

Balaam and His Donkey

In Numbers 22, we read of Balaam's furious anger. It was so great that he was beside himself. Many have lost touch with reality and done foolish things while angry. Enter Balaam. He got into an argument with a donkey and didn't even realize the donkey was arguing back—and was winning the argument! The real irony is that Balaam threatened her by saying, **"If there had been a sword in my hand I would have killed you by now"** (Num. 22:29). But the donkey that Balaam wanted to kill by the sword had saved Balaam from being killed by the sword of an angel (Num. 22:22-33). Balaam wanted to take the life of the donkey that saved his life!

Balaam's complaint against the donkey was that she had made a mockery of him. But hadn't Balaam

made a donkey of himself? You be the judge. Don't ever get in a debate with a donkey. It may be hard to tell the difference.

Abraham, Saul, and the Tamarisk Tree

The Christian believes that **"all Scripture . . . is profitable"** (2 Tim. 3:16). Yet there are times when he may not see why seemingly insignificant details are mentioned. Farther along he may understand why.

"And Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God" (Gen. 21:23, NASB). But it was under a tamarisk tree that Saul ordered the slaughter of eighty-five priests of the Lord because they had ministered to David (1 Sam. 22:6-19).

Under the tamarisk tree Abraham was thinking of God, while Saul was thinking of himself.

When Saul and his sons were found dead at the battle on Mount Gilboa, the Philistines cut off Saul's head and fastened his body and the bodies of his sons to the wall at Bethshean. During the night the valiant inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead took their bodies down from the wall, burned them, and buried their bones, where? Under the tamarisk tree (1 Sam. 31).

Conclusion

These are only a few of the cases of irony in the Scriptures. Truly, the nature of these ironies is one of the evidences for the existence of God and the inspiration of the Bible.

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BULLETIN OF
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Irony in the Scriptures

By Dick Bkackford

Someone said, "Irony is hard to define, but you know it when you see it." He was right. Irony in the Scriptures is often seen when things turn out the opposite of what one intended. It may be a paradox that expresses an absurdity and is akin to satire. It happens so often that it is more than coincidence. Most of the time it is a case of someone getting his comeuppance. A modern way of expressing this is—"what goes around, comes around" or "that's going to come back and bite you." The biblical way of expressing it is that one "reaps what he sows" (cf. Gal. 6:7).

Irony in the Scriptures can be used as evidence for the existence of God, for man could not have contrived these things and caused them to happen.

Haman

The case of Haman is the first case that usually comes to the minds of most Bible students. There are several ironies in this account in the book of Esther.

The first is the fact that Haman devised a plot to commit genocide against the Jews. Haman was an Agagite (a descendant of Agag). Saul had been commanded to utterly destroy all the Amalekites, who had been seeking to destroy Israel, but he spared Agag. Now Haman is trying to destroy all the Jews in the Persian Empire. . . .

It was the disobedience of Saul, a Benjamite, which almost led to the destruction of the Jews. It was the vigilance of Mordecai, a Benjamite, which saved them from Haman's plot.

The king had commanded all his servants to bow to Haman. Haman couldn't stand it because one man, Mordecai, would not pay homage to him. Haman built a gallows on which he planned for Mordecai to be hanged. On the very night Haman came to the king to suggest that Mordecai be hanged, the king happened to be reading in the records about Mordecai's heroism in saving the king's life! Now the king is going to have an opportunity to save Mordecai's life! He plans to honor Mordecai and he asks Haman's advice—"What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?" (Esther 6:6). Haman just knew it was him that the king wanted to honor. He describes the royal array and glorious parade with all its pomp and pageantry, with one leading the horse and proclaiming: "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the

king delights to honor" (Esther 6:9). Then the king told Haman to do that for Mordecai. Haman wanted to be in the limelight, but this wasn't exactly what he had in mind! The man who was stuck on himself is put to shame. He goes to his house mourning, with his head covered. Haman was hanged on the gallows he had built for Mordecai. Not only was Haman at the end of his rope, more irony is seen in that it was Haman's wife and friends who came up with the idea of the gallows! They didn't know it was going to "come back and bite them," for not only Haman, but also his ten sons were hanged on the same gallows.

