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Front Cover: The cover artwork is a stylized photo by Steve Buffington. “An image of a Christian leader is the rope braking device used in repelling. If its integrity is compromised, your life could be in danger. However, a braking device that functions as its creator intended allows risks and activities unable to be experienced in any other way.”
OPERANT CONDITIONING THEORY AND COURAGEOUS FOLLOWERSHIP: A DONKEY’S PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this paper is to describe the relationship between operant conditioning theory and courageous followership. This relationship was explored via a genre analysis of Numbers 22:21-41, which is the passage that contains the story of Balaam and Balaam’s donkey. A genre analysis is a tool that examines the passage in light of the pericope’s literary genre. A prophetic genre analysis is aptly suited to investigate negative reinforcement and courageous followership as a prophetic genre analysis examines the role of the prophet and the message of the prophet. This was accomplished through exploring the interaction between Balaam and Balaam’s donkey. The results showed that the dimensions of courageous followership are not affected by negative reinforcement. The findings indicate that followers cannot be studied as a monolith but rather as unique and distinct subgroups. This is the first study to investigate Numbers 22:21-41 through a genre analysis.

KEYWORDS: Genre Analysis, Negative Reinforcement, Numbers 22:21-41
Operant Conditioning Theory and Courageous Followership: 
A Donkey’s Perspective

The study of followership as a discipline has been underdeveloped resulting in a dearth of research on the topic (Bjugstad, et al. 2006). Further, researchers have traditionally studied operant conditioning theory from a leadership perspective (Gottfredson & Aguinis, 2017). This paper presented the connection between courageous followership and negative reinforcement through a genre analysis of Numbers 22:21-41. A genre analysis is an investigative tool that allows researchers to examine the ancient text in light of its literary genre. The genre of the text is important as passages with different genres cannot be interpreted and understood in the same way. This paper proposed that Numbers 22:21-41 is a prophetic genre.

Numbers 22:21-41 depicts the story of Balaam and Balaam’s donkey. This analysis explores the relationship between Balaam and Balaam’s donkey through the lens of the pericope’s literary genre. This type of analysis reveals the followership dimensions through the interaction between Balaam and the donkey. The paper first offers the relevant framework through the examination of Numbers, specifically Numbers 22:21-41. Second, the paper describes the previous literature regarding the theories of operant conditioning and courageous followership. Third, the paper details the methodology of the analysis. Finally, the paper presents the discussion with an intersection between courageous followership application and negative reinforcement.

The genre analysis enlightens the relationship between Balaam and Balaam’s donkey. Understanding the relationship between Balaam and Balaam’s donkey is necessary to highlight the negative reinforcement used on Balaam’s donkey, the courageous follower, and the results of that consequence. The effort to understand the relationship and its consequences leads to the research question:

What does the interaction between Balaam and Balaam’s donkey reveal about negative reinforcement on courageous followers?

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

Numbers is the fourth book of the Bible. Authorship has traditionally been credited to Moses (Carpenter & McCown, 1992). However, there have been additional credited sources of the Pentateuch (Marsh, 1990). Because of the various sources of authorship, the date range of the written text is between 850 B.C. and 721 B. C. (Marsh) concerning events that occurred around 1445 B.C. to 1405 B.C. (Rydelnik & Vanlaningham, 2014). Numbers received its title from the two censuses conducted in the book. Numbers also contains historical places, events, and characters to depict the narrative of the Israelites calling as a chosen people and their dessert excursion prior to entrance into the Promised Land. Numbers gives an account of two generations. Numbers contains a variety of literary genres from historical narratives in chapters 11-14, 16, 20-21, 25, and 31-32 to poetry in chapters 21 and 22-24 and Old Testament law in chapters 5, 15, and 27 (Carpenter & McCown). The story of Balaam is contained in Numbers 22-24. This paper will specifically examine Numbers 22:21-41.
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Numbers 22:21-41 depicts Balaam, the diviner, traveling to meet Balak, King of Moab. Balaam is riding his donkey when an angel appears before Balaam and the donkey three times. Each time, Balaam does not see the angel, but the donkey does see the angel. Three times the donkey avoids the angel and each time Balaam strikes the donkey. Balaam and the donkey have a conversation referencing the punishment. Eventually, Balaam is able to see the angel and is convicted to speak whatever the Lord commands.

