

Comedy and Horror

In the Bible

It is what it is: Numbers 22 (Balaam and The Talking Donkey)

I will begin with this funny story because it's my favorite.

The Story Part One:

I read my Bible. I think that people should read it, and especially Christians. Personally you're not much of a Christian if you don't read your Bible. I mean where do you get spiritual inspiration? Where do you get your learning and understanding? Where do you get God's direction? The Bible is all those things and more. The "more" comes in the form of stories. To know yourself and God better is to read the stories in the Bible. Usually these stories play themselves out in our lives. We see that insight once we've read the Bible and not before.

Usually stories have history. We get "back" story in most movies. It's the same in the Bible. Many events are connected. In Numbers 21 we find Moses having to deal with lack of water and food; the death of his brother; and war. The land they were given by God is a good land. So good in fact that it was inhabited by others. The problem is: what to do with the others? God had asked Moses and the Israelites to kill off all the people that stand in their way. That was a problem because they were related.

If you went back into the earlier history, you find lists of offspring. In Genesis we find Esau who was an aggressive man. He is also called Edom. That land produced a people similar to him. Similarly, Noah produced a son named Ham. His child was named Canaan. That boy created the land of the Canaanites. Moving forward to Numbers 21 Moses was in the promised land, yet in his way, were part of his family line. That would have been fine except that those

relatives had become violent and depraved cultures. God said they had to go before the Israelites could have the land.

So what happened was that Moses and his rag tag army were very good fighters. They caused all sorts of mayhem in the territory. Word was getting out about them. Again in history, Abraham's Brother Lot had Daughters that were less than stellar. They tricked their father and slept with him. Those daughters had children and one of them was called Moab. This nation was afraid of Moses and the Israelites. Jacob in history had a brother named Esau who became the Edomite's. Both of these nations were a scary people. Moses in turn was afraid of the Edomite's. This caused the Israelites to avoid Edom and turn their sights on the land of Moab.

Numbers 22 opens with a concerned King of Moab named Balak. He had been listening to the frightening stories of kingdom after kingdom falling to the Israelites. He decides to call on the Balaam of Beor to come before him and give spiritual; direction. You see, in those days that is how they got things done. A King had wise men or seers that gave direction from the Gods. They were also called mediums, seers, or wise men. I suppose they might be fortune tellers in our day. A famous one in that land of Moab was Balaam the seer.

This famous seer was good at getting it right. We are not told if he is an Israelite but he was in-tune with the God of the Israelites. He was able to have insight through this God. King Balak of Moab knew him well. The King in his wisdom sent for the seer. He sent money and credible men to convince him to come. I bet this was common to pay for advice as we pay for legal experts to navigate the law. Balak wanted Balaam to navigate God's will or favor. This is where our comedy story begins now that you know the back story. Tune in next week for a comical chat with a Balaam and the talking donkey.

The story Part two:

There is so much fun in a talking donkey. First is the curious interaction between God and Balaam. This man named Balaam does the “seer like” thing and talk to a God. I do wonder the sincerity of the conversation. There seems to be something lurking behind the scene. This story opens with King Balak telling some of his elders to get advice from the famous seer Balaam. After a discussion Balaam boldly tells the King Balak’s men that he will go and inquire of the Lord first.

I feel that Balaam did not know the Israelites. I am not sure if he really knows what God he is talking to. Balaam never says what God it is. He seems to believe he is talking to a God as opposed to the Israelite God Yahweh. Through this mysterious God, Balaam seems to be getting such good advice. It’s almost like going to a well for the best water. However, this advice from this God is making him profitable. The elders of the King are naturally bringing a divination fee. It reminds me of Whoopi Goldberg in the movie Ghost. She is running a successful fortune teller racket until a real Ghost confronts her. Balaam appears to be running a spiritual racket too.

So this is how it went. God tells the seer not to go with these men. Twice he is asked and twice he refuses. On the third time God says “Fine Go, but only tell them what I say.” Something at this point seems to be missing. God gets angry that Balaam went. Yet, didn’t God tell him to go? This is where I think the racket part comes in. I think Balaam accepted their fee a third time because “money wise” three times is the charm. God tested this man to see what he would do. I wonder if inside his heart, Balaam he did not really believe or honor this God.

