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1

The seeing donkey

*I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near:
a star shall come out of Jacob, and a sceptre
shall rise out of Israel.*

Numbers 24:17





Sometimes we can't see what is staring us in the face. Or could it be we refuse to see?

God's prophet, Balaam, was heading in the right direction, but for the wrong reason. Bribery from a local king, to curse the Israelite invasion, so blinded his loyalty to Jehovah that when the sword-wielding angel of the Lord blocked Balaam's path, it was his donkey that saw the heavenly barricade and not Balaam (Numbers 22:23)! The ensuing conversation between man and beast was nothing short of comical. It really is striking to witness the lengths to which God will go, to get us to see what is right in front of us.

Thankfully, on this occasion Balaam saw sense and delivered the four prophecies God had intended, much to the ire of King Balak. The biggest surprise of all was tucked into Balaam's fourth prophecy (Numbers 24:17), where he spoke of seeing 'Him' – a Saviour who would strike the enemies of God's people – 'not now' and 'not near', but in the distant future. This 'star' out of Jacob was later prophetically described by Isaiah as 'a great light' shining on a people 'who walked in darkness' (Isaiah 9:2). Balaam's prophecy of a sceptre out of Israel, signifying Christ's royal rule, was confirmed by Isaiah as the One who would establish the eternal kingdom. 'His government and its peace will never end,' Isaiah prophesies. 'He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for *all* eternity. The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will make this happen' (Isaiah 9:7 NLT (UK), emphasis mine).

Who would have thought that God would give a message of messianic hope to a man He'd reprimanded through a talking donkey? But things changed for Balaam, albeit temporarily, when he acted on what he saw. Under the Spirit's direction

he was a man ‘whose eye is opened . . . who hears the words of God’ (Numbers 24:2–4). He wouldn’t miss an angel in his path again!

Now it is the Bible that speaks to us of angelic proclamations, prophetic messages and the accounts of God’s action plan to redeem lost humanity. God wants us to know what is on His heart. He has not hidden Himself from us. Even the pagan King Nebuchadnezzar recognised this, declaring to Daniel, ‘Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries’ (Daniel 2:47).

Unfortunately, there are still Balaams around today – so blind that they refuse to see – but God no longer uses talking donkeys. His message is written down for us in His Word, clear and plain for all to read and understand. We only need to open it. For there we will read of the night when the prophecies and promises of the man stopped in his tracks by a donkey came true in the narrow streets of Bethlehem . . . then went on to be accomplished on the cross of Calvary.





Reflect


Consider the fact that 'God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise' (1 Corinthians 1:27). Donkey versus prophet – who would have thought! Why does God do this kind of thing (1 Corinthians 1:29)?

Respond

Determine to choose belief over doubt when faced with the Bible's 'foolish' stories.

Pray

Star of Jacob, shine in my soul that
I might see You clearly and respond
in loving devotion.
Amen.





2

The reward of waiting

*Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and
hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become
straight... and all flesh shall see the
salvation of God.*

Luke 3:4-6



How many sleeps until Daddy comes home?

This was a frequent question in our home when our son Paul was little. Having a dad who was an itinerant evangelist meant he wasn't always there to tuck you in at night. So Paul used the number of sleeps without his dad as his measurement of time until the great homecoming. It also meant that many a night I had this 'starfish' spread out across my bed! Yet seeing the excitement on his little face each morning when another sleep had passed was worth my edge-of-the-bed existence – especially when he learned subtraction and could work out for himself how many sleeps were left.

He was a boy who waited eagerly for his dad's promise – 'I'll be back soon' – to be fulfilled. Paul learned early in life that his father was a man of his word, and he was always prepared for him to walk through the door. The awaited day began with bed-bouncing excitement, and continued with heightened anticipation and fervent clock-watching until his daddy's car was spotted coming down the street. Then it was straight out of the door to dash into his father's arms for a rib-squeezing hug.

Our heavenly Father's promise of a coming Messiah stretched as far back as the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15), with more details given in the many prophecies of Isaiah 700 years before Christ's birth (7:14; 9:1–7; 25:9). One day Messiah would walk with us again as God had done with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8). God would come near. No, more than that. God would come and live with us in human form. It was all promised before it happened, by One who had a 100 per cent proven record for keeping His word. Waiting would have its reward. Of that there was no doubt.

However, the heavenly Father didn't say exactly when Messiah would come – only that He would. For centuries those who faithfully believed God's word waited for the promise to be realised, and prepared as best they could for His coming. John the Baptist, whose calling was to prepare the people to meet Him, 'went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' (Luke 3:3). The wild man of the desert knew Messiah had arrived. And as Jesus transformed lives, John was privileged to observe a little of what the prophet Isaiah had meant about the levelling of life's mountains and valleys.

I don't think our son Paul counted the sleeps until his daddy came home because he felt insecure. Rather it was because he missed his presence. Life was better when he was there. He was worth waiting for.

How much more so is Jesus. For it is in His presence that we experience fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11). And in Jesus – He 'who is the head of all principality and power' (Colossians 2:10 NKJV) – we are made complete.





Reflect

Think about the reliability of God's promise of the Messiah throughout the Old Testament. Check out for yourself the Bible references included in today's thoughts.

Respond

Share the good news of Christ's coming with someone today, even if it is only through a Christmas card containing a Scripture text.

Pray

Promise-keeping God, thank You that the waiting is over. The Messiah has come, and with Him hope for a lost world. Amen.