

Fear God; Ecclesiastes 12:13

1. Vending Machine

- a. Hangry
 - i. Have you ever put your money in a vending machine, made your selection, and then the food gets stuck?
 - ii. Have you ever put your money in a vending machine, made your selection, and received the wrong treat?
 - iii. You get angry!
 - iv. You may bang on the vending machine and watch helplessly while the treat sits between the glass and the coil.
 - v. You may groan, yell, scream, or go into hysterics, but you still have a Payday bar instead of a Snickers (diva).
- b. We often treat God the same way with our prayers.

2. Balak

- a. Balak was the king of Moab.
 - i. Numbers 22:1–6: "Then the people of Israel set out and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan at Jericho. And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. And Moab was in great dread of the people, because they were many. Moab was overcome with fear of the people of Israel. And Moab said to the elders of Midian, 'This horde will now lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field.' So Balak the son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the people of Amaw, to call him, saying, 'Behold, a people has come out of Egypt. They cover the face of the earth, and they are dwelling opposite me. Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.'"
 - ii. Pethor is around 400 miles away from the plains of Moab, where the Israelites were encamped.
 - iii. Verses 3 and 4 show us the depth of Balak's fear. They were "overcome" with fear, and they were afraid that the Israelites would deplete the land of its resources, "They will now lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass."
 - iv. Balak knows just the vending machine to call.
 - v. Balaam, whose actions speak for him, "He whom you bless is blessed, and he who you curse is cursed."
 - vi. This was not Balaam's first time, and he may be accurate with his blessings and cursings.
- b. All Balak has to do is put his coin in the machine and pick his curse.

3. The LORD

- a. But, this event is not about Israel, Balak, or Balaam.
 - i. This story is about YHWH.

- ii. Numbers 22:7–13: "So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand. And they came to Balaam and gave him Balak's message. And he said to them, "Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you, as the Lord speaks to me." So the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam. And God came to Balaam and said, "Who are these men with you?" And Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, saying, 'Behold, a people has come out of Egypt, and it covers the face of the earth. Now come, curse them for me. Perhaps I shall be able to fight against them and drive them out.' " God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed." So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, "Go to your own land, for the LORD has refused to let me go with you."
- iii. Balaam recognized YHWH; "As the LORD speak to me" in verse 8 and "the LORD has refused to let me go" in verse 13.
- iv. At this point in the event, we can see the one who fears God and the one who does not.
- v. God eventually allows Balaam to go with the princes but warns him only to say what God tells him to.
- vi. Numbers 22:20–21: "And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men have come to call you, rise, go with them; but only do what I tell you." So Balaam rose in the morning and saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab."
- b. The Donkey
 - i. We know the story: while Balaam was on his donkey, God became angry and sent an angel to bar his way.
 - 1. There are two elephants in this room that we must address.
 - a. Numbers 22:22–27: "But God's anger was kindled because he went, and the angel of the Lord took his stand in the way as his adversary. Now he was riding on the donkey, and his two servants were with him. And the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road, with a drawn sword in his hand. And the donkey turned aside out of the road and went into the field. And Balaam struck the donkey, to turn her into the road. Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on either side. And when the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she pushed against the wall and pressed Balaam's foot against the wall. So he struck her again. Then the angel of the Lord went ahead and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam. And Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff."
 - b. The question arises: why would God get angry at Balaam when He told Balaam to go?
 - c. We rabbinical tradition in the Targumic literature that gives us an idea of why God was angry.

- d. "The rabbinical tradition in the Targumic literature interpreted this sequence as evidence of Balaam's personal rebelliousness in embracing the idea that he might eventually be successful in pronouncing a curse on Israel. Thus taking Ashley and the rabbis in tandem, the verse would refer to God becoming angry with Balaam while he was on the journey because he still thought he might curse the people of Yahweh."¹
- 2. The second elephant in the room, the donkey speaks!?
- a. Only three animals in scripture speak in the human tongue.
 - i. The serpent in the Garden (Genesis 3:1-5).
 - ii. The eagle in Revelation 8:13: "Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"
 - b. Each time an animal speaks, it is a sign of impending doom, that life is about to come to a screeching halt if you do not fear God and keep his commandments.
 - c. The donkey's acts and words show us the problems Balaam is about to face. The donkey was caught between the angel's sword and Balaam's stick thrice. Balaam will soon find himself trapped three times between Balak's demands and God's prohibitions. Balaam will quickly understand that God wields a sword and that disobedience means death.²
 - ii. Balaam blesses Israel and does not curse them.
 - iii. Neither Balak nor Balaam got what they wanted from the vending machine.
 - iv. Again, the story is not about a donkey, Balaam, or Balak. This is a story about the LORD.
- 4. Israel.
 - a. We have to look at Israel. God has been working hard to keep Balak from achieving his goal of cursing Israel (he makes a donkey talk!).
 - b. So, what has Israel been up to while camping in the plains of Moab?
 - i. Numbers 25:1-3: "While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel."
 - ii. God has the offenders put to death.
 - iii. Then, we are given a particularly grievous example.
 - iv. Numbers 25:6-9: "And behold, one of the people of Israel came and brought a Midianite woman to his family, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the whole congregation of the people of Israel, while they were weeping in the entrance of

¹ Dennis Cole, Numbers, vol. 3B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 389.

² Wenham, Gordon J. Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary. Vol. 4. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981

the tent of meeting. When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose and left the congregation and took a spear in his hand and went after the man of Israel into the chamber and pierced both of them, the man of Israel and the woman through her belly. Thus the plague on the people of Israel was stopped. Nevertheless, those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand."

- v. This man committed an act of political and religious treason in front of the place that symbolized God's presence, power, and person.
 - vi. While God defended Israel from Balak, Israel rebelled against Him.
 - c. Neither Balaam, Balak, nor Israel got what they wanted from the vending machine.
5. Fear God.
- a. We have been taught That God's love trumps all (and that is correct).
 - i. 1 Corinthians 13:13: "So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."
 - ii. 1 John 4:8: "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love."
 - iii. 1 John 4:16: "So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."
 - iv. It is God's love that led Him to sacrifice Jesus (God) so that His body would become the sin-bearer and His blood would cleanse us of our sins.
 - v. We teach God's love more than anything else.
 - b. There is another aspect that we have to teach, fear God!
 - i. Matthew 10:28: "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."
 - ii. Reverence is integral to our response to YHWH, but so is fear.
 - iii. Who has heard, "You just wait until your dad gets home"?
 - iv. Maybe we had a fast and accurate mom with the *chancla*.
 - c. We treat YHWH like a vending machine.
 - i. We put our prayers in and expect a certain outcome.
 - ii. When the response to our prayer seems stuck between the glass and the coil (it appears God has not answered us), we yell, scream, and shake our fists at God (the Almighty YHWH)!
 - iii. When our prayer results in a Payday bar instead of a Snickers (we don't get what we asked for), we cry, moan, and blame God.
6. Keep His Commandments
- a. What we don't understand is that while we are over here in the plains of Moab wailing at God and playing the prostitute, The Almighty YHWH is on the mountain defending us from our enemies.
 - b. The demons believe and shudder (to tremble from fear, quiver).³
 - c. We believe and are arrogant and prideful.
 - d. Ecclesiastes 12:13: "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."

³ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000