Earlier, when Haman had obtained the decree to annihilate the Jews, the king said to him: "The money and the people are given to you, to do with them as seems good to you" (Esther 3:11). In the end Mordecai is appointed over all the house of Haman and is given similar permission. The king gave his signet ring and the authority to write a decree in the king's name and seal it with the king's ring. Those who planned to put the Jews to death are themselves put to death. Justice reigned. Numerous ironies here.

The Tower of Babel

Some of Noah's descendants settled in the land of Shinar. In their pride and arrogance the people said, "Come, let us build us a city, and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven, and let us make us a name; lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11:4). Notice the frequent "us" or "we." They had a grand scheme to "make a name for themselves," but we don't know the names of so much as a one of them! And their effort to prevent being scattered upon the face of the whole earth resulted in exactly that!

Abraham and Babylonia

Abraham came to the Promised Land from Ur of the Chaldees, which later came to be known as Babylonia. When his descendants turned away from God, they were sent into captivity in the country from which Abraham came—Babylonian captivity!

Abraham and Lot

Abraham gave Lot the first choice of the land. Lot chose wealth, culture, and advantage. Abraham took what remained.

Abraham ends up having a great inheritance to pass on, while Lot is left living in a cave, having lost everything in the fire. That sure wasn't the way he planned it. The reason Lot is spared is because God remembered Abraham (Gen. 19:12-20:30).

Pharaoh and the Israelites

Moses said that when it seemed the Egyptians had the Israelites trapped at the Red Sea, Pharaoh would say, "They are bewildered by the land; the wilderness has closed them in" (Exod. 14:3). However, it was the Egyptians who were bewildered when the Red Sea closed them in! The Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. "Not so much as one of them remained" (Exod. 14:28). They all drowned in the water. And what was it Pharaoh wanted done to all the male babies in Israel? He wanted them drowned (Exod. 1:22; 14:1-31)! Boy! Aside from the miracles, can we not see the hand of God in the irony?

Joshua and the Pagan Kings

When Adoni-Zedek, the pagan king of Jerusalem heard how Joshua had destroyed Jericho and Ai, he feared greatly. So he formed an alliance with four other pagan kings to go to war against the Gibeonites, for they had made peace with Joshua.

When they went into battle against Israel "the Lord cast down large hailstones from heaven. . . . There were more who died from the hailstones than the children of Israel killed with the sword" (Josh. 10:11). This was also the occasion when God caused the sun and moon to stand still. "'Sun, stand still over Gibeon; and Moon in the Valley of Aijalon.' So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the people had revenge upon their enemies" (Josh. 10:12, 13).

These pagans worshiped the host of heaven and it was the host of heaven that did them in! God used the hail, sun, and moon (Deut. 4:19; Rom. 1:25).

Joseph, Gideon, and the Midianites

It was the Midianites who bought and sold Joseph into slavery (Gen. 37:28, 36). The Midianites continued to oppress Israel and the Israelites were under bondage to them for seven years and were forced to live in dens and caves (Judg. 6:1, 2). The Midianites would destroy Israel's crops and leave no sustenance for the people, their cattle, sheep and donkeys. Israel's enemies were "as numerous as locusts while their camels were without number" (Judg. 6:5, 6).

The people were greatly impoverished. But when God decided to deliver Israel from the Midianites, He chose Gideon and his tiny army of 300 men to defeat the "numberless" enemies. And who was Gideon? He was of the tribe of Manasseh, a son of Joseph. Remember, it was the Midianites who sold Joseph into Egyptian slavery. Now it is a descendant of Joseph who subdues the Midianites!

They got their comeuppance. And we see the hand of God in the irony.