

Balaam and His Donkey



Scripture Reference: [Numbers 22-24](#)

Suggested Theme: God wants to bless His people. We should say things that encourage and bless people instead of hurt them.

Memory Verse: “When you talk, do not say harmful things. But say what people need—words that will help others become stronger. Then what you say will help those who listen to you.” [Ephesians 4:2, ICB](#)

Story Overview:

Enemies of the Israelites paid money to a sorcerer named Balaam so that he would call a curse on God’s people. The Lord spoke to Balaam, but Balaam did not listen. As Balaam and his donkey travelled along a road, an angel of the Lord blocked the path of the donkey. When Balaam beat the donkey, God miraculously caused it to talk to its owner. Finally, Balaam saw the angel and realised what had happened. He ended up blessing the Israelites instead of cursing them.

Background Study:

Unfortunately, children in Christian families are sometimes familiar with unwholesome talk. It is sometimes tempting for adults to speak negatively about the church or our fellow Christians. Too many times, children are listening while negative things are being said. We must remember that the things we say help shape our children’s view of the church and people. We can help our children grow up seeing the positive things about the church, no matter what difficulties the adults face. In today’s story, we will learn about Balaam and how he was paid money to curse the people of God. Balaam finally learned how to say good things about God’s people.

In [Numbers 21:10-35](#) we read about how the Israelites were unfairly attacked by the Amorite king. The Lord helped His people defeat the Amorites and conquer other kingdoms in the area. Balak (king of Moab) witnessed the Israelites defeating his neighbours, and he became so nervous that he decided to hire a professional seer to curse the Israelites ([Numbers 22](#)). Balaam had a reputation for bringing down curses or blessings on armies. Whether there was some supernatural power involved or not, Balaam was accurate in his predictions. Perhaps this could have partly been due to a careful selection of “customers.” He might have only chosen to work for those whose future seemed apparent. He did not immediately agree to accept money from King Balak. Perhaps he wanted to do a little investigation of the situation.

Until the time of this incident, any god would do for Balaam. Surely, Balaam was shocked to hear the Lord speaking to him ([Numbers 2:9-12](#)). The Lord told Balaam not to go with King Balak’s men ([Numbers 22:12-14](#)). After Balaam sent them away, they returned with more money. Balaam refused to go with them, but then the Lord told him to go ([Numbers 22:15-20](#)).

Numbers 22:21-39

Balaam saddled his donkey and began the journey. It is unclear why the Lord was angry about how Balaam carried out his instructions, but he blocked Balaam's progress. He sent an angel to stand in the path of Balaam and his donkey. Three different times, the donkey refuses to go past the angel. Each time, it is beaten. Finally, the Lord miraculously caused the donkey to speak on the third beating. Balaam had claimed to hear voices before, but never had he expected to hear his donkey!

The Lord then tells Balaam that the donkey saved his life. The angel would have struck Balaam dead if the donkey had not stopped. Balaam is instructed to continue and only say good things when he gets to Moab. Perhaps this man, who makes predictions, is learning that only God knows what is happening.

Numbers 23:1-12

Balaam has King Balak build seven altars and sacrifice animals on each. Balak then asked Balaam to curse the Israelites. The Lord put words in Balaam's mouth and caused him to bless them instead.

Numbers 23:13-26

Balak took him to another place and tried again. And, again, the Lord put blessings in Balaam's mouth. Balak became very angry.

Numbers 23:27-24:14

In this third speech, the Lord does not have to put words in Balaam's mouth. He renounces the sorcery that he has always used (24:1) and freely blesses the people of the Lord. Balak refuses to pay him and sends him home.

Numbers 24:15-25

Before leaving, Balaam prophesies that the Israelites will crush their enemies. He even prophesied doom to individual kings who were there.

Balaam is a complex character. Micah ([Micah 6:5](#)) later looks back at today's incident and writes that Balaam stopped King Balak. On the other hand, Balaam is portrayed negatively in [Deuteronomy 23:3-6](#). Balaam's life certainly ended in disobedience. He was killed in battle after somehow being involved in advising people who turned away from the Lord ([Numbers 25; 31:8-16](#)). Nevertheless, in today's story, whether he meant to or not, both Balaam and his donkey do and say what the Lord commands.

Way to Introduce the Story:

Draw a simple donkey outline on large paper (or chalkboard/whiteboard). Provide "tails" and a piece of blue tac for each child. Blindfold the children one at a time and let them tack the tail on the donkey. See who gets the closest. "In today's story, we are going to learn about a man who had a donkey. Who knows what sound a donkey makes? (Let the children answer) The donkey was able to do something no other donkey has ever done."

The Story:

The children of Israel were a mighty nation. As they wandered through the wilderness and the desert, many other nations came to fear them. They fought and won many battles. They captured cities and conquered the enemies of God who attacked them. One of the nations that wanted to hurt Israel was known as Moab. When the Moabites saw the great number of people and heard of their victories, they became very worried. The Moabite King was named Balak. He decided to do something about the Israelites.

In those days, people believed in magic, evil spirits, and curses. King Balak believed in these things. He knew of a sorcerer named Balaam who cursed people. That meant that he would say bad things and wish

for bad things to happen to them. Many people believed that terrible things happened when Balaam cursed anyone.

King Balak sent men to ask Balaam to curse God's people. The king's men offered Balaam lots of money to come to the Israelite camp and curse them. Balaam wanted the money, so he told the king's men he would ask the Lord.

