

Numbers 22:29

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me:
I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill
thee.

Analysis

Because thou hast mocked me (הִתְעַלְלַת בִּי, hit'allalt bi)—Balaam accuses his donkey of making a fool of him. The Hebrew root 'alal means to deal wantonly with, to mock or abuse. The bitter irony: a prophet hired to curse Israel threatens to murder the very animal God used to save his life (v. 33). **I would there were a sword in mine hand** reveals Balaam's murderous rage toward a dumb beast, yet moments later the angel appears with drawn sword showing who truly deserved death.

This absurd scene—a renowned diviner arguing with livestock—exposes the prophet's spiritual blindness. The donkey saw what Balaam could not: the angel of the LORD blocking the path. God opens the mouth of an ass to rebuke a prophet's madness (2 Peter 2:16), demonstrating that He can speak truth through any means when His servants fail.

Historical Context

This occurred circa 1406 BC as Israel camped in the plains of Moab. Balaam was a non-Israelite prophet from Pethor in Mesopotamia (22:5), hired by Balak to curse Israel. Ancient Near Eastern texts confirm the practice of hiring professional diviners to pronounce curses on enemies, making Balaam a legitimate threat requiring divine intervention.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. When has your spiritual blindness made you rage at circumstances while missing God's protective intervention?
2. What does Balaam's threat to kill his own donkey reveal about how anger distorts our perception of reality?
3. How does God use unexpected means (even "foolish" things) to speak truth to those who refuse to listen?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר	בָּלָעָם	לְאֵת וֹן	כִּי	הִתְעַלְלָהָ	בִּי	
said	And Balaam	unto the ass	H3588	Because thou hast mocked	H0	
H559	H1109	H860		H5953		
לִּי	יָשׁ	חֶרֶב	בְּיָדִי	כִּי	עַתָּה	הַבְּגִתִּיךָ:
me I would	there were	a sword	in mine hand	H3588	H6258	for now would I kill
H3863	H3426	H2719	H3027			H2026

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 12:10 (Parallel theme): A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.

Matthew 15:19 (Parallel theme): For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: