

Jonah and Balaam's Temper Tantrums

The scriptures are serious business; they are God's guidebook for mankind to follow and there is not a lot to laugh about within the pages. Some of what is written is somewhat shocking, but there are a few pieces of history that are really funny.

We read in the book of Jonah, that in about 800 BC, Jonah the prophet was sent by the Lord to the town of Nineveh, to preach a message of repentance to the people there. At that time in history, Nineveh was a great city, the shape of a quadrangle, measuring about one hundred kilometres (or sixty miles) in circumference. Nineveh had had many suburbs. In Genesis 10:11 & 12 we read that Nimrod built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir and Calah. Resen lay between Calah and Nineveh, making the city a vast one indeed when those suburbs were combined. There were 120,000 children in the city, and if we add the 120,000 children to obviously twice the number of parents, Nineveh was indeed a huge city for the era.

Instead of obeying God, Jonah (whose name means Dove), ran in the opposite direction because he did not want the city to repent. He went to Joppa (modern day Jaffa) and boarded a ship to take him to Tarshish. God sent a violent storm, terrifying those on the ship and Jonah ended up being tossed overboard. The Lord prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah (possibly a whale shark). After three days Jonah cried out to the Lord and the Lord spoke to the fish, which then vomited Jonah out onto dry land.

The Lord spoke to Jonah again, and this time Jonah obeyed and went to Nineveh to preach. The people repented and the whole city turned to God which pleased the Lord. The trouble was their repentance displeased Jonah and he was very angry. Why he was so angry that the whole city repented is a mystery, but his temper tantrum was so extreme, he actually told God to let him die. When God asked him, "Do you do well to be angry?" Jonah sulked, "I do well to be angry, angry enough to die."

Balaam's tantrum was even worse. In Numbers chapter 22 to chapter 24 we read the story of Balak, the king of Moab and Balaam, a foreteller of events. Balak was overcome with fear because of the Israelites and told Balaam to curse them. The Lord intervened and told Balaam not to curse the Israelites, for they are blessed. Balak told Balaam a second time to curse the Israelites but the Lord came to Balaam at night and said Balaam could only say what God told him to say. Balaam ignored God and rose up in the morning and saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab.

On the way, the Lord appeared with His sword drawn, but only the donkey could see Him, so the donkey walked into a field. Balaam struck the donkey, and made it go the direction Balaam wanted to go. When the Lord stood on a narrow path with a wall on either side, the donkey thrust itself against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot and he struck the donkey again. The Lord went further and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn and when the donkey saw the Lord, it fell under Balaam. Balaam became so angry he struck the donkey with his staff. Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey and it spoke to Balaam, "What have I done to you that you should strike me these three times?"

And Balaam said to the donkey ... Let's read that again. And Balaam said to the donkey ... Balaam must have been a very silly man to argue with a donkey! Most people would be so shocked if a donkey spoke to them, they would listen to what God had to say! Not our Balaam ... he argued with it! And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have provoked me! I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!"

And the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey, upon which you have ridden all your life long until this day? Was I ever accustomed to do this to you?"

And Balaam said, "No." 'Then the Lord open Balaam's eyes and he saw the Lord standing in the way with His sword drawn in His hand and Balaam bowed his head and fell on his face'.

Balaam might have been silly enough to argue with an animal that normally would not have been able to speak, but he wasn't silly enough to argue with the Lord! But then Balaam wasn't exactly humble either. He knew God didn't want him to curse the Israelites because he had been clearly told. After falling on his face, Balaam said, "If my going displeases You, I will return."

"If." Balaam said. "If." Well of course it displeased the Lord and Balaam knew that. The Lord had told him twice; the donkey had stopped him three times and spoken to him; the Lord stopped him with a sword in His hand; and still Balaam said, "If it displeases You." How many times did this bloke have to be told? Eventually, after being forced by God to bless Israel and prophesying about the coming of Jesus, Balaam and Balak gave up and went their separate ways. It is doubtful anyone could have thrown a worse temper tantrum than Balaam.

Amen and God bless you.

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