

**October 9th**  
**THE DONKEY SPEAKS!**

*"When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam. And Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff. Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, 'What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?' And Balaam said to the donkey, 'Because you have made a fool of me. I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you.' And the donkey said to Balaam, 'Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Is it my habit to treat you this way?' And he said, 'No.' Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. And he bowed down and fell on his face." **NUMBERS 22:27-31***

*The Star* is an animated film released by Sony Pictures Animation in 2017. The story revolves around the birth of the baby Jesus and includes a donkey named "Bo" in the central plotline. According to Wikipedia, Bo the donkey seeks a more meaningful life and finds himself tied into Mary and Joseph on the way to Bethlehem. Indeed, children love when animals talk in films. Companies have made millions by giving animals a voice. Here in Numbers 22, we have a real encounter with a donkey that speaks truth to a greedy false prophet. What does God teach us here?

James Boice in his commentary on the life of Moses makes three observations from this passage that are helpful to see the connections that Moses gives. First, Balaam keeps pushing the donkey to go forward until God's angel stops him; Balak keeps pushing Balaam to curse Israel until God intervenes. Second, God opened the donkey's mouth to speak to Balaam; God opens Balaam's mouth to bless Israel. Third, the donkey was caught between Balaam's stick and the angel of the Lord; Balaam was stuck between Balak's desire to curse the people and God's pressure to only bless Israel. Of course, one truth that hasn't been mentioned is that Balaam isn't surprised by the donkey speaking! He just talks to the donkey like it was an everyday, normal conversation.

Beyond these connections that Moses makes here, we can see more of God's character in this event. Why would God condescend to the false prophet Balaam in the first place? Why wouldn't he just have killed the prophet? God had already secured a blessing on the Israelites; Balak had already received the message. Why the angel? Why this odd story of a donkey that talks? God brings the threat of discipline and judgment to warn Balaam. Now, I get it that some may read this chapter and conclude from Numbers 22:20 that the Lord gave him permission to go with the princes of Moab. However, I agree with Duguid in his commentary on Numbers. He explains it this way: "If the summons of men and the glory (reward) that they offer is really so important to you that it outweighs the expressed command of God, then you may go with them." Duguid points out wisely here that this is a choice of who Balaam will show his allegiance to.

I'm sure there's been lots of interpretation about the donkey talking. However, those ideas miss the big point. God uses Balaam here to show us a window into our own hearts. We are more like Balaam than we like to admit. Sure, we don't have a donkey talk to us, but God gives us His perfect Scripture to make us stop in our tracks of disobedience. God stops the donkey (and Balaam in their tracks). We can make this a simple, don't behave like Balaam; worship God alone. Give God your full devotion. This is all true. But it misses the point of God's intervention. Every intervention by God shows His love and grace towards the sinner. God pursues His people not just with a promise of blessing, but a promise of conforming us to Christ. Left to ourselves, we would choose greed, popularity, and possessions every time. But God. God brings us discipline because He loves us as a good Father. Fathers that discipline show their children that they care for them and want to develop them into mature adults. Earthly fathers mimic God's care for His people in this way. Balaam reminds us that we need God's consistent reminders to walk with Him in every moment. When's the last time that you praised God for the discipline that He brings you when you walk away from Him? He does it because He loves you.

**Spend some time thinking about God's discipline that He's brought into your life over your lifetime. Thank Him for His loving discipline that reminds you that He loves you.**

**For Further Reading: Hebrews 12:3-11**