According to the documentary hypothesis, the chapters about Balaam are a combination of the J and P texts, which feature prominently in Numbers (Friedman, 1997). Likewise, the supplementary hypothesis suggests that Numbers is foundationally based on Priestly sources supplemented by non-Priestly sources (Levin, 2007). However, the fragmentary hypothesis proposes that Numbers is a mixture of various sources, such as stories and narratives, collected together by an editor or editors during the Pentateuch’s redaction (Lockwood, 2007). Whatever the case, it is likely the story of Balaam is a combination of texts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are two prominent theories in Numbers 22:21-41, which are the theory of operant conditioning and courageous followership. The literature review section will outline the elements of these two theories. The theory of operant conditioning encompasses negative and positive reinforcement. Courageous followership describes a type of follower with specific traits. Numbers 22:21-41 contains both theories; therefore, both theories are presented.

THE THEORY OF OPERANT CONDITIONING

Skinner (1965) posited the theory of operant conditioning, which suggested that there is a relationship between behaviors and consequences. In this way, an individual’s actions are changed based on the consequences. This theory applies to leadership through the concept of motivation, in that a leader uses rewards or punishments to motivate followers (Anderman, 2010). Skinner presented four steps of operant conditioning, which were the stimulus or behavior cue, the response or the actual behavior, the consequence or the reward or punishment, and the future response, which is the anticipated reward or punishment. Through this four-step process, an individual’s behavior can be modified.

NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT. The punishment component of operant conditioning theory is Negative reinforcement (Skinner, 1965). Punishment comes in many forms, but it is always an “unpleasant event” (Magoon & Critchfield, 2008, p. 2). Negative reinforcement highlights avoidance and escape learning. Avoidance learning posits that a person’s behaviors change to avoid punishment (Dymond et al., 2011; Kim, Shimojo, & O’Doherty, 2006). Likewise, in escape learning, a person attempts to escape the punishment by applying specific behaviors (Hamner & Hamner, 1976). In avoidance learning, one avoids certain behaviors, but in escape learning, one applies specific behaviors.

Punishment can be a wide variety of options including a physical penalty or more likely in the workplace, progressive discipline, suspensions, demotions, or loss of pay (Beyer & Trice, 1984; Chelliah & Tyrone, 2010). In leadership, Zimbardo and Ruch (1977) provided recommendations for
applying punishment, which included punishing the behavior and not the follower, swift punishment following the behavior, explaining the exact undesirable behavior to the follower, and the punishment is appropriate in severity meaning enough to stop the action but not excessive or unreasonable. Chaudhuri (2010), referencing McGregor, applied the concept of negative reinforcement to the practical example of being burned by a hot stove. Chaudhuri found that upon being burned by a hot stove, the consequence is instantaneous, it is intense, it is unsentimental, it is consistent and fair, and the relationship between the behavior and the result is indisputable. There is also a resolution for avoiding the consequences, which is avoiding the behavior of touching the hot stove (Hamner & Organ, 1978). McGregor’s example highlights the errors that leaders often commit when attempting to punish unwanted behaviors such as the inability to separate emotion or violating the principle of timeliness and intensity (Zimbardo & Ruch).

**POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT.** Hamner and Hamner (1976) described positive reinforcement as any consequence that encourages repeat behaviors. Positive reinforcement is often in the form of a reward (Skinner, 1965). The type of reward is contingent on whether the positive reinforcement is primary or secondary. Primary positive reinforcement results in physical rewards such as food, water, shelter, or money such as a pay raise (Rothschild & Gaidis, 1981). Secondary positive reinforcement is often intangible, and the receiver must convert the reward for it to be tangible such as praise, recognition, or other forms of reward often seen in the workplace (Rothschild & Gaidis). However, a reward must be positive for each application, which means that the reward could change based on personal preference (Magoon & Critchfield, 2008).

**COURAGEOUS FOLLOWERSHIP**

Chaleff (1995) argued that followers are engaged in every component of an organization and must uphold the vision and purpose of an organization in cooperation with the leader. Therefore, Chaleff (1995) posited the idea of courageous followership where followers have the courage to be responsible, serve, challenge, transform, and take moral action. Chaleff (2009) also presented the idea that in large hierarchical structures, followers may need to have the courage to speak to the hierarchy, which means that followers should be able to address executives several levels above the follower in the organizational structure. Chaleff (2009) also offered guidance for leaders in relation to courageous followers suggesting that leaders must have the courage to listen to followers. Courageous followers are unique in that they demonstrate some or all of the dimensions of courageous followership.

