

Numbers 22:27

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff.

Analysis

When the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam— With no room to dodge, the donkey collapsed (רָבַּע, rābaš, "to lie down/crouch"). This is submission posture—lying down before superior power. The animal demonstrated the appropriate response to divine opposition that the prophet refused: stop moving, fall down, cease striving.

Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff (מִתְּהָ, matṭeh) —The prophet's rage peaked at the moment his mount showed him what to do. Instead of recognizing the donkey's wisdom, he beat her for the third time. His staff (matṭeh, the same word for Moses' rod of authority) was directed at the wrong target—he should have used it to shepherd himself toward obedience, not punish the creature saving his life. God would momentarily open the donkey's mouth (v. 28) to rebuke the prophet's madness.

Historical Context

In ancient Near Eastern literature, talking animals appear in myths and fables, but this account is presented as historical fact—affirmed by Peter (2 Peter 2:16) who wrote that the "dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet." The miracle authenticated God's extreme opposition to Balaam's journey.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. When God's messages come through unlikely or humbling sources, does your pride prevent you from hearing His rebuke?
2. How often do you beat down the very means God uses to stop your destructive path because they frustrate your plans?
3. What would it look like to fall down in submission before God's opposition rather than raging against the obstacles He places in your way?

Interlinear Text

תִּחְתַּרְבָּי זְרֻבָּבֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ הָאֵלֶּה יְהִי רָא
she fell down **وتִּתְרַבֵּי** **זְרֻבָּבֶל** **הַמֶּלֶךְ** **הָאֵלֶּה** **יְהִי** **רָא**
H8478 H7257 H3068 H4397 H853 H853
saw **וְיָתַרְבָּא** **זְרֻבָּבֶל** **הַמֶּלֶךְ** **הָאֵלֶּה** **יְהִי** **רָא**
H7200 H860 H853

בְּלֹעַ מְלֹא כְּלֹבֶד אֵרֶב בְּלֹעַ מְלֹא כְּלֹבֶד
and Balaam's anger and Balaam's and he smote
H1109 H639 H1109 H5221
was kindled

בְּמַקְלֵל בְּמַקְלֵל
And when the ass with a staff
H4731 H860

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 14:16 (Parallel theme): A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident.

James 1:19 (Parallel theme): Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

