

## **The funny story about the holy man and his donkey: Numbers 22**

Once upon a time, back in the day, the 12 tribes of Israel were settling in the land of Israel after they had escaped from Egypt. The king across the River Jordan, which back then was called Moab and these days is called the Kingdom of Jordan, well back then, just like now, he wasn't very happy about Israel and felt threatened. He had his armies but he was nervous. So he decided that what he needed was a curse. He wanted to put a curse on Israel to make them weak so he could defeat them. He had heard about a holy man far far up in the north – someone called Balaam, who apparently was a man of great spiritual power, the power to bless or to curse. So the king of Moab sent messengers all the way to the far far north, way up to Syria by the Euphrates river, to ask this Balaam to come to Moab. He promised to pay him lots of money! Well at first Balaam said no, but then he said yes, and off they went.

<sup>22</sup> God was angry that Balaam was going, and as Balaam was riding along on his donkey, accompanied by his two servants, the angel of the LORD stood in the road to bar his way. <sup>23</sup> When the donkey saw the angel standing there holding a sword, it left the road and turned into the fields. Balaam beat the donkey and brought it back onto the road. <sup>24</sup> Then the angel stood where the road narrowed between two vineyards and had a stone wall on each side. <sup>25</sup> When the donkey saw the angel, it moved over against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot against it. Again Balaam beat the donkey. <sup>26</sup> Once more the angel moved ahead; he stood in a narrow place where there was no room at all to pass on either side. <sup>27</sup> This time, when the donkey saw the angel, it lay down. Balaam lost his temper and began to beat the donkey with his stick. <sup>28</sup> Then the LORD gave the donkey the power of speech, and it said to Balaam,

Donkey: "What have I done to you? Why have you beaten me these three times?"

<sup>29</sup> Balaam, "Because you have made a fool of me! If I had a sword, I would kill you."

<sup>30</sup> Donkey, "Aren't I the same donkey on which you have ridden all your life?"

Balaam: "Yes"

Donkey: "And have I ever treated you like this before?"

Balaam: "No"

<sup>31</sup> Then the LORD let Balaam see the angel standing there with his sword; and Balaam threw himself face downward on the ground. <sup>32</sup> The angel demanded,

Angel: “Why have you beaten your donkey three times like this? I have come to bar your way, because you should not be making this journey. <sup>33</sup> But your donkey saw me and turned aside three times. If it hadn't, I would have killed you and spared the donkey.”

<sup>34</sup> Balaam, “I have sinned. I did not know that you were standing in the road to oppose me; but now if you think it is wrong for me to go on, I will return home.”

<sup>35</sup> But the angel said,

Angel: “Go on with these men, but say only what I tell you to say.”

So Balaam went on with them.

When they got to Moab, the king took him up to a lookout across the river to see the camps of the people of Israel. ‘Come on then, I’m paying you well,’ said the King, ‘Curse these people!’

But Balaam prayed to God, and asked God what to say, and God gave him a prophecy of blessing instead of curse.

So Balaam pronounced:

**How can I curse what God has not cursed?**

**The people of Israel are blessed more than other nations.**

<sup>10</sup> **The descendants of Israel are like the dust—  
There are too many of them to be counted.**

**The LORD their God is with them;  
They proclaim that he is their king.**

<sup>23</sup> **There is no magic charm or witchcraft,  
that can be used against them.**<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>24</sup> **The nation of Israel is like a mighty lion!**

**Whoever blesses Israel will be blessed,  
And whoever curses Israel will be cursed.”**

Well, as you can imagine that didn’t go down very well with the king of Moab. So Balaam and his donkey set off again on the long journey back to the north, back home, without getting paid after all.