Regarding the courage to assume responsibility, this refers to the follower’s sense of ownership within an organization (Chaleff, 2009). Courageous followers seek solutions and create new ideas in order to maximize their value (Riggio, Chaleff, & Lipman-Blumen, 2008). Followers with the courage to serve search for new ways to assist the leader and aid the organization (Riggio et al.). Courage to serve means that the followers use hard work and teamwork to pursue a common purpose, even if that means accomplishing tasks that are not the most desirable (Riggio et al.). Further, the courage to serve means that followers will stand up for the leader (Riggio et al.). The courage to challenge refers to a follower’s desire for harmony and peace yet includes the willingness to confront the leader in order to maintain the organization’s purpose and to increase ethical leadership (Riggio et al.). A follower demonstrates the courage to transform by a follower’s willingness to adapt and accept change, even if it involves personal risk (Riggio et al.). Taking moral
action means that a follower is willing to leave a leader or organization (Chaleff, 1995). However, Dixon and Westbrook (2003) expanded this dimension to include many actions that require a moral act. Dixon and Westbrook argued that followers must act morally to protect other followers, leaders, and the organization.

INTERSECTION OF THEORIES

There was no research found investigating the relationship between negative reinforcement and courageous followership. Ricketson (2008) examined leadership styles and the dimensions of courageous followership and found a negative correlation between transactional leadership styles, which emphasizes contingent rewards and punishments, and the dimensions of assuming responsibility and the courage to challenge. However, Ricketson’s study did not specifically investigate positive and negative reinforcement on courageous followership. Further exploration is needed to understand the relationship between these two constructs.

METHOD

A genre analysis is an investigative device used to study the Bible and other ancient text through the document’s literary genre. Van der Merwe (2015) stated, “the text embodies its meaning in some literary genre” indicating the literary genre of the passage provides a key to interpretation (p. 2). Osborne (2006) even stated, “meaning is genre-dependent” (p. 26). An individual understands modern poetry differently than a non-fiction story; so too must an ancient text be interpreted in the same manner. Each genre contains different hermeneutical principles by which to understand the meaning of the text (Osborne). The author houses the message in a genre which provides “rules” or “hints” as for how to interpret the message (Osborne, p. 26). Researchers must examine the message of the ancient text through the lens of relevant genre characteristics.

GENRE SELECTION

The genre of Numbers 22:21-41 is debatable as there are several options including historical narrative and poetry (Rydelnik & Vanlaningham, 2014). However, I contend that this passage is a prophetic genre. This is because Morrow (2014) referenced Loisy saying the story of a talking donkey is “simply unbelievable” (p. 335). Perhaps better stated is that Balaam’s donkey is the only animal in the Bible that speaks aside from the talking serpent in Genesis (Herzog, 2011). Since this story is outside of the supernatural environment of the Garden of Eden (Herzog), and there is no indication that the donkey was a representation of any demon, the reality of a talking donkey is questionable. Even in Matthew 8 when Jesus cast the demons into the pigs, there was no evidence the pigs were capable of speech. Although miracles are possible and often repeated throughout the Biblical text, the miraculous nature of the event and Balaam’s non-reaction to the miraculous indicates that this genre is beyond a historical narrative and could serve to edify. Long (1973) warned that passages involving prophets in the Old Testament have problems fulfilling the historical narrative genre as the historical narrative genre classification scheme is limited and ambiguous. There is also little likelihood that Numbers 22:21-41 is poetic in genre as there is no metrical pattern, parallelism, or language and imagery associated with Hebrew poetry (Osborne, 2006). Rather, the characters of Balaam and Balaam’s donkey could both be considered prophets.
Genre is found in large volumes of work and smaller pericopes, even in one-line statements as found in Proverbs. Osborne (2006) also argued that there are smaller pericopes housed within larger passages that have a distinct genre separate from the larger composition. For example, the Gospels are historical narratives as they record the actual events surrounding Jesus, however, within the historical narratives are parables, which must be treated independently. This is also the case for Numbers 22:21-41. This passage falls within several chapters that address the Balaam story, however, Numbers 22:21-41 is unique in that the surrounding chapters describe Balaam favorably as Numbers 23 and 24 depict Balaam as a prophet of God blessing Israel while Numbers 22:21-41 depict Balaam as comical (Hall, 2003). Hall described this section in the scriptures as a break from the surrounding chapters, and Butzer (1990) stated that “this passage is quite apart from the main strands of the Balaam narrative” (p. 251-252). Marsh (1990) suggested that this is due to the change in sources or authors. Therefore, this section of the passage creates a distinct pericope for examination. The verses surrounding Numbers 22:21-41 could be considered a historical narrative genre or poetry genre (Rydelnik & Vanlaningham, 2014) according to Osborne’s genre classification scheme, however, Numbers 22:21-41 is a separate and unique passage and a separate and unique genre analysis is necessary. Therefore, it is appropriate to conduct a genre analysis using the characteristics of the prophecy genre.

