LESSON 36

God blesses Israel through Balaam

NUMBERS 22:1–24:25

CENTRAL TRUTH

Evil men cannot stop God's plans.

KEY VERSE

"If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I would not be able to go beyond the word of the LORD, to do either good or bad of my own will. What the LORD speaks, that will I speak?" **(Num 24:13).**

Supporting Truths

1. God is faithful to His promises.
2. God can use evil people to accomplish His purposes.
3. God punishes the evil people He uses to accomplish His purposes.
4. God does not change His mind like man does.
5. Jesus will establish His kingdom when He comes.

Objectives

1. Explain how God used Balaam to reaffirm His promises.
2. Describe how God used Balaam, a pagan prophet, to accomplish His purposes.
3. Discuss how God was merciful to Balaam in Numbers 22 but also judged Balaam in Numbers 31.
4. Describe how Balak attempted to make God change His mind.
5. Identify the elements of Balaam's prophecies that relate to Jesus.

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Lesson Summary

When Balak urged Balaam to curse Israel so that he could destroy them, God used Balaam to reaffirm His promises to His people. Balaam was a false prophet, but God used him to reaffirm His election of Israel and His promise to bless Israel. He promised to make Israel a strong nation, to give Israel prosperity and victory, and to raise up the Messiah from Israel. One day this King will establish His kingdom and rule over the nations.

Spotlight on the Gospel

Through Balaam's prophecies, God reaffirmed His election of Israel and His promises to bless Israel. However, the greatest blessing is the provision of the Savior, Jesus Christ. In view of God's faithfulness and His unchanging nature, it is certain that Jesus will come again, establish His kingdom, and reign over all the nations. When Christ comes to reign will you be one of His followers?

TWO WEEKS AGO

Israel rejects God's prophet and priest
Numbers 16:1–17:11

LAST WEEK

God offers Israel healing from sin
Numbers 20:2–13; 21:4–9

THIS WEEK

God blesses Israel through Balaam
Numbers 22:1–24:25

REBELLION

Lesson Commentary

Evil men cannot stop God's plans.

After God punished Israel's unfaithfulness with fiery serpents, Israel continued on their detour around Edom (Num 20:14–21). The nations around them saw Israel as a threat. Two Amorite kings launched campaigns against the Israelites, but the LORD was faithful and gave Israel victory over these kings (21:21–35). Fearing an attack from Israel, the king of Moab hired Baalam to curse God's people. But the LORD used Baalam, a pagan prophet, to reaffirm His faithfulness to Israel. God is ***sovereign*** over, or in control of, evil men.

Balak wanted Balaam to curse Israel (22:1–40)

Balak, the king of Moab, was concerned that Israel would conquer Moab (22:4). Not knowing that Israel was forbidden by God to attack Moab (Deut 2:9), he sent messengers to the false prophet Balaam, asking him to curse the Israelites (Num 22:5–6). When the messengers arrived, Balaam told them that he would speak with the LORD before giving them an answer (22:8). Although Balaam used the covenant name "Yahweh" for God (LORD or Jehovah in most English translations), Scripture makes it clear that he did not worship the LORD (2 Pet 2:15–16; Jude 11; Rev 2:14).

THINK ABOUT IT
God is in complete control of everything all the time. Therefore, nothing can stop His plan to bless His people.

However, that night the true God of Israel spoke to Balaam. God told Balaam not to go with Balak's messengers and not to curse Israel because God had determined to bless them (Num 22:12). So Balaam sent Balak's men away (22:13). The messengers returned to Balak, delivering Balaam's response (22:14). But Balak didn't accept Balaam's answer. He sent additional messengers with the promise of honor and whatever else Balaam wanted (22:15–17). However, Balaam knew that he could not go beyond the LORD's word (22:18). That night, God gave permission for Balaam to go, but He did not give permission to curse the people. Balaam could speak only what God revealed.

Even though God had told Balaam to go, He became angry with Balaam as he went on his journey (22:22). When the angel of the LORD came to confront Balaam, only Balaam's donkey was aware that the angel was there. Three times the angel of the LORD appeared to his donkey, and each time Balaam beat his donkey, not knowing that the donkey had rescued his life (22:23–27). Even after God miraculously allowed the donkey to talk to Balaam, Balaam did not realize that the angel was there (22:28–32). When Balaam finally saw the angel, the angel told him that the donkey had saved his life by turning aside (22:33).

