

What Balaam DID Say

Mike Southern

May 2016

For most people, the story of the prophet Balaam starts and ends with his talking donkey. But the story doesn't end there, not by a long shot. Balaam still has to face Balak, the king of Moab, who's thinks he's paying for a curse on Moses and the Israelites... and kings in the ancient world didn't take disappointment very well!

The story of Balaam takes three chapters—Numbers 22-24—but the rest of this tale picks up at the end of chapter 22, right after the donkey said her piece...

The journey to King Balak's castle was likely a quiet one for Balaam.

His donkey had nothing more to say
while he was probably afraid to even breathe.
Prophets are supposed to speak for God, after all,
but Balaam had already said too much.

For there have always been

those who thought they could buy God's blessing
for the right price
and those who would willingly sell God's blessing,
even though it wasn't theirs to sell.

However, *prophet* and *profit* are not the same word!
Balaam had agreed to sell God's blessing...
but an angry angel with a sword had made it clear
that God had NOT agreed to the deal.

Worse yet, Balaam was sure

that King Balak had NOT gotten the same message,
which meant this journey would NOT end well for a certain prophet!

It was late in the day when Balaam finally arrived
and King Balak was pacing impatiently.

"Why did you take so long?" he demanded.

"I told you I would give you anything you asked for!"

Balaam simply said, "I'm here, but nothing has changed.

I can only say what God tells me to say, nothing more."

But the king barely heard him.

He was paying to have Balaam curse the Israelites
and he wanted it done NOW!

So he took Balaam to a place where they could spend the night.

The king offered sacrifices to try and gain God's favor,
sent part of the meat to Balaam for dinner,
and went to bed believing that God would do what he wanted.

The next morning he took Balaam to a high place
where they could see the Israelites as they marched toward his kingdom.
Balaam set up seven altars and made sacrifices,
then he went alone to see what God wanted him to say.
And when the king saw Balaam returning,
he just couldn't wait to hear how badly Balaam would curse Israel!

Instead, Balaam looked out over the Israelites and said,
"Balak called me here to curse you,
but how can I curse those whom God has blessed?
I can only pray that my end is as blessed as yours will be."

King Balak was furious! "What are you doing?
I'm paying you to curse my enemies, but you blessed them instead!"
Balaam just sighed and said, "I warned you, didn't I?
I can only say what God tells me to say, nothing more."

But King Balak was determined. He took him to another place and said,
"You can only see *part* of them from here. Just curse *some* of them for me!"
So Balaam made all the sacrifices again and went off alone again,
and when he came back the king asked,
"Well, what did He say *this* time?"

Balaam looked right at King Balak and said,
"Listen to me, Balak. God is not a man who lies;
He doesn't change his mind just because some human king commands it.
He will bless Israel and I am powerless to stop Him!"
And when the king said, "If you aren't going to curse them,
at least don't bless them!"
Balaam just sighed and said, "I warned you, didn't I?
I can only say what God tells me to say, nothing more."

Never one to give up. King Balak took him to yet another place and said,
"Let's try again. Maybe God will let you curse them *from here!*"
So Balaam made all the sacrifices again and went off alone again...
but by now he already knew what God planned to do.
He didn't need to go through all the rituals he normally did this time;
instead, God's Spirit came straight to him and Balaam said:

"This is MY prophecy, the words of a man
who finally sees clearly what God plans to do.
Israel is God's own people, beautiful in His sight,
and He will allow no one to harm them.
God will bless those who bless Israel, and curse those who curse them."

Now King Balak was enraged! He clapped his hands to call his guards.

“I called you to curse them. Instead, you have blessed them **THREE TIMES!**

I had planned to reward you but God has kept you from getting it!

NOW GET OUT OF HERE!

GO HOME!

But what King Balak didn't know

was how happy his words made Balaam.

For he expected the king to kill him, but now he was going home ALIVE!

And before he left, Balaam said, “I warned you, didn't I?”

I can only say what God tells me to say...

“And He has one last word for you.”

Then the Spirit came on Balaam one more time

and he prophesied Israel's complete victory over Balak

and everyone else who stood against God's people.

And after that, both men went home—

Balak to fight a war he couldn't win

and Balaam to praise God for sparing his life.

But at least Balaam had finally learned the truth...

A prophet should only say what God tells him to say, nothing more.