The prophecy genre first analyzes the text through the nature of the prophetic role, which includes the call of the prophet and the role of the prophet (Osborne, 2006). The second step of the genre analysis is to examine the nature of the prophetic message, which includes the interaction of the present and future, the revelatory state, and form of the proclamation (Osborne). This text is also investigated for the role and relationship of the donkey and Balaam as required by the genre analysis. The genre analysis method enlightens the discussion on operant conditioning theory and courageous followership.

ANALYSIS

The analysis section contains the necessary elements for a passage to be a prophetic genre. These elements include the nature of the prophetic role and the nature of the prophetic message. For the nature of the prophetic role, this paper utilizes Osborne’s (2006) hermeneutical model as it relates to a prophetic genre analysis by investigating the call of the prophet and the role of the prophet. For the nature of the prophetic message, this paper examines the present and future, the revelatory state, and the form of the proclamation. This paper outlines Numbers 22:21-41 in light of the characteristics of the prophetic genre.

NATURE OF THE PROPHETIC ROLE

Prophets are mentioned as early as Genesis 20:7 when God called Abraham a prophet with John the Baptist being the last labeled prophet as referenced in Matthew 11:9-11. Therefore, Balaam’s story rests within that prophetic timeframe. The call of the prophet and the role of the prophet address the nature of the prophetic role.
CALL OF THE PROPHET. Osborne (2006) argued that the call of a prophet can occur through supernatural or natural means. Through both forms, the donkey’s calling is threefold. First, through natural means, Balaam is incorporating the donkey into his calling by bringing the donkey on the journey as seen in v. 21. In Numbers 22, it is Balaam who was called by God at night with specific instructions to go with the Moabite officials, but to only speak God’s words (v. 20). As a result, “Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the Moabite officials” (v. 21, NIV). Balaam’s inclusion of the donkey on the journey also included the donkey in the calling as both were working toward a purpose.

Secondly, through supernatural means, Way (2009) argued that Balaam, as a prophet, switched roles with the donkey in this passage effectively making the donkey the called prophet and Balaam the stubborn beast. The role-reversal is demonstrated when Balaam, the seer (Nm 24:4, 16), is unable to see the angel all while the donkey is granted this gift. Further, Balaam is instructed to be God’s mouthpiece (Nm 22:20); however, the donkey fulfills this role in v. 28 when God opened the donkey’s mouth. In this role-reversal, the donkey became the prophet and Balaam became the ass.

Thirdly, through supernatural means, a prophet is called to be a “forth-teller” of divine revelation (Bush, 2003, p. 7). MacAuthor (2016) stated that “Scripture describes divine revelation as a process by which God puts words in the mouth or on the tongue of the prophet” (p. 300). This indicates that a prophet speaks through a divine act. Likewise, Margalit (2013) stated, “God communicates truths to human beings by unnatural means. Anyone who is privy to such revelation is called a prophet” (p. 78). The donkey fulfilled this calling in v. 28 when God opened the donkey’s mouth.

ROLE OF THE PROPHET. Bush (2003) warned that the role of the prophet was not based on social status or importance. This is aptly seen in Numbers 22:21-41 as God chose to reveal the truth through a donkey. Further, Bush argued that “the prophetic role is seen as something initiated by the Spiritual Presence” (p. 101) as demonstrated when the donkey was the only entity to observe the angel three times and therefore, was essentially the only creature in the presence of the angel.