The angel repeated God's command to go to Moab and told Balaam to speak only what God commanded (22:35). When he arrived in Moab and spoke to Balak, Balaam confessed, "Have I now any power of my own to speak anything? The word that God puts in my mouth, that must I speak" (Num 22:38).

God used Balaam to communicate four promised blessings for Israel (22:41–24:25)

First, God elected Israel and promised to bless Israel (22:41–23:12).

At the beginning of the next day, Balaam and Balak went to a high place of Baal, a center of pagan worship. From here Balaam could observe all the people of Israel (22:41). Balaam had Balak sacrifice seven bulls and seven rams, a pair of animals on each of the seven altars (23:1). Afterward, Balaam went alone to wait for God's word (23:3). God met Balaam and "put a word in Balaam's mouth" (22:5). Balaam returned to Balak and spoke exactly what God had given him.

Balaam could not curse Israel because they were God's ***elect***, His chosen people (Exod 19:5–6). Numbers 23:7–10 echoes God's election and blessing for Israel repeated elsewhere in Scripture (Gen 12:2; 28:14). Balaam's oracle blessed Israel by reaffirming God's choice. Israel was without equal among the nations (Num 23:9).

Second, God would make Israel to be a strong nation (23:13–26).

Balak asked Balaam to try and curse Israel again, but this time from a different location. Again, Balak offered the sacrifices, and Balaam waited alone for God (23:15–16). Balaam returned after God had told him what to speak and again blessed the people. Although

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Balak had been trying to persuade God to change His mind concerning Israel, Balaam said, "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent" (23:19). God's blessing of Israel was irrevocable.

There was nothing Balaam could do to reverse God's blessing; Balaam's sorcery and divination were of no help against the true God (23:20, 23). The LORD was with Israel as her king (23:21b). Anyone opposed to Israel would be as helpless as a lion's prey because the LORD Himself was with Israel, strengthening the nation (23:24). After Balaam blessed Israel for the second time, Balak was infuriated (23:25).

THINK ABOUT IT
Balaam was like a puppet in the hand of God as he did what God directed.

Third, God would give Israel both prosperity and victory (23:27–24:14).
Balak stubbornly clung to the hope that God would change His mind, urging Balaam to try to curse Israel again (23:27). Sacrifices were again offered, but this time Balaam did not go to seek omens against Israel (24:1). After Balaam looked up and saw Israel, the Spirit of God came upon him (24:2). Revealing the extent of His power, the Spirit of God actually spoke through the false prophet (24:3–9).

Again Balaam blessed Israel. He proclaimed the beauty of Israel, likening Israel to valleys, gardens, cedars and aloes planted by the Lord (24:5–6). Balaam also prophesied about Israel's future king, whose "kingdom shall be exalted" (24:7). God had already promised Israel a king (Gen 17:6–8; 35:11; 49:10), and Balaam affirmed these promises, which ultimately are fulfilled in Jesus. Balaam also affirmed God's promise that whoever blessed Israel would be blessed and whoever cursed Israel would be cursed (Num 24:9; cf. Gen 12:3).

Balak understood that Balaam had just pronounced God's curse on him since he was one of those who was seeking to curse Israel. He warned Balaam to flee since Balaam had "bountifully blessed [Israel] these three times" (Num 24:10). However, before he left, Balaam had three more prophecies to utter from the LORD (24:20–24).

Fourth, God would raise up the Messiah from Israel and He would rule the nations (24:15–25).
Balaam had prophesied of the coming king in his third prophecy, and he returned to that theme in his last prophecy (24:17). Although the king was not yet present, Balaam looked to the king's arrival in the future (24:17a). He referred to the king by two metaphors, the "star" and the "scepter." God already had promised that "the scepter shall not depart from Judah" (Gen 49:10).

Like the scepter, the star was a symbol of royalty. The future king would have dominion over Moab, Edom, and Seir (Num 24:19). Balaam was ultimately looking forward to Jesus, "the bright morning star" (Rev 22:16; cf. 2:28; 2 Pet 1:19). Jesus will fulfill this prophecy when He returns and establishes His millennial kingdom (Rev 19:11–20:6).

Balaam also prophesied the defeat of the surrounding nations (Num 24:20–25). While it is difficult to pinpoint when these defeats happened, it is clear that the nations who opposed Israel and Israel's God ultimately would be defeated by the coming king. The ever faithful God would not withhold His blessing from Israel; likewise, just as God promised, those who cursed Israel would be cursed themselves.