Did the real God confront Balaam through a donkey? Balaam gets on his donkey. It’s a nice donkey. First class in those days by all accounts. In many ways a donkey symbolized

royalty. Was this seer contemplating that he is royalty because a God was on his side? Some time ago I went through a ravine to Petra in Jordan. It was very narrow and long. This ride on this donkey seems like going through a ravine. An angel of the Lord comes and is only seen by the donkey. I think it's so symbolic because this man hears from the spiritual but cannot see the spiritual.

The donkey on the other hand can see the whole thing. Right in front of him is an angel with a sword. So the donkey swerves into a field to avoid him. Balaam whacks his donkey to get back on track. The angel confronts the donkey again and this time the sides of the path are narrow just like the ravine to Petra. Balaam scrapes his foot on the wall and whacks his donkey again. This final time the donkey is tired upon seeing the angel (a third time) so he just lies down with Balaam still sitting on him. Balaam is irate and frustrated. He takes out a staff and beats the poor tired animal.

Then the donkey begins to talk. It says beginning in verse 28 of Numbers 2:

28 Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth, and it said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?" 29 Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If only I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now." 30 The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?" "No," he said.

The best part of this whole dialogue is Balaam's reaction. He talks back to the donkey as if it's normal. I wonder if Balaam was really spiritually inept. He could report what a spirit like God tells him, but he could not see the spiritual before his eyes. I love his final answer to the

donkey “no” I am not in the habit of talking to a donkey. Right at that moment his eyes were opened. He could see the angel. I wonder if that is the moment that his heart was open to God as well.

God then tells Balaam to go with the men and only tell them what God wants to say. I know this was told by God before, but this time Balaam has changed. This seer sees what he could not see before. His racket of being the famous seer just disappeared. I bet the donkey was exhausted by this point. He was carrying this man and contending with an angel. As you could tell the donkey wanted none of it. Let’s discuss what can be learned from all this next week.

What we can learn:

Can we learn lessons from a talking donkey? There are always verses in the Bible that tell us more about a story. This story of Balaam and his talking donkey in Numbers 22 has an ending in other parts of the Bible. First of all, Balaam is asked three times by the King to curse Israel. Three times he only tells what God wants to say. Each time God blesses Israel and curses Moab. Finally, the frustrated Balak of Moab tells Balaam to get lost. I wonder if the King threw out the donkey as well?

Joshua 13:22 says **“In addition to those slain in battle, the Israelites had put to the sword Balaam son of Beor, who practiced divination.”** No more is told about Balaam except his death. It makes me think that he never really got God. He never really understood what was happening through him. I say that because of two verses in the New testament. 2 Peter 2:15 reports **“They have left the straightway and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness.”** Plus, Jude 1:11 **“Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam’s error; they have been destroyed in Korah’s rebellion.”**

The tradition and rumors about Balaam hundreds of years later were that this seer was less than stellar. He became famous as a disaster. In the end he fell to the sword with no mention of him again in a good light. What if the Donkey could still talk to us? He might be saying that we listen to our own needs. We desire fame and fortune. There is a man named Benny Hinn and he is a faith healer of God. This man reminds me of Balaam. He has made a living off of the power of God. God gave Balaam insight, yet Balaam profited. Mr. Hinn profits from Gods healing powers. Now I'm sure both men believe that they are doing God's work. This Bible story makes me skeptic.

What we can learn is that God did it. God does it too. The power of God is not to be taken lightly. It is not to be profited from. I think that is why Paul of the Bible made tents and raised money for the church. I bet he never touched a dime of his ministry for himself. The words in the New testament about Balaam's sting (Wicked and Balaam's error). It can be our error too. Far too often we assume we are worthy of the talents and powers that God gives us.

Maybe it's more about being the vessel God choses for us to get the job done. Is that not honor enough. Isn't it famous enough to know that God asked something of you and you did it. So many times Jesus pointed out the pride of the religious leaders. So many times he spoke parables that focused on the task rather than the reward. I feel sad because I think the donkey got it but Balaam did not.

Where are you with power, prestige, and fame. Far too often famous people fall because they assume they are invincible. I suppose they go too far. I am saddened if all we see is a funny story about a talking donkey. I am sad if all you see is God asking the Israelites to kill people. The lesson is seeing what God sees. The lesson is hearing what God is saying. Maybe Balaam

would have seen the angel himself if he put less stock in his own ability than why God was using him. Maybe his own ass would have not have been needed to save him.