Although the role of a prophet was complex, the primary purpose was to deliver a message from God (Osborne, 2006). Osborne described the role of a prophet as a “seer” who follows the direction of God (p. 260). This is a depiction of Balaam’s donkey as the donkey was able to see the divine, but also followed God’s outline. Claiborne (2005), referencing unlikely places God chooses to dwell, stated that Balaam’s donkey was an instrument of the kingdom. While the prophets in the Bible played many roles, Osborne argued that the “central function of the prophet [was] God’s mouthpiece” (p. 261). Although there was a fully communicative angel in Balaam’s path (as demonstrated in v. 32-33), God chose to open the donkey’s mouth and provide a message to Balaam through the donkey (v. 28).

Nwachuku (2011) argued that there were four types of prophets in the Bible based on their role, assignment, or scope of work as deemed by God. The four types of prophets were apostolic, evangelical, teaching, and preaching prophets (Nwachuku). Balaam’s donkey is an apostolic prophet. Apostolic is related to the Greek word “apostolos” which was derived from the verb “apostello” which means to “send” (Min, 1999, p. 15). Min argued that the basic meaning of the word indicated the sending of a messenger or message. In this way, Balaam’s donkey fulfills the role as God gave the
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NATURE OF THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE

The interaction between the donkey and Balaam demonstrated the nature of the prophetic message. The components of a prophetic message are the intersection of the present and future, the revelatory state, and the form of the message (Osborne, 2006). Each element is highlighted in Numbers 22:21-41.

PRESENT AND FUTURE. Prophets often related the present and the future. Fee and Stuart (2014) argued that prophets frequently addressed the immediate future, for example, “less than 2 percent of Old Testament prophecy is messianic. Less than 5 percent specifically describes the new-covenant age. Less than 1 percent concerns events yet to come in our time” (p. 182). The donkey’s actions intersected the present and future, specifically for Balaam. The donkey observed the angel three times, each in more restrictive locations. The first time the donkey walked off the path into a field, the second time the donkey walked against a wall, finally the donkey could not escape the angel and laid down (v. 23-27). The donkey’s actions depicted the steps Balaam needed to take. Verse 22 states that God was angry with Balaam. Balaam should have removed himself from his current path and laid himself at the mercy of God (Henry, 1961). The donkey was demonstrating in the present the actions Balaam needed to do.

The story of Balaam’s donkey is also a foreshadowing of 1 Kings 13 where a prophet rode a donkey after delivering God’s message. The prophet did not obey God and as a result, was challenged by a lion, just as Balaam did not obey God and was challenged by an angel. However, in 1 Kings 13, the donkey did not save the prophet but rather sat beside the lion after the prophet’s death. Way (2009) found that both stories contained an emphasis on Yhwh, donkeys as literary characters, and animals as divine agents. These two stories showed a connection between the present and the future just as the prophet connects the present and future.

REVELATORY STATE. Osborne (2006) stated, “the way the message was communicated to the prophet differed greatly depending on the situation” (p. 267). Some messages came through visions and dreams and others through direct revelation (Stokl, 2012). Numbers 22:22-27 depicts direct revelation to the donkey. God not only opened the donkey’s mouth but caused the donkey to speak rationally and to the purpose of the event. Tillich (1973) argued that it was the special conditions that made a situation revelatory. The special conditions in Numbers 22:21-41 were the interaction between Balaam and the donkey. The donkey, by her actions, not only revealed the presence of an obstruction but also revealed the relationship between Balaam and the donkey. The donkey did not retaliate in like kind but instead asked probing questions to help Balaam understand and rationalize the experience. The donkey’s actions and statements demonstrate the form of the proclamation.

FORM OF THE PROCLAMATION. Osborne (2006) found that there were several proclamation forms used by the prophets in the Bible. The most applicable is the symbolic action form which occurs when the prophet acts out a scene to communicate God’s message. Balaam’s
donkey demonstrated through her actions the steps Balaam needed to take in order to repent and escape the wrath of God as outlined in the Future and Present section. The donkey’s actions demonstrated the form of the proclamation.