Balaam probably did not believe in the Lord, but he wanted the men to believe that his curses worked. Balaam must have been very surprised when the Lord actually answered him! The Lord told Balaam not to take the money from King Balak. He did not want Balaam ever to say bad things about the Israelites. Balaam did not take the money or go with the king's men.

When the king heard about this, he told the men to return to Balaam and offer him even more money. This time, the Lord told Balaam to go with the men. The king's men thought Balaam would curse the Israelites, but God had a special plan for Balaam. He wanted to show Balaam that the Lord is more awesome than magic or the evil spirits that Balaam said he believed in.

Balaam saddled his donkey and began riding toward the Israelite camp. As Balaam and his donkey were travelling along, an angel stood in front of the donkey. Balaam could not see the angel, but the donkey could. The donkey walked off the path to avoid running into the angel. Balaam became angry, so he beat the donkey with a stick.

After that, Balaam got back on his donkey and started riding again. Balaam's donkey saw the angel again, but Balaam still could not see it. The angel had a sword in his hand, and the donkey pressed against a wall to escape. Balaam's foot got caught against the wall and was crushed. He was even angrier at the donkey, so he beat her again.

Then Balaam got back on his donkey and rode on until they reached a narrow place in the road. The angel appeared to the donkey again. This time, there was no room to go anywhere, so the donkey just sat down in the middle of the path. Balaam could not believe it! What was wrong with his donkey? He was just about to hit the donkey again when an amazing thing happened. His donkey began to talk to him!

"What have I done to make you beat me three times?"

The angel appeared to Balaam, too, and said, "Why do you keep beating your donkey? If your donkey had not stopped, I would have killed you by now."

Only God could make a donkey talk, and an angel appeared! Balaam realised that the Lord was angry with him. Now, he would do exactly what the Lord said to do.

Balaam did not curse the Israelites when he met King Balak at the Israelite camp. He only said good things about them. He blessed them and talked about how good the Lord was. He did not say one bad thing. He even had altars built so he could worship the Lord. King Balak was angry. This is not what he had planned at all! He wanted Balaam to say bad things, but only good things.

King Balak was unhappy, but the Lord was pleased. He loved His people and wanted everyone to say good things about them.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. [Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.](#)

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Review:

- Who was the king of the Moabites who wanted to hurt God's people? (Balak)
- Who did Balak try to pay to curse the Israelites? (Balaam)
- What did Balaam's donkey see in its path? (An angel with a drawn sword)
- What did Balaam do every time his donkey tried to get out of the way of the angel? (He beat it)
- What did Balaam's donkey do that no other donkey has ever done? (It talked to him)
- Did Balaam curse God's people like King Balak wanted him to? (No, he blessed them instead)
- Why did God stop Balaam from cursing the Israelites? (He loved His people, and they were blessed because they followed Him)
- What did you learn about God from this story?

Reflection:

- What is something you wonder about in this story?
- What question do you have for God about this story?
- What do you think Balaam learned about God from this experience?
- What do you think Balaam thought or felt when he heard his donkey talking to him?
- How do you think the donkey felt when she saw the angel with the sword? What about when Balaam hit her?
- God used Balaam to do something good for His people by blessing them. What good things do you want God to help you do?
- God used Balaam to bless the Israelites instead of cursing them by putting good words in his mouth. How do you feel when someone speaks kind words to you or compliments you?
- Have you ever wanted to say mean or angry words at someone? What can you do when you feel this way, so you are kind or peaceful instead?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. [A variety of prayer methods are found here.](#)

Song Suggestions:

- [My God is So Big Song](#)
- [Rejoice in the Lord Always Song](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- [How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.](#)
- [Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.](#)

Activities:

- Find photos of donkeys in books. Or, taking the children to a place with real donkeys would be exciting!
- Play a simple word game. [Bible Wordz Game](#) is an adaptable game in which children form words from letter tiles. The words relate to those in the Bible lesson.



- Bring a tube of toothpaste and show it to the group. Squeeze a little toothpaste out onto a plate. Try putting the cap on and being a little messy. Then, squeeze a bunch of toothpaste out of the tube. As you do this, you can chat with the children about how great toothpaste is, but it can be messy. Finally, when you have a bit of a mess, ask the children to help you put the toothpaste back into the tube. After a few attempts, you can talk about how easy it is for the toothpaste to come out, but how it is practically impossible to put it back in. Compare this to words that we say. Once unkind words are said, they cannot be taken back. A good scripture to read together is *"Careless words stab like a sword. but wise words bring healing."* [Proverbs 12:18, ICB](#)

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable "God's Story" printable reflection page. [Free printables for this story.](#)

Crafts:

- Make a donkey puppet from a paper bag and take turns letting her "talk." You could let the donkey tell the story from her point of view.
- Provide the children with a large piece of paper. Use large letters to write *"What is good about the church?"* across the top of the paper. Let the children write or draw things they like about our

congregation. They might draw people who are especially kind to them, people doing good work, song notes to represent the singing they like, etc. This could be displayed for the whole church to see.

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. [Free printables for this story.](#)

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Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page & puzzle worksheets Balaam \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Craft: Donkey puppet made from a paper bag printable \(DLTK\)](#)
- [Craft: Make a donkey from cardboard boxes \(Bible Class Creations\)](#)
- [Printable: papercraft donkey \(DLTK\)](#)
- [Game: 'Journey to the Promised Land' activities \(Christian Crafters\)](#)

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