

## Monetizing God?

About a hundred years ago, ‘A dog walks into the telegraph office and tells the clerk to send a telegram. He tells the clerk to send the following message: “Arf-arf-arf- arf-arf- arf-arf- arf-arf”. The telegraph clerk tells the dog: “There’s no additional charge for two more words. Do you want to add a couple more arfs?” The dog thought for a moment and answered, “Wouldn’t that sound a bit redundant?””

What wonders we’ve missed having been born too late to have seen this talking dog!! Or would a talking donkey be even more spectacular? For in all recorded history, there is only one record of a talking donkey. Forever known as Balaam’s donkey, this was a female donkey; in traditional language an “ass”, not a “jackass” which is a male donkey. These domesticated animals are sure-footed, patient, but slow. Smarts, intelligence, they’re not. But appearances can often be deceiving. For Balaam’s donkey was a whole lot smarter than she appeared. In fact, she had far greater insight, eyesight, and character than her owner.

Balaam is a fascinating, but tragic, character. He was a prophet of God in the ancient Mideast, knowing God much like Abraham initially did centuries before. However he is universally vilified by the Jews, the Christians, and Lord Jesus, in a way like

the devil in the serpent is. For though God had blessed him with a spiritual gift to be able to sense spiritual things, even to hearing God's voice, he used his gifting not to serve God, but rather to make money. Balaam exploited this blessing of God, milking it for all it was worth. And he became famous, a celebrity of the time, which is obvious by the fact that the king of Moab asked for him.

The king of Moab, Balak, found himself facing off with the terrorist army who called themselves Israelites, under the leadership of some ex-Egyptian prince named Moses. These enemies of civilization had just defeated two major kings of the lands east of the Jordan River. Sihon, king of the Amorites had refused the Israelites passage through his domain, and fought them. And for all his trouble, the Israelites defeated his army and killed him. That was frightening enough for the Moabites and King Balak. But the Israelites marched way north and east of the Sea of Galilee into what is now the Golan Heights, then the kingdom of Bashan, and had to fight against Og, Bashan's king. He was a giant, one of the ancient race of fallen angel-human half-breeds, called Rephaim. These giant human half-breeds possessed superhuman strength. (It's likely that the legend of Hercules stems from one of these Rephaim or Nephilim.) This giant, King Og, was a predecessor, possibly ancestor, of probably the last of the giants, Goliath, whom God dispatched through David's slingshot some 400 years later. But God here empowered the Israelites to defeat and kill Og as this sinful idolatrous heathen was in the way

of the Israelites entering the Promised Land. If the Moabite King Balak had been frightened before, now he was terrified, for the Israelites had advanced to his border. What was he to do?

Well, there was the famous prophet Balaam. It was reported that if he cursed a people, they could then be defeated. So King Balak sent a delegation to Balaam in his hometown of Pethor, some 400 miles away!, to hire him to come and curse the Israelites so that the kingdom of Moab could defeat them and be safe. Well, Balaam, slept on their request, conferred with God during the night, then refused them, for God told him that the Israelites are blessed, and Balaam can never curse them. Balak then sent another delegation, more high ranking than the last. Same thing. So Balak then sent royal princes with promises of even greater wealth, honor and position in Moab. But Balaam again refuses, telling him that even if the king were to give him an entire house filled with gold and silver, he could do only what the Lord God allows him to do. But after another night, God told Balaam to go on to Moab with the delegation.

So the next day, he is riding his donkey to Moab. But “hired mercenary” Balaam knows he can’t directly curse the Israelites because God won’t let him, nevertheless he’ll at least try to do what he was so handsomely hired to do. So the Lord God sent His Angel to confront Balaam. The donkey saw the Angel brandishing his sword, and veered off the road to avoid the angel. Balaam was infuriated that his always docile donkey suddenly

had a mind of her own! So he beat her with his staff, and she turned back onto the road. The Angel then moved up to where the road narrowed, passing between two walls. The donkey did her best to obey her master and avoid the sword-wielding Angel, pressing herself against one wall, unfortunately nearly crushing Balaam's foot in the process. He was not pleased. He beat the poor donkey again. The Angel moved further ahead where the passage was too narrow for the donkey to get past the Angel. When the donkey saw the Angel this time, it just stopped, and laid down with Balaam still mounted on her. Balaam really lost his temper this time, and in a rage viciously beat the poor beast of burden. Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth, enabling her to speak in human language! For a God Who gives us Holy Spirit so we can speak in tongues and heavenly languages, this was actually no big deal at all. Not since the serpent spoke to Eve in the Garden of Eden, we've no record of any non-human creature ever having the gift of speech. It was a miracle!

The poor donkey asked her "slave-driving" master, "What have I done to you that deserves your beating me three times?" Balaam was so enraged that his only concern was justifying himself, that he hardly noticed the miracle of a talking donkey. "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 have ridden all your life", the donkey answered. "Have I ever done anything like this before?" "No", Balaam admitted'. At which

point the Lord opened the eyes of this self-important, “holier-than-thou” prophet and he saw the menacing Angel blocking the way. Balaam now has sense enough to bow his head and fall face-down on the ground in worshipful submission. That this Angel was no ordinary angel but the actual Angel of the Lord, Whom most believe is Christ appearing as God before He became Jesus in Mary, is because this Angel accepts Balaam’s worship. Actual angels never allow humans to worship them, because only God is worthy to have all creation worship Him. Balaam heard the Lord’s reprimand, confessed his sin, and offered to go back. But the Lord had other plans for him to go on with Balak’s delegation.

To condense the story, Balaam, after the Angelic delay, belatedly met King Balak, and after warning the king that he could only speak what the Lord God allowed, they conducted elaborate rituals, many idolatrous, supposedly to prepare for Balaam to receive God’s word and pronounce it upon the Israelites, so they could no longer defeat Moab. But each time God met Balaam, He put glorious blessings in his mouth, so that the Israelites were strengthened. This happened four times! King Balak was beside himself with anger and fear. So Balaam went home.

But he was a man who *monetized* his gift from God. Worse, he was a compromiser. While he could not directly curse the Israelites, after he went home, he devised a way to hurt the people another way. If he could not curse them, then if he could cause them to sin against God, then God would have to release curses

against them because of their sin. Devilishly clever, indeed! So he arranged to have many beautiful young women of Moab go into the camp of the Israelites, where they easily seduced many young men of Israel to fornicate with them, even to worship their idols. Numbers 25:1-3 describes it: “While the Israelites were camped at Acacia Grove, some of the men defiled themselves by having sexual relations with local Moabite women. These women invited them to attend sacrifices to their gods, so the Israelites feasted with them and worshiped the gods of Moab. In this way, Israel joined in the worship of baal of Peor, causing the Lord’s anger to blaze against His people”. Thus a plague came upon them, killing 24,000. While Balaam had set them up, the Israelites could still have prevented the tragedy if they had just obeyed God’s commands and not given in to the temptations.

Which is exactly our life situations. As people, as churches, as whole denominations, the devil tempts us to sin with seductive allure, worldly fame and favor, in one hand, and political coercion, persecution, in the other. If we sin and don’t repent, then he can hoodwink us to reject Christ and march straight into hell. So never aim for more money, or what you think is best for yourself. Instead, follow John the Baptist’s example, in John 3:30: “[Christ] must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less”. He Who is within you must become greater and greater, and your self will, willingly, less and less. Then you’ll have the greatest treasure of all, eternal life with Him Who always loves!