The donkey’s statements also showed the form of the proclamation in terms of the structure of the communication and the interaction with Balaam. The donkey used a form of response called “probing questions” where one asks a question in response to a question. The probing form of questioning often required an answer, which prompted another question (Chen, 2016). God used the probing questioning style in Genesis 3, Job 38-39, Genesis 11-12, and many others. Jesus demonstrated this type of communication style throughout the Gospels with examples in Matthew 5:46-47, Mark 8:17-18, Luke 14:28-31, John 21:15-17, and others. In fact, Jesus asked 307 questions throughout the Gospels (Casey, 2006). God and Jesus did not ask these questions to find the answers, because they already knew the answer. God and Jesus asked these questions to cause the participant to “think and reflect” (Casey, p. 6).

DISCUSSION

The relationship between negative reinforcement and followership has been studied in the past. Lee and Wei (2008) and Howell and Hall-Merenda (1999) found that punishment can negatively impact follower satisfaction and performance. However, these findings regard followers in general and do not specifically address courageous followers who demonstrate the dimensions of courageous followership. The genre analysis enlightens the dynamic interaction between Balaam and Balaam’s donkey. This section applies that interaction to the discussion on negative reinforcement and courageous followership.

RESPONSIBILITY

In the responsibility dimension of courageous followership, the follower takes responsibility for themselves, the leader, and the organization (Riggio et al., 2008). The donkey demonstrated responsible behavior by controlling the movement of both parties as seen in verse 23, 25, and 27. The donkey took proactive steps to avoid the problem encountered in the roadway. Riggio et al. argued that “the authority to initiate comes from the courageous follower’s understanding and ownership of the common purpose, and from the needs” of the leader (p. 164). Even though Balaam guided the donkey via a device, the donkey assumed the authority to respond to the needs of the leader, even though those needs were unknown to Balaam at the time. The responsibility factor is further emphasized by the angel’s assertion that those movements saved Balaam’s life solely as the donkey was never at risk (v. 33). The donkey took responsibility and authority for preserving the life of the leader, even after being physically punished for the actions.

In Numbers 22:21-41, the negative reinforcement used by Balaam was physical punishment. In fact, the physical punishment became more severe after each application as seen in verses 23, 25, and 29 from Balaam beating the donkey to Balaam eventually proclaiming that he would kill the donkey. After each implementation of negative reinforcement, the donkey did not surrender or avoid this responsibility. The donkey could have abandoned Balaam completely out of fear, as the donkey in 1 Kings 13 did, but rather, the donkey willingly chose to submit to Balaam’s authority.
after each application of punishment as demonstrated in verses 24-29. The donkey’s actions indicate that courageous followers will continue responsible behaviors after receiving negative reinforcement.

Further, the role reversal between Balaam and the donkey extended beyond the transfer of the prophet and beast roles but also included the follower and leader roles. Gibb (1968) stated, “leaders and followers frequently exchange roles and observation has shown that the most active followers often initiate acts of leading” (p. 252). However, this passage does not merely suggest that the donkey exchanged roles with Balaam but rather shared roles with Balaam. In Numbers 22:21-41, the donkey assumed the authority and demonstrated the responsibility to save the leader but also accepted the punishment and continued to follow Balaam’s direction. The donkey was demonstrating the simultaneous duality of leader and follower roles rather than a dichotomy of leader and follower. The donkey’s actions suggest that both roles can exist concomitantly within an individual.

**SERVE**

Courageous followers serve the leader. Riggio et al. (2008) stated that “courageous followers are not afraid of the hard work required to serve a leader” (p. 165) and that they will make tough decisions. The donkey demonstrated service to the leader by faithfully transporting the leader. The conversation between Balaam and the donkey also established a history of service as verse 30 states “The donkey said to Balaam, ‘Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?’ ‘No,’ he said.” The discussion between the two established a pattern of behavior of service to the leader.

The donkey’s pattern of service continued after each application of negative reinforcement. Even after Balaam threatened to kill the donkey, the donkey still served Balaam as verse 35 indicates Balaam finished the journey, purportedly with the donkey. Further, the donkey did not hesitate or show fear in serving Balaam after each application of negative reinforcement, but rather the donkey took more extreme steps each time to save Balaam in accordance with the angel’s partial to total obstruction of the pathway as an adversary: the first time the donkey veered into a field, the second time the donkey crushed herself against a wall, the third time the donkey fell beneath Balaam in submission (Way, 2009). The donkey made the tough decision to serve Balaam each time even though it was likely that the donkey was going to receive physical punishment.

