

Shadows In the Bible

Balaam

Everyone has a moment in time when a certain story resonates. For some it's Peter Pan or Winnie the Pooh. For me it comes in the form of a shadowy Prophet named Balaam found in Numbers 22. In those days it was dangerous to be a seer or a prophet of God. Some would call them the mystics or sightseers. The real job of these people was to get it right for the King. Tell him what he wants to hear. Several times in the Bible the seers were put to death for getting it wrong.

When Balaam was summoned by King Balek he must have shuddered. There was always a chance that this was it, get it wrong and die. Balek wanted Balaam to tell him what to do with the Israelites. This seer Balaam said he would go home and wait for the word from the Lord. As it was, God told him to tell the king to leave these people alone. God also said that Balaam was not to curse these people for the king or go with him. That is not what the king wanted to hear. Balaam was in a tough spot.

This poor man was caught between a King and a God who were talking to him. The King insisted Balaam go with him. God had told him no. What to do? Then this story gets strange. The

King sends many men to insist that he go and curse the Israelites. God then insisted that he Go with this king. Balaam didn't want any part of it. The strange part is that Balaam decides to get on his donkey and go. We then get into this hilarious exchange between an angel and a talking donkey. The donkey stops three times because he sees an angel that Balaam can't see. Balaam on the other hand is beating the donkey for not moving. Then the angel talks to Balaam through the donkey and they argue.

The strange part for me is not the donkey. It's that God told Balaam not to curse the Israelites. Then he says to go with the Moabite king. Further to that, God then says he is angry that Balaam went. What is really going on here? It seems part of this story is missing. Was Balaam fleeing away from the Moabite mess? Why was God angry when he told Balaam to go?

I think the missing parts are found in the rest of the Bible. Usually these shadow figures in the Bible are mentioned in other places. Balaam is mentioned several times as an object lesson like in several spots like in Deuteronomy 23 and Nehemiah 13. In those verses Balaam's actions of giving a curse was a bad thing. In our story in Numbers 22-23, Balaam does not curse the Israelites.

It seems confusing. What is clear from other passages is that Balaam may have cursed the Israelites for money that the king offered. In Revelation 2 it says that Balaam was a bad example of idolatry and deception. I believe the missing pieces to this shadowy story are his heart.

Balaam loved receiving money for his advice. He really did not want to listen to God. I think God told him to go with the king just to see if he would, not that he should.

This is a fun story. The donkey is priceless. The shadowy figure of Balaam was killed just a few chapters later by the sword. His name is a blemish in the Bible. So many verses for a

man who didn't do what God had asked. I do think this is a story of the heart. We are given choices and paths in life. Many of us do know the real way to go (yes, we do), but we also are also looking for a way out. An easy path. We are Balaam. Several times God called the Israelites Balaam. God could call us Balaam too. We love choosing our own path and it's not the one God told us to go on.