



# BALAAM AND HIS DONKEY

NUMBERS 22:21-39

## GOAL

▶ **To help children understand that if God is for them, no one can stand against them.** His word reigns supreme over even the most powerful of enemies. In this story, all the money and power in the world could not purchase a curse over the people of Israel. They were God's very own people, and the enemy had no authority over them. King Balak paid top dollar to the most powerful sorcerer he knew in order to curse Israel, but God constrained the evil prophet Balaam to only speak blessings over Israel. In fact, in the prophet's final blessing, he even predicted the Savior. Jesus took the curse upon Himself, so there is now no condemnation to those who put their trust in Christ. If you are His, you are blessed.

## CHARACTERS

▶ **King Balak:** He ruled over the land of Moab, a land that stood in the way of Israel's route to the Promised Land. Terrified of the invading Israelites, he asked the wicked prophet Balaam to conjure up a curse against the people of Israel in order to weaken them.

**Balaam:** He was a well-known prophet and diviner who was hired by the king of Moab to curse the people of Israel. Even though he was warned by God not to curse the people of Israel, Balaam was seduced by riches and seriously considered the king's offer. But God sent a sword-bearing angel to stop him and forced Balaam to deliver blessings instead.

**Balaam's Donkey:** She was an ordinary donkey that was used by God in an extraordinary way. On Balaam's way to consider the king's offer of riches in exchange for cursing Israel, the donkey unexpectedly fought to leave the path. The donkey saw what Balaam couldn't see: an angel of God standing in the way with sword in hand. Balaam beat his donkey, unaware that the poor creature had just saved his life. Then, in one amazing moment, God gave the donkey the ability to speak her mind to the clueless prophet.



## WORDS TO KNOW

▶ **Curse:** to call on a supernatural power to bring harm or punishment on someone.

King Balak called on Balaam to curse the people of Israel because he felt threatened by them.

**Blessing:** God's favor and protection.

God's favor and protection was on the people of Israel. Balaam had no authority over the people God laid claim on and blessed.

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## MEMORY VERSES

▶ **Numbers 22:12:** God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed."

**Romans 8:31-33:** What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.



## OVERVIEW

**Read Numbers 22:21-39:** The king of Moab was terrified as the Israelites neared his city. Israel's deliverance from Egypt and their success in defeating neighboring cities had him on edge. He was sure it would take supernatural effort to defeat these strangely empowered people, so he called upon the most successful sorcerer in the land: a false prophet named Balaam. The prophet jumped at the opportunity to increase his reputation, status, and wealth. He assured the king's messengers that he would consult with the God of Israel to find out the feasibility of their request. But God answered, "No!" He said, "You cannot curse the people, because I have already blessed them." Balaam tells the king's messengers that he cannot curse these people. But King Balak wouldn't back down, and he sends more prominent messengers to tell him that the king would give Balaam anything he asked for if he would only curse the people of Israel. With that, Balaam saddled his donkey and left for Moab. God was not pleased with Balaam and sent an angel to stop him dead in his tracks. Balaam did not see the angel, but the donkey did, and she resisted Balaam's attempt to continue on the path. Then, miraculously God gave the donkey the ability to speak, and she soundly reasoned with the mad prophet. Finally, Balaam was made able to see the angel of God standing in his way. He confessed his error and promised to deliver the message that God sent him to deliver. The intended curse became a blessing.



## SUGGESTIONS

It seems that the prophet and the donkey switched roles. Discuss the irony and humor of the situation.

1. The man who claimed divine insight could not see that God sent an angel to resist him, but the donkey could.
2. When the donkey tried to change Balaam's path, Balaam resisted, intent on continuing his dangerous course. But the donkey had spiritual eyes to see, and the good sense to insist they leave the path. In so doing, she saved her master's life.
3. Balaam was mad at the donkey for embarrassing him and resisting his will to move forward, but really the diviner made a fool of himself by completely missing the supernatural event unfolding before him.
4. Balaam behaved like a madman when he exploded in violence upon his poor donkey, then verbally abused her in conversation. The donkey pleads a very sound case.

God is not mocked! Balaam was presumptuous enough to think he could change God's mind and curse what God had already blessed. Far from a wise sorcerer with spiritual insight, he became a fool who was nearly killed, left to communicate with a donkey, and forced to speak a blessing over the nation he sought to harm.

So, who was the donkey, and who was the prophet?

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## PRE-LESSON ACTIVITY

**Talking Donkey Puppets | Supplies:** paper lunch bags, markers, construction paper, googly eyes, yarn, and glue or tape. To expedite the craft, cut several sets of donkey ears out of grey or brown construction paper the night before class.

Give each student a flat paper bag. The part that folds forward is the donkey's mouth. Have the students glue or tape two ears to the back of each bag. Then have them draw two large circles for the donkey's nostrils just above the end of the small folded piece, and place two googly eyes just above that. They can then cut up yarn for the donkey's tail and hair if they like, or add paper arms and legs, or decorate with markers. When finished, show them how to put their hands inside the bags and make it look like the donkey is talking. Have them repeat the donkey's speech from the lesson.