**CHALLENGE**

Riggio et al. (2008) argued that courageous followers challenge leaders when their leader’s behaviors or organizational policies are incompatible with what is morally right. As Riggio et al. stated, “courageous followers give voice to the discomfort they feel” and “they are willing to stand up, stand out, risk rejection, and initiate conflict” to challenge the leader (p. 166). “Give voice to the discomfort they feel” and create conflict aptly described the donkey in response to Balaam. After Balaam beat the donkey with his rod, God opened the mouth of the donkey as depicted in verse 28. The donkey spoke out against the treatment by asking “What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?” (v. 28). In response, Balaam said “You have made a fool of me! If only I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now.” (v. 29). The donkey was willing to cause conflict in order to challenge the leader.
The conversation between Balaam and the donkey in Numbers 22:28-29 occurred after the third application of negative reinforcement. The donkey questioned why she was receiving punishment. The questioning was an applicable approach as all punishment should have an articular reason. If the connection between the unwanted behavior and the punishment is unclear, then the punishment is ineffective. However, this question leads to the following questions of “Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?” indicating that because of past performance, the negative reinforcement in this situation was unfair (v. 30). The donkey used this form of probing questions as a challenge just as probing questions are used throughout the Old Testament as a way to challenge through informing. Although it is clear to the reader that Balaam cannot see the angel, it is not clear to the donkey that Balaam can see the angel. Therefore, the donkey is under the impression that Balaam can see the angel but chooses to punish the donkey regardless. The donkey’s response indicates that followers may question punishment when past performance has been exemplary.

During the donkey’s conversation with Balaam, the donkey is not merely pleading for her life as even the angel submits in verse 33 that the donkey was not in danger. Rather, the donkey is challenging Balaam to help Balaam recognize the facts of the situation surrounding the two characters. Through these actions, the donkey was demonstrating the challenge dimension of courageous followership.

TRANFORMATION

Courageous followers participate in transformation. A courageous follower helps transform events, behaviors, or policies that jeopardize the leader (Riggio et al., 2008). Further, courageous followers help the leader struggle through change and adapt for the better.

The donkey encouraged Balaam’s transformation in two ways. First, the donkey responded to the third application of negative reinforcement, not by stating that there was an angel in the path or making excuses, but rather with several probing questions. The design of the questions was to get Balaam to contemplate the experience (Casey, 2006). The donkey could have made any statement, but the donkey asked questions regarding the donkey’s followership. The donkey asked questions about her previous service, which made Balaam realize the absurdity of the three applications of the negative reinforcement. Through the use of probing questions, the donkey transformed Balaam’s perception of the situation and made it so that Balaam could only respond with one word to the three separate probing questions.

The second way the donkey helped transform Balaam is through the entire episode. God commanded Balaam to go to the king of Moab in verse 20, yet verse 22a states “but God was very angry when he went.” Rydelnik and Vanlaningham (2014) posited that this contradiction addressed the status of Balaam’s intention either at achieving profit as suggested in 2 Peter 2:15 or as being eager to curse Israel. In either event, there is obviously a problem with Balaam’s heart before God. The donkey’s actions and statements, along with Balaam’s open eyes, helped Balaam realize that he sinned. Balaam eventually came to this realization through the donkey’s help. The donkey helped transform Balaam’s perception and heart in accordance with God’s will as outlined in verse 35. Moyer (2012) stated, “at the conclusion of the passage he contritely acknowledges his failure and expresses a willingness to rectify it” (p. 175) while Way (2009) suggested that the episode with the
donkey was necessary to get Balaam to the point of repentance. Balaam could only transform after three close encounters with an angel, three applications of negative reinforcement, and the conversation with the donkey.

Through this examination of the transformation of Balaam in the text and the donkey’s role, it is apparent that the application of negative reinforcement transformed Balaam more than it transformed the donkey. Balaam began the conversation with the donkey with the belief that he was correct in his actions as seen in verse 29. Balaam did not react to the talking donkey with surprise or fear but instead with self-righteous indignation. It was only after the donkey responded and revealed the donkey’s loyal past that Balaam recognized his unfair treatment in beating the donkey three times. At this point, the verbose prophet could only muster one word in response to the donkey. It is apparent that Balaam was changed as Balaam prostrated himself before God laying right next to the donkey who was also laying in the roadway (v. 27). Balaam’s actions represent that negative reinforcement transforms the leader as much as the follower, especially when punishment is applied unethically either through abuse or other forms.

