

THE TALKING DONKEY

No, I'm not talking about the talking donkey in 'Shrek', although he was quite funny. I am talking about a real, live donkey that did actually talk to her owner.

This donkey and her owner lived about four thousand years ago, give or take a few years. Her owner's name was Balaam, which means devourer.

How was it that this donkey was able to talk? Well, the story goes like this:

God had led the Israelites out of Egypt and they had been wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and God had decided that it was time for them to enter the Promised Land. This was a huge piece of land that God said that He was giving to them.

The nations that lived there were not very happy that these people were moving in. It wouldn't have been so bad if there had only been a few hundred, but there was probably nearer to one million people.

One of the kings who didn't want them to live there was Balak. He was the king of the Moabites and although they were distantly related to the Israelites, they didn't want them on their land. Balak had heard how God had fought for them and he was very frightened. So the king decided that he must do something to get rid of them, but what?!

Then Balak had an idea and he sent some messengers to Balaam. They said to Balaam, "Look, there are these people who have come from Egypt and because there are so many of them and they have settled next to us, we want you to come and curse them. Perhaps then we shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. We know that who you bless is blessed, and who you curse is cursed."

So, Balaam said to them, "Stay here tonight and I will tell you what God says to me in the morning."

So the princes of Moab stayed the night.

Then God came to Balaam and asked, "Who are these men that are staying with you?"

Balaam said, "They came from Balak the king of Moab. He saw all the people that had come out of Egypt and was frightened of them and asked me to curse them."

God said to Balaam, "You're not going with them and nor are you going to curse these people because they're blessed."

In the morning, Balaam said to the Princes of Balak, "Go back to your land because the Lord has not given me permission to go with you."

So the Princes of Balak went back to their king and told him that Balak had refused to come with them.

Then Balak sent princes that were more important than the first and when they came to Balaam they said, "Please don't let anything stop you from coming to Balak and he will honour you and do whatever you say; only just come and curse them for him." Then Balaam said to them, "Even if he gave me his own house full of silver and gold I would not be able to any more or less than God Himself permits me to. So why not stay the night and I will see what God will say to me.

That night God spoke to Balaam and said, "If the men call you in the morning go with them but you must only do what I tell you to do.

So the next day, Balaam went with the princes. God was cross with Balaam because he had gone with the princes. So, God sent an Angel to stand in Balaam's way on the road. Now the donkey saw the Angel on the road and to avoid the Angel, she turned into a field, so Balaam struck her and ordered her back onto the road. Then the Angel stood in the middle of a narrow path between the two vineyards and there was a wall on either side. When the donkey saw the Angel, she pushed herself up against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot, so he hit her again.

Then the Angel of God went further along the road where it was so narrow you couldn't turn to the left or to the right, so the donkey seeing the Angel lay down underneath Balaam. Balaam was so angry with her that he hit her with his stick. It was then that God opened the mouth of the donkey and she said to him; "What have I done to you that you have hit me three times?"

Balaam said; "Because you have abused me, if I had a sword I would kill you!"

So, the donkey said; "Haven't you ridden me ever since you bought me. Have I ever done anything like this to you before?"

Balaam said; "No."

Then God opened Balaam's eyes and he saw the Angel standing in the middle of the road with a drawn sword in his hand. Balaam bowed down and fell flat on his face and the Angel of the Lord said; "Why have you struck your donkey three times? I have come to stand against you because you are sinning against God. Had your donkey not turned aside from me I would have killed you and let her live."

This is how a donkey came to speak and saved the life of Balaam.

This story is taken from the New King James Version of the Bible. If you want to read this for yourself, and find out what happens next, you will find it in the book of Numbers chapters 22 to 24.