God used a pagan prophet to pronounce numerous blessings upon His people. Through Balaam's prophecies, God reaffirmed His election of Israel and His promises to bless Israel. But the greatest blessing is the provision of the Savior, Jesus Christ.

Lesson Outline

Evil men cannot stop God's plans.

AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE

1. **Balak wanted Balaam to curse Israel (22:1–40).**
1. **God reaffirmed His promise to bless Israel (22:41–24:25).**

AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE

1. **Balak wanted Balaam to curse Israel (22:1–40).**
   - Balak, the king of Moab, was concerned that Israel would conquer Moab (Num 22:4).
   - Balak sent messengers to the false prophet Balaam (22:5–20).
   - Balaam told Balak that he could only say the words God gave him (22:18).
   - An angel would have killed Balaam if it weren't for his donkey (22:23–32).
   - Balaam went to Balak and told him he could only say the words God gave Him (22:38).
2. **God used Balaam to communicate four promised blessings for Israel (22:41–24:25).**
   - God elected Israel and promised to bless Israel (22:41–23:13).
   - God would make Israel to be strong nation (23:14–26).
   - God would give Israel both prosperity and victory (23:27–24:14).
   - God would raise up the Messiah from Israel and He would rule the nations (24:15–25).

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Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.

Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

1. **What did Balak want Balaam to do?**
   Curse Israel.
2. **What do you think would have happened if the donkey had not turned from the angel?**
   The angel would have killed Balaam.
3. **What did Balaam's oracles teach about God's relationship with Israel?**
   God elected Israel and promised to bless Israel.
4. **What did God promise in Balaam's oracles?**
   God promised that Israel would victorious and prosperous. He promised the Savior, who would rule the nations, would come through Israel.

Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

1. **Why was the king of Moab afraid of Israel?**
   The king of Moab, Balak, had seen how Israel had destroyed the Amorites in Numbers 21:21–35.
2. **What did Balak want Balaam to do?**
   Curse the people of Israel.
3. **What do you think would have happened if the donkey had not turned or avoided the angel of the LORD?**
   The angel would have killed Balaam. God had mercy on Balaam by allowing the donkey to see the angel and turn away from Him. God used the donkey to rebuke Balaam and to save him from being killed.
4. **Do you think Balaam could curse Israel?**
   No. What God has blessed, no man can curse. God used Balaam to bless Israel.
5. **What did Balaam's first oracle teach Balak about God?**
   God elected Israel and promised to bless Israel (22:41–23:13).
6. **What did God teach Balak and Balaam through Balaam's second oracle?**
   God would not change His mind. He would make Israel to be a strong nation (23:14–26).
7. **What did God promise through Balaam's third oracle?**
   God would bless Israel with prosperity and victory (23:27–24:14).
8. **What did God promise through Balaam's fourth oracle?**
   God would raise up the Messiah from Israel, and He would rule the nations (24:15–25).

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5

INTRODUCE

TALK TO THE ANIMALS
Show the children pictures of donkeys and ask what donkeys sound like. Ask the children whether they have any pets and what they sound like. Ask those who have pets if they have ever heard their pets speaking English. Explain that in today's lesson, they will learn about a donkey that spoke like a person.

TAG THE DONKEY
The goal of this game is for Balaam to tag the donkey. It is similar to the game Marco Polo. Choose one child to be the donkey and one child to be Balaam. Balaam must close his eyes and say, "Come here, donkey—I'll get you!" and the donkey must reply "Stop or you'll be cut in two!" While Balaam is trying to find the donkey, the rest of the children can make various animal sounds to distract him.

ILLUSTRATE

MARIONETTE MASTER
Bring a marionette to class. Use this puppet controlled from above by wires or strings to illustrate God's sovereign control over evil men. Explain that God is in control of everything, everywhere, all the time.

BROOMSTICK DONKEY
Use a broomstick donkey (or utilize a broomstick horse) during the lesson to help the children picture Balaam riding his donkey. You might "ride" on the broomstick donkey yourself during this portion of the lesson, describing how Balaam's donkey protected him from the angel.

APPLY

TALKING DONKEY
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2.
Materials: Craft sheet, paper bag, brown construction paper, crayons, scissors, and glue.

Directions: Pre-cut the donkey head and tail from craft sheet. Pre-cut the donkey legs from brown construction paper. Have children color the donkey head and paper bag. Glue the donkey head, tail, and legs to the paper bag.