MORAL ACTION

Courageous followers take moral action, which is described as leaving a leader or organization when their behaviors are harmful, and they are unwilling to change (Riggio et al., 2008). In Numbers 22:21-41, Balaam’s behavior was transformed; therefore, there was no need for the donkey to leave and this dimension does not apply specifically to the donkey. However, Dixon and Westbrook (2003) indicated that moral action applies to all follower actions. Numbers 22:21-41 deals with a moral component and the donkey, being a main character in the episode, related to the moral outline. The moral component that required action is the unfair treatment and abuse of followers. Henry (1961) argued that God allows the weakest to speak in their own defense, which is what the donkey did in verses 28-30. This demonstrated that just because a leader implements punishment, does not mean that the punishment is not abuse. Courageous followers who show moral action will speak out against such abuse in the guise of negative reinforcement as demonstrated in this passage. See Table 1 for a review of the donkey’s behaviors.

Table 1: Balaam’s Donkey’s Application of Courageous Followership in Numbers 22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Verse Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Donkey controlled the movements and responded to the leader’s needs</td>
<td>v. 23-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Performed its duty faithfully</td>
<td>v. 30, 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Spoke out about wrongdoing</td>
<td>v. 28-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transform</td>
<td>Asked probing questions</td>
<td>v. 20, 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Action</td>
<td>Argued for fair treatment and spoke in defense</td>
<td>v. 21-41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPLICATION OF THEORIES

The donkey demonstrated the dimensions of courageous followership and revealed the relationship between these dimensions and negative reinforcement. From the donkey’s example, courageous followers will continue the behaviors related to responsibility, service, challenge, transformation, and moral action after implementation of negative reinforcement. These actions are in line with Chaleff’s (1995) depiction of courageous followers in that these followers must have courage. Peterson and Seligman (2004) described the virtue of courage as “the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition” (p. 30). Given this definition, it is expected that courageous followers continue in their role without becoming demotivated, alienated, or disgruntled. This finding is contrary to previous research which found that punishment can negatively impact follower satisfaction and performance (Howell & Hall-Merenda, 1999; Lee & Wei, 2008). These results indicate that followers should not be studied as a monolith but rather studied in unique and distinct subgroups.

Further, the donkey demonstrated that one entity can exhibit both follower and leader roles simultaneously. Future research should examine the dual nature of leader and follower rather than studying each construct separately. This paper is limited in that it does not seek to change existing theology in regard to prophets, or even suggest that animals are at a specific level of sentients. Instead, this paper seeks to demonstrate that God can use anything for His glory, even a donkey. Also, future research is necessary in regard to many forms of followership. Leaders should understand these principles when applying negative reinforcement.

CONCLUSION

From a follower’s perspective, receiving punishment, discipline, or another type of negative reinforcement can be discouraging. Especially when the leader handles the situation poorly and does not apply the principles discussed in this paper. However, courageous followers will continue to follow the leader in an active way and not get discouraged. Courageous followers will remain responsible, in service, transformational, challenging, and moral. For example, a new member of the administrative team made an administrative error in filing paperwork. The unit leader began to scold and condescend, attacking the character and decision-making skills of the new member in front of the team. The new member, and courageous follower, asked to speak with the unit leader in their office. The courageous follower challenged the appropriateness of the punishment in relation to the minor clerical error and helped the unit leader understand the truly insignificant offense and why it happened. The courageous follower proposed a new system that would avoid the error in the future. The unit leader adopted the new system and adapted their behavior for the future.

Previous research has neglected courageous followership in relation to negative reinforcement. A genre analysis was aptly suited to illuminate the framework and interaction between Balaam and the donkey. Through a prophetic genre analysis, the role of the prophet, the call of the prophet, and the prophetic message all intersect to outline the donkey’s dimensions of courageous followership and how those dimensions related to negative reinforcement. The results showed that courageous followers will continue responsibility, service, challenge, transformation, and moral action behaviors in response to negative reinforcement. This paper presented the context through an examination of Numbers 22:21-41 as well as the prophetic genre analysis and discussion.
of followership. This paper sought to introduce a foundation for future discussion regarding the topic of courageous followership and operant conditioning, which should include quantitative and qualitative research.

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