Shabbat message Balak

Intro: Tribute to all those who who helped out in the moving process. I felt bad that so much moving happened while I was on vacation and not able to help. Special thanks to Stella, the big white beast, for moving 2 items to my house. The Rabbi's truck may be named, but at least it doesn't talk, like the donkey of our character Bala'am. With what it took for the Lord to get Bala'am's attention in the story, the donkey also probably said, "and the book called me the ass."

A. Looking back at our Torah portion in Numbers 22:31, it tells us that the Lord "opened Bala'am's eyes" and the angel appeared to him. It says Bala'am fell flat on his face. He goes on to confess, "I have sinned....if it displease you, I "ashuvah" as the Hebrew says. The same word as "teshuvah," which is translated, "repent."

1. First note, this is the key thing that God is waiting for from us, not only, confess our sin, but declare that we will "teshuvah." The question is will we do it. Bala'am could have hardened his heart even more and found another donkey to pursue the people. That's what some of us would do. Bala'am took several warnings from God to stop (forever earning Jews the title "stiffnecked"), but when He saw the Lord, he fell on his face in repentance. The question is would we do the same?

2. Also note, here is another case where a man is approached by theophany (be it a angel, man, or talking donkey), and they know right away who it is.

B. Let's look at our portion from the messianic writings about the conversion of Rabbi Sha'ul, (the Apostle Paul.)

C. As we look the verses 1-2 of Acts 9, Paul sought (and you assume) got permission from the high priest to go to Damascus to the synagogues to arrest any jews of "this way" as the Scripture says. Two things to point out here before start the game of applying 21st century western understanding to the event.

1. If Yeshua were not the Mashiach, we followers from all ages, would be guilty of blasphemy. So, Paul's intention may have been to honor God and he was acting in the authority of the high priest.

2. Point 2, this priest was not anointed of God. How do we know? When Yeshua died, so did the levitial priesthood, as evidenced that according to the Torah, Caiaphas ended his priesthood when he tore his garment. (Leviticus 21:10) This was done in the spirtual, because Yeshua is the high priest under the order of Melchitzedek. (Psalm 110:4)

D. So Paul is on the way to Damascus, and he is approached suddenly by "a light from heaven." Just like Bala'am, Paul fell to the ground, as a voice called out to him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"

1. The Torah portion really caused me to think again about Paul's response, "Who art thou, Lord? Whenever I've heard this story in the backdrop of Christian teaching, I would get a picture of Jesus, the white, European guy with the blond hair and a halo appearing to Paul. So when Paul asked who He was that would make it a rhetorical question, right?

2. But, consider in light of Bala'am, that Paul also knew right away that it was the Lord, Adonai or YHVH, who was speaking to him. Hence he fell on his face. Now, reconsider Paul's question, the Scripture just says a bright light appeared, even if Yeshua appeared in it, as He looked in physical form, Paul was not a contemporary of his, nor did Yeshua take a bunch of selfies for Paul look at. So, more than likely, Paul was convinced that He was serving God going to arrest followers of the Way, as he had the authority of the high priest. He knew it was the Lord appearing to him for sure, as we said. So, likely he really wondered why Adonai would be asking him this? So, now just like we try to measure our response next to Bala'am; now we need to ask the question the question asked of Paul, adapted for us, which is who is Yeshua?

1. In Isaiah 9: he is the Son given to us who shall be called the Wonderful Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting father, and the sar shalom (prince of peace).

2. In Daniel and Matthew, He is the Son of Man. In John, He is the Son of God.

3. In John 1, He is the Creator.

4. In Acts 4, he is the only name given, by which we must be saved.

5. In Hebrews 10, He is our great High Priest (after the order Melchitzedek). In Hebrews 12, He is the author and finisher of our faith.

6. In Philippians 2:9-11, let's consider what Paul stated that he discovered as the answer his question, "Who art thou Lord?"

II. We have mentioned that the two characters we've looked at today and many others always knew that it was God speaking to them? How do we know that God is speaking with us? Many of us won't have the evident theophany (although it does happen) nor the bright light or audible voice, (though it does happen). I think for most of us we would describe "that still small voice" which is biblical, but how do you know the voice is from him? We can also hear from him through others, "witnesses." But, even more, how do we know it is from Him? The answer seems simple though it is not. The answer will never go contrary to the Word of God. But the difficult part is this contradicts our nature, our religious teachings, our worldly teachings, our traditions, and most importantly what we have been told God says or wants.

A. Let's consider 2 examples: "I don't have to go to the congregation (church) to know God or be saved." On the basic level, it is true, of course. But, the Scripture reminds us that are not to forsake the assembling ourselves together. (Hebrews 10:25). Also Lord instructed the Israelites early on to observe the Shabbat throughout their generations. (Exodus 31:16) Looking at Titus 1:9, we are to be part of a congregation so that we can be taught, and then be able to have an influence on those in the world.

B. Another more blanket example is "God wants me to be happy...." Of course this is true, but if it's used to justify divorce, incurring debt, ignoring our responsibilities, or even sexual imorality, it is not of God.

These examples are given to illustrate that part of determining if something is of God, as Bala'am and Paul did is, being able to align the purpose or event to the Word of God. The Hebrew Word "chefetz" is a desire or delight, and has been translated also as purpose or event. This is what must be able to be in sync with God's Word.