

Balaam's donkey

in Numbers 22:22-35 **was** / is ...

"So the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden, ever since I became yours, to this day? Was I ever disposed to do this to you?" And he said, "No." Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand; and he bowed his head and fell flat on his face. And the Angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because your way is perverse before Me." (Numbers 22:30-32)

also in

Second Peter 2:15-16

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

contrasted with

her foolish master

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

healthy and

quite intelligent

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

instinctively

afraid of the Angel

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

miraculously

able to speak **SOME**

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

more helpful

than Balaam's servants

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

not crazy

about money (2 Pet. 2:15-16)

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

Descriptive



Meditation

misunderstood & mistreated

not made

in God's image (Gen. 1:26-28)

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

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not speaking

about great / many things

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

ordinarily

submissive (22:30)

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

protecting

herself and Balaam

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

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thinking like

a normal domestic donkey

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

trying to

avoid being struck (22:28)

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

unable to grasp

why she was struck (22:28)

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

very different from

talking fairytale animals

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

wrongly assuming

Balaam also saw the Angel

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

Directions: after reading through **Numbers 22:22-35, 2 Peter 2:15-16**, and some informative articles about donkeys, consider and discuss how Balaam's donkey is described above. — **Do you agree with the various points? How would you change some points or add new ones?** — **At the end of the study, think about and discuss the most important descriptive phrases and make practical applications.** Obviously, we should not be like Balaam (2 Peter 2:15-16), but how should we perhaps be like his donkey? — © 2022 by Jon F. Mahar, Hakusan City, Japan and Alexander, Maine, U.S.A.

Can donkeys think?

This simple yet profound question is the necessary starting point for this study, and the answer is, "Yes, of course donkeys can think." They are intelligent animals. Just because donkeys and horses do not have the natural ability to speak in human languages, there is no reason to assume that they are unable to think about what happens to and around them.

What would Balaam's donkey have thought?

She would instinctively and naturally have been afraid of the Angel of the Lord, and her evasive actions were totally normal. Therefore she would have been puzzled about why she had been beaten by Balaam, since she naturally assumed that her master also could see the Angel. The donkey being able to voice her thoughts was, of course, miraculous, but her question about why she had been beaten (22:28) was what we might expect. She did not speak of great things such as the appearance or identity of the Angel or even about why they were traveling. Moreover, unlike the greedy prophet, she would not have been thinking about money (2 Pet. 2:15-16). Her thoughts were basic, and so were her words.

What about the donkey's second speech in 22:30?

Admittedly this is longer and not just about being beaten. Yet, the second speech also makes sense from the domestic donkey's perspective. It was about the relationship between a master and his donkey. She was not a wild donkey like those spoken of in Job 39:5-8. Like other wild animals, a wild donkey thinks about doing its own thing, but Balaam's domestic animal did not think that way. So, again, the second speech in 22:30 was, of course, miraculous, but it was not out of line with how a normal domestic donkey thinks.

Were there multiple miracles?

Yes, there were at least three. First, the Lord allowed the lowly donkey to see himself while Balaam was not so enabled. Second, the Lord enabled the donkey's speech, but her speaking twice was not all that was miraculous. Third, in the next two chapters God controlled Balaam's speech so that the greedy prophet was unable to curse Israel as he wished. The reasonable donkey was able to say what she wished, but the mad prophet was not.

What are the applications?

As Second Peter 2:15-16 shows, we should not be like the crazy prophet who was focused on money. Rather, we should be loyal and submissive to the Lord, somewhat like the donkey was loyal and submissive to Balaam.

In addition, it is important to teach children that there is a world of difference between fairy tales in which animals think and speak like people about many things, and this miraculous yet realistic passage in the Bible about a one-time event. The Bible is not full of talking animals! So this was a rare, special case.

Finally, we need to remember and stress that the story of Balaam and his donkey is actually more about the Creator and his freedom to do as HE pleases. God worked, and the Angel of the Lord in the story was probably the Lord Himself. (See Exodus 3:1-6.) Wild and willful Balaam, however, was unable to do as he pleased.