Talking Donkey
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2.

TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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AGES 6–8

INTRODUCE

WHAT'S YOUR PRICE?
Would you do something wrong for a dollar? How about for $100? How about for a house full of gold and silver? Today in our lesson, we will learn about a man named Balaam who tried to curse God's people for a house full of gold and silver.

WORD BY WORD
Use this activity to help children learn the key verse. Have the children sit in a circle. Children will take turns bouncing a ball to a person on the opposite side of the circle. Each person who catches the ball will say the next word of the verse. The last person says the reference. It may be helpful to have the verse on a piece of poster board so that the children can check it if they are uncertain of the words. The verse game can lead into a discussion about God's merciful kindness and how His truth will endure forever.

ILLUSTRATE

PROMISE RING
Bring a wedding ring to class. Show the ring to the children during the lesson, and tell the children that it is a picture of a promise made between two people. However, we know that people do not always keep their promises. Unfortunately, some people break their promises through divorce. Explain that God is not like man; he always keeps his promises (Num 23:19). Every time we see a rainbow in the sky we should be reminded that God always keeps His promises.

CONFINED TO GOD'S WORDS
Balaam could only speak the words that God had given him concerning Israel (Num 22:38). Illustrate this by having a child come up to the front of class and speak only the words that you give him. Before class, write out a funny statement and put it in an envelope. Give the envelope to the child during class and tell him to say only the words on the page inside of the envelope.

APPLY

BALAAM MARIONETTE
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2.
Materials: Craft sheet, white yarn, brads, crazy eyes, crayons, scissors, glue, and hole punch.

Directions: Have children color and cut out the pieces to the marionette from the craft sheet. Connect all pieces to the torso with brads. Glue on crazy eyes. Punch holes on head, hands, and feet. Tie a 2ft yarn piece through each foot, a 1.5ft piece through each hand, and a 1ft piece through the head. Tape four craft sticks together to form an X. Tape the strings that are attached to the hands to opposite ends of one crosspiece of craft stick X. Tape the strings attached to the feet to the other two ends of the X. Tape the string attached to the head to the middle of the X.

Balaam Marionette
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2.

AGES 9–11

INTRODUCE

FAITHFULNESS

God is faithful even when we are not. Are there times when people you know have not been faithful? For example, your siblings said they would do something but didn't. Or a friend said one thing but did another. Can you list any examples of God being unfaithful? No; we can't because God is always faithful. In today's lesson, God demonstrates His faithfulness to Israel when they are blessed rather than cursed by Balaam.

FAITHFULNESS SWORD DRILL

Have children race to look up the following verses. The first one to find the verse gets to read it to the class. Lamentations 3:23; 2 Timothy 2:13; Psalm 36:5; Psalm 119:90; 1 Kings 8:20, Jeremiah 23:20; 1 Timothy 3:11; Colossians 1:2; Jeremiah 23:28; Luke 16:10–1

ILLUSTRATE

PROPHETIC PASSAGES

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2.

Materials: One copy of "Prophetic Passages" chart on paper for each child.

Directions: Pass out a writing utensil and a copy of the "Prophetic Passages" chart to each child. Fill in the boxes as you teach through the four prophecies of Balaam. After the entire chart is filled in, point out to the class that it did not matter whether Balak took Balaam to a different location or made great sacrifices to his false idols. The result was always the same. Israel was blessed bountifully by God because God is faithful to His promises, regardless of how sinful we are.

LEGAL CONTRACT

Bring a legal contract to class and show it to the children during the lesson. Explain that contracts are necessary in this world because people often break their promises. However, God never breaks His promises; He is always faithful (Num 23:19).

APPLY

GOD'S WISDOM ON WORDS

Divide the class into groups and read the following verses together: Numbers 22:18, 35, 38; 23:5, 12, 16, 19, 26; 24:13. After all the verses have been read, ask each group to answer the following questions. Answers are written in italics.

1. How was Balaam restricted in what he could speak or do? (Numbers 22:18, 35; 23:12, 26; 24:13) *Balaam could not speak or do less or more than God told him. He could speak only the words that God spoke to him. He had to do ALL that the Lord spoke. He could not do good or bad on his own will.*
2. Who put a word in Balaam's mouth? (Numbers 22:38; 23:5, 12, 16) *The Lord.*
3. In what three ways is God different from man, according to Numbers 23:19? 1) *God does not lie, 2) God does not have any need to repent and 3) God is completely faithful to His promises.*