MEMORY  
VERSES  
MEANING

▶ **Numbers 22:12:** God told Balaam that he could not curse His special people, because they were a blessed people. His word to Balaam was clear, but Balaam chose to disregard them and later suffered the consequences.

**Romans 8:31-33:** If we trust Jesus as our Savior, we belong to God, and if we are His, no one can stand against us. The eternal things that really matter cannot be touched and nothing can separate us from God's love.

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POST-LESSON  
ACTIVITY

▶ **Balaam's Donkey, The Skit**

Split the group into two to four groups. Create a simple stage area that will provide a backdrop to a skit on Balaam's argument with his donkey. Assign a team leader to each group to help them come up with a plan. After each group has been given some time to plan, let each group act out the dialog between Balaam and his faithful donkey. For younger kids, tell the story, and let them act it out as you are telling it.



TAKE  
HOME

▶ Balaam knew about the God of Israel, he heard from God, and he claimed to have a relationship with God, but in actuality, his heart was far from God. His desire was for power and wealth; it was not for God's blessing and His grace. How can we avoid displeasing God like Balaam did?

**1. Obedience:** This means that we have to do what God says all of the time, including when it conflicts with what we want to do or it seems like God is making an unreasonable request.

**2. Proper motivation:** We should desire God's will in our life and His blessing more than we desire things of this world.

**3. Understanding God's Word:** What God says, he really means. We cannot alter His will.

CLOSING  
PRAYER

▶ Dear Lord Jesus, help us to seek to please You and desire Your reward and blessings over the temporary treasures of a self-willed life. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.





## QUESTION & ANSWER

### SLIDE 1



**Q1a:** Why were the scouts from the land of Moab afraid of the Israelites?

**A1:** They were afraid because they had heard of the things God had done for them.

**Q1b:** Knowing what we know about God, would you ever want to go up against Him?

**TN:** No way! Nothing can stop God! The people of Moab were right to be afraid of what might happen to them if the people of Israel challenged them. As fierce as the people of Israel were in battle, it was God who was bringing them victory.

### SLIDE 2



**Q2a:** What did the king of Moab want Balaam to do?

**A2:** The king wanted Balaam to curse the people of Israel.

**Q2b:** A new kid starts going to your school, and there are rumors that he is a bully. Do you believe the rumors and decide not to be friends with him?

**TN:** Rumors seldom reflect reality. Before we decide whether we like this person or not, we should get to know him. It is unfair to let other people's beliefs and perceptions about others determine our feelings. While it may be true that this new kid is a bully, it is unfair for us to judge him as such before he has even done anything! Instead of sending messengers to Balaam in an attempt to get him to curse the people of Israel, he could have asked Balaam to talk to God and plead for mercy. The king could have sent messengers to the people of Israel and come up with a peaceful way for them to pass through his land. There are many peaceful ways that this could have been handled.



**QUESTION & ANSWER**

**SLIDE 3**



**Q3a:** What did God tell Balaam?

**A3:** God told Balaam not to go with the messengers because He had already blessed the people of Israel.

**Q3b:** A classmate offers to give you his bike if you will help him cheat on a test. Would you do it?

**TN:** That's a pretty sweet reward, but cheating is wrong. This is an obvious example of temptation. We should never give in to temptation. There should be nothing more valuable to us than God's good favor. While it would be nice to have this new bike, it's not worth sinning to get it. The king offered Balaam a very rich reward in exchange for doing something evil. God told him not to do it, but he wanted riches more than God's favor. This was a bad choice.

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**SLIDE 4**



**Q4a:** Why did the donkey refuse to move any further down the road?

**A4:** She refused to go further because she could see an armed angel of the Lord on the road.

**Q4b:** You're out walking your dog when he suddenly stops and begins growling. What do you think is going on?

**TN:** Dogs have fantastic senses of smell and sound. We cannot smell or hear many things that are as plain as day to them. So it's possible that there is a cat in a nearby bush, or a snake or something dangerous and the dog is warning us about what is up ahead. While it is unknown whether animals can see angels like Balaam's donkey did, they can sense things that we can't. Rather than punish them for not doing what we want them to do, it might be a better idea to figure out what is making them act so strangely.

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## QUESTION & ANSWER

### SLIDE 5



**Q5a:** What miracle did God perform?

**A5:** God gave the donkey the ability to speak to Balaam.

**Q5b:** Why do dogs walk around in circles before they lie down?

**TN:** Animals do strange things sometimes. For another example, why do cats seem to enjoy being pet for a few minutes and then scratch and bite us? Balaam didn't understand why his donkey refused to move any further, but instead of just never figuring it out and possibly continuing on his journey by foot, God allowed the donkey to explain herself. Learning why dogs and cats or other animals do the strange things they do would be interesting, but that knowledge likely wouldn't have life or death consequences like it did for Balaam.



