



Church of God Sunday School

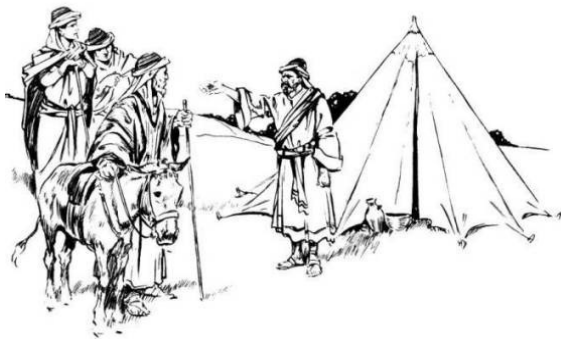
THE STORY OF BALAAM

Numbers 21:21 — 24:25; 31:1-16

Deuteronomy 18:10; 23:4

As the people of Israel continued to travel toward Canaan, God gave them great victories over two mighty kings—Sihon (*SAI-hon*), king of the Amorites (*AM-uh-rights*), and Og, king of Bashan (*BAY-shuhn*). Soon Israel came to the land of the Moabites (*MO-uh-bites*). The people of Moab were afraid of the Israelites, "because they were many."

Balak (*BAY-lak*), the king of the Moabites, had a plan. He sent messengers on a long journey to Pethor (*peth-ORE*), a distance of almost 400 miles. These messengers were to find a man by the name of Balaam (*BAY-luhm*). Balaam had a reputation for pronouncing blessings or curses upon people. Balak gave his messengers "rewards of divination" to give to Balaam if he would come and curse the Israelites.



When Balaam heard Balak's request, he asked the messengers to stay overnight. During the night, God asked Balaam, "What men are these with thee?" Balaam told God why they had come to him. God told Balaam, "Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed."

The next morning, Balaam told the men that God had refused to give him permission to go with them. So the men returned and told Balak that Balaam would not come with them. But Balak did not give up. He sent more men, men who were more important than the first men. Balak also offered Balaam greater rewards.

Balak promised to promote Balaam to "very great honour" and to do whatever Balaam asked if he would

only come and curse Israel. Balaam's answer was, "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more."

That should have been the end of the story. However, Balaam then asked the men to stay overnight to see what God would say. (Was he hoping that God would change His mind?) That night God told Balaam, "If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do." The next morning, Balaam got up, saddled his ass (donkey), and went with the Moabite men. (Did the Moabite men come to call Balaam?)

No doubt, Balaam thought everything was going to be fine. However, the Lord was angry with Balaam for going with the men. "And the angel of the LORD stood in the way" with a sword in his hand! Balaam could not see the angel, but the donkey could. She turned aside into the field, to get out of the angel's way. Balaam hit the animal, to turn her back into the path.

As Balaam approached a vineyard, the path had walls on both sides. Once again, the angel stood in the path. To get away from the angel, the donkey "thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall." Balaam was so mad! He hit the animal again!

Then the angel of the Lord went ahead of Balaam again and "stood in a narrow place." When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord for the third time, "she fell down under Balaam." Balaam's anger was greatly



stirred, and he beat the animal with his staff. (What do you think Balaam's servants and the princes of Moab thought of all this?)

Then God "opened the mouth" of the donkey. She began talking—not braying, but talking—in Balaam's own language! And Balaam understood what she said: "What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?"

Instead of being surprised that the animal was talking to him, Balaam was so mad that he answered her back: "Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee."

The donkey then asked Balaam if she had ever done anything like that before. Balaam said no, for she had not. Then God opened Balaam's eyes. He saw the angel standing in the way, with his sword drawn. Balaam bowed his head and fell flat on his face.

The angel told Balaam that the donkey had spared his life three times. Then Balaam said, "I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me." Balaam offered to go back. Instead, the angel told him to go on with the men, but he was only to speak the words which God gave him. So, Balaam continued on "with the princes of Balak."

King Balak went out to meet Balaam. When Balak questioned Balaam about why he took so long to come, Balaam said, "The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak." Together they went to Kirjath-huzoth (*KIHR-ee-ath-HOO-zote*), where Balak offered sacrifices of oxen and sheep.

The next day, Balak, Balaam, and all the princes of Moab went to the "high places of Baal" (where sacrifices to Baal were offered). There Balaam could look down on the greater part of the Israelite camp. Balaam told Balak to build seven altars and prepare seven rams and seven oxen for sacrifices, one for each altar. After the sacrifice was made, Balaam then went to a high place, in hopes that "the LORD will come to meet me."

God met Balaam and told him exactly what to say. Balaam returned to Balak and said, "How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied?" Then he blessed Israel.

Balak was *not* happy. He said: "What hast thou done unto me? I took thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast blessed them altogether."

Then Balak took Balaam to another place, and there he built seven more altars and offered more sacrifices. Again, Balaam went to meet with the Lord, while Balak waited by the burnt offering. The Lord told Balaam what to say. When Balaam went back to Balak, he said that he had received the command to bless Israel. He could not change what God had said.

Then Balak told Balaam not to curse or bless Israel, but Balaam said, "All that the LORD speaketh, that I must do."

But Balak did not give up. He said to Balaam, "Come . . . unto another place; [maybe] it will please God." Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor (*PEE-ore*). For the third time, Balak built seven altars and sacrificed offerings. That time, Balaam did not leave as he had before. He knew that God would not change His mind. The Spirit of God came on him as he looked upon the tents of Israel, and Balaam spoke a parable that blessed them.

Balak was so angry at Balaam that he clapped his hands together violently (a sign of rage and dismissal)! Then he said to Balaam, "I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times." Balak told Balaam to leave and hurry back to his place.

Before Balaam left, he told Balak of all that the Israelites would do to the Moabites and to others. After Balaam finished prophesying, he "went and returned to his place."

But that is not the end of Balaam's story. He "loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Peter 2:15). Although God had stopped Balaam from cursing Israel himself, Balaam came up with a plan! If he could cause the people of Israel to disobey God's commands, they would bring down curses upon themselves.

Balaam gave evil counsel to Balak, and Balak listened. Soon, the Moabite women and the Midianite women became friendly with the Israelite men. The women worked to draw the Israelite men away from true worship and convinced them to bow down to their false gods. The Israelites became involved in the terrible sin of idolatry! Many people of Israel died for taking part in this sin.

It looked like Balaam had finally got his way. But God always has the last word. When God told Moses to go to war with the Midianites, Balaam was on the side of the Midianites; and he was killed.

MEMORY VERSE:

"The word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do."

—Numbers 22:20
