as they follow Christ.

Death of Balaam

Numbers 31:8

All five of the Midianite kings—Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba—died in the battle. They also killed Balaam son of Beor with the sword.

The Israelites slew the Kings of Midian. They slew Balaam.

God's overruling providence brought him thither, and their just vengeance found him. Had he himself rightly believed what he had said of the happy state of Israel, he would not have thus herded with the enemies of Israel.

The Midianites' wicked wives were Balaam's projects: it was just that he should perish with them, Hos 4:5.

They took the women and children captives. They burnt their cities and castles, and returned to the camp.

God promise that he would make the Israelites masters of all the countries yet unsubdued, through Joshua was old, and not able to do it; old, and not likely to live to see it done.

Life Application

Eventually, each of us lives through the same process. Who and what we are will somehow come to the surface, destroying any masks we may have put on to cover up our real selves.

Efforts spent on keeping up appearances would be much better spent on finding the answer to sin in our lives. We can avoid Balaam's mistake by facing ourselves and realizing that God is willing to accept us, forgive us, and literally make us over from within.

Don't miss this great discovery that eluded Balaam.

Key Verse.

2 Peter 2:15-16

They have wandered off the right road and followed the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved to earn money by doing wrong. But Balaam was stopped from his mad course when his donkey rebuked him with a human voice.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Verse Concept: Matthew Henry's Concept Bible Commentary