**Q6a:** What did the angel command Balaam to do?

**A6:** The angel commanded Balaam to go to Moab, but only say what God told him to say.

**Q6b:** What rule might you try to break if you didn't think you would get caught?

**TN:** Maybe we'd stay up past our bedtime, or maybe we'd try to see a movie we're not allowed to see. Rules were made to keep us safe, healthy, and good. When we break rules like staying up late, we're not getting enough rest to get us through all of the activities of the next day. Not getting enough sleep makes us less attentive and usually a bit cranky. Not getting caught means that we may not get punished, but that doesn't mean we won't have to deal with the consequences of breaking the rule, which was set for a good reason. God told Balaam not to go to Moab unless the messengers called for him. Balaam packed up his stuff and headed toward Moab without waiting for them to call on him. Getting caught, called out on his sin, and seeing the threat of punishment was what stopped Balaam from carrying out his plan. A better plan is understanding that God and other authority figures, such as parents and the police, create and enforce rules set up to protect us and make us good people. Having this understanding makes us want to obey them and the rules.



## QUESTION & ANSWER



**Q7a:** How many times did the king press Balaam to curse the people of Israel?

**A7:** Three times the king pressed Balaam to curse the people of Israel.

**Q7b:** Does God ever change His mind?

**TN:** Nope. Never. There will never be a need for Him to change His mind. When God makes a decision, it is with full view of all associated information. He knows how this one action will ripple out and affect other parts of life. He makes no bad decisions. So when God chose to bless the people of Israel, He was going to make that blessing stick, no matter what. When God sent His Son to deliver all of mankind from our slavery to sin, He will never regret that decision. He will never later decide to take away our forgiveness. Once we accept Jesus as our Savior, nothing can separate us from our salvation or from God's love.



**MEMORY  
VERSES**

▶ **Numbers 22:12:** God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed."

**Romans 8:31-33:** What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

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**BIG IDEA**

▶ God is for us, so no one stands a chance against us!

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**CLOSING  
PRAYER**

▶ Dear Lord Jesus, help us to seek to please You and desire Your reward and blessings over the temporary treasures of a self-willed life. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.



## LESSON TRANSCRIPT

### SLIDE 1



As scouts from the land of Moab watched the multitudes of Israelites moving toward their territory, they feared the worst. They had heard about the God of Israel and what He did to deliver this peculiar people out of Egypt, and they had witnessed the destruction of other neighboring inhabitants who stood in Israel's way. They knew it was just a matter of time before Israel would challenge them, too.

### SLIDE 2



When the king of Moab received word of the impending danger, he quickly came up with a plan that he hoped would weaken the threat. There was a man name Balaam who was well-known to have magical powers. It was said that he could invoke divine blessings as well as cast destructive curses on anyone he chose. So, the king sent messengers carrying great treasure, hoping to secure Balaam's services in cursing the people of Israel.

### SLIDE 3



Balaam was pleased at the gift and proud that his prestige demanded such a price. "I will talk to the God of Israel," he told the king, "and tomorrow I will let you know what can be done." But God was not pleased that Balaam was conspiring with the enemy to curse His special people, so He spoke to Balaam, "Do not go with the messengers to curse my people because I have blessed them." But the king persisted and promised even more treasure—an offer Balaam could not refuse.



## LESSON TRANSCRIPT

### SLIDE 4



Balaam got up early in the morning and began his journey to Moab. He was so focused on acquiring the great reward offered by the king, he could not see that God stood against him. He could not see that an angel of the Lord stood in the center of the road waving a sword in the air with the intent to kill. The only one to see the terrific sight was his faithful donkey. In terror, she ran off the road, refused go forward, and finally threw herself into a wall, crushing Balaam's leg. Still blind to the danger, Balaam repeatedly beat the poor donkey for resisting him.

### SLIDE 5



Finally, the donkey collapsed to the ground in despair, hopeless to communicate the threat to her master. But just then, God performed a miracle and gave the abused creature the ability to speak her mind: "What have I done to you that you would mercilessly beat me this way?" she cried out. Balaam, still blinded by gain and now further blinded with anger, spoke back to the donkey! "Because you mock me" he said. "If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now!" The donkey continued her plea, "In all the years you have ridden me, have I ever once done anything like this?" The mad sorcerer thought for a moment, then replied, "No."





## LESSON TRANSCRIPT

### SLIDE 6



All at once, God opened the eyes of Balaam and he saw the angel standing in his way, sword in hand, ready to kill. He fell on his face to the ground. The angel spoke to him, "Why did you continue to beat on your donkey? I have been sent here to stop you, and if it weren't for that poor creature fighting to avoid me, I would have surely killed you, but spared your donkey!" Balaam confessed, "I am wrong. If you want me to, I will return." But the angel commanded him to go, and warned him, "Only say to the king exactly what God tells you to say."

### SLIDE 7



Three times and in three different places high on the hillside, the king pressed Balaam to cast a destructive curse against the people of Israel. But Balaam could only speak God's words, and God's words were only blessings. All the wealth, power, and determination the enemy could muster could not overcome the intense love God had for His beloved people. God's great act of turning the enemy's curse into a blessing would not be His last. One day, He would send a Messiah who would destroy Satan's curse and deliver all of mankind, once and for all.