

Balaam and the Talking Donkey



References

Numbers 22-24;
Patriarchs and Prophets,
pp. 438-452



Memory Verse

"Anyone who loves
me will obey
my teaching."
(John 14:23).



Objectives

The children will:
Know that we
worship God when
we obey Him.

Feel ready to listen
to God's voice.

Respond by asking God to
help us listen and obey.



The Message

We worship God
when we follow
His instructions.

Monthly Theme

We worship God when we obey Him.

The Bible Lesson at a Glance

The prophet Balaam is summoned by Balak, the king of Moab, to put a curse on the Israelites. Balaam is offered many riches for doing this. Balaam asks God for instructions and is told not to curse the people. But being greedy, Balaam is going to try to curse the people anyway. On the way to meet Balak, Balaam's donkey sees an angel, but Balaam doesn't. Finally the Lord "opens the mouth of the donkey." The donkey and Balaam have a conversation about anger and cruelty to animals. Balaam sees the error of his ways and vows to say only what the Lord tells him to say. Ultimately, Balaam delivers three blessings, not curses, and then is dismissed by Balak.

This is a lesson about worship.

Worship is more than going to church. It is following the Lord's instructions in every aspect of life. Worship is obeying God, listening to His voice, and saying what He would have us say. We use our speech, our voice, to worship Him.

Teacher Enrichment

Balaam was an Aramaean prophet or soothsayer bribed by Balak, a Moabite king. Balak wanted Balaam to curse or cast an evil spell on Israel. Balaam had a reputation for having unusual powers, but the Bible does not call Balaam a prophet, even though he delivers the Word of the Lord. (See "Balaam" in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, p. 115.) In fact, the Hebrew word used to describe Balaam's prophecies is different from the word used with Israel's true prophets. (See *The New International Version Study Bible* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985], note on Numbers 23:7.)

"Balaam was once a good man and a prophet of God; but he had apostatized, and had given himself up to covetousness; yet he still professed to be a servant of the Most High. He was not ignorant of God's work in behalf of Israel; and when the messengers announced their errand, he well knew that it was his duty to refuse the rewards of Balak and to dismiss the ambassadors. But he ventured to dally with temptation. . . . He greedily accepted the

offered treasures, and then, while professing strict obedience to the will of God, he tried to comply with the desires of Balak" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 439).

"Love is manifested in obedience. The line of demarcation will be plain and distinct between those who love God and keep His commandments, and those who love Him not and disregard His precepts" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 92).

"When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 668).

Room Decorations

See Lesson 10.

Program Overview

Lesson Section

Minutes

Activities

Materials Needed

Welcome

ongoing

Greet students at door; hear pleased/troubled

1

Readiness Options

up to 10

A. *Surprise!*
B. *Animal Antics*

none
pet or picture or video of pet doing a trick

Any Time

Prayer and Praise*

up to 10

Fellowship
Songbook
Mission
Offering
Prayer

none
Sing for Joy
Children's Mission
basket or other container
none

2

Bible Lesson

up to 20

Experiencing the Story

Memory Verse

Bible Study

scarves, broom, cloth bags or purses, stick, crown
chalkboard or whiteboard, chalk or marker, eraser
Bibles, paper, pens

3

Applying the Lesson

up to 15

Parent and Child Instructions

Bibles, parents (see activity)

4

Sharing the Lesson

up to 15

Paper Tearing

colored construction paper, pencils or pens, parents of children in your class

***Prayer and Praise me be used at any time during the program.**

Welcome

Welcome students at the door. Ask how their week has been, what they are pleased/troubled about. Review last week's memory verse and encourage the children to share any experiences from last week's lesson study. Have them begin the readiness activity of your choice.

1

Readiness Activities

Select the activity most appropriate for your situation.

A. Surprise!

Say: **Think of a time you had a big surprise!** When every child has thought of one, give them a minute to think of a way to "draw" the surprise in the air with their hands for the other students to guess what it is. Give each student an opportunity to participate. If your group is large, form groups of four to six for this activity.

Debriefing

Say: **There are good surprises and bad surprises. Let's think of some really, really good surprises!** Give children time to respond. **Let's think of some bad surprises.** Discuss. **Today, we are going to learn about someone who was really surprised! God had an amazing surprise for a man who didn't do what God wanted him to do. Our memory verse is: "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching." (John 14:23). Let's say that together. Perhaps the man in our lesson didn't really know God. Today's message is:**



WE WORSHIP GOD WHEN WE FOLLOW HIS INSTRUCTIONS.

Say that with me.

You Need:

- pet or picture of pet

B. Animal Antics

Allow response time as you ask: **What's the best animal trick you've ever seen?** If you have an animal that does a trick and is safe around children, bring it in to show the children, or bring in a picture. **Who has a pet? Can your pet do any tricks?** Invite the children to share stories about their pets and show you the kind of tricks their pets can do.

Debriefing

Allow response time as you say: **Is it important to care for the animals around us? Why? Yes, God gave us pets to be our friends. Some people use animals to help them work. God expects us to treat all our animals kindly. What do you think your pet or other animal would say to you if it could talk? Today we are going to learn about an animal that actually did talk! And what it said showed it wasn't too happy with its master. Our memory verse is about obeying God. "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching." (John 14:23). Let's say that together. In today's story the animal's master wasn't obeying God's instructions. So he wasn't showing God that he loved Him. Today's message is:**



WE WORSHIP GOD WHEN WE FOLLOW HIS INSTRUCTIONS.

Say that with me.

Prayer and Praise

Any
Time



Fellowship

Report the students' joys and sorrows (pleased and troubled) as reported to you at the door (as appropriate). Allow time for sharing experiences from last week's lesson study and review last week's memory verse. Acknowledge any birthdays, special events, or achievements. Give a special warm greeting to all visitors.



Suggested Songs

"Trust and Obey" (*Sing for Joy*, no. 113)

"I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" (*Sing for Joy*, no. 119)

"Dare to Be a Daniel" (*Sing for Joy*, no. 116)

"Give Your Heart to Jesus" (*Sing for Joy*, no. 118)

"I Want to Be" (*Sing for Joy*, no. 124)



Mission

Use a story from *Children's Mission*. Emphasize following God's instructions.



Offering

Say: **We worship God when we obey Him. And we obey Him when we give our offerings to help others learn about Him.**

You Need:

- basket or other container



Prayer

Ask God to help the children want to obey Him because they love Him.

Bible Lesson

You Need:

- scarves
- broom
- cloth bags or purses
- stick
- crown

Experiencing the Story

Characters: Balaam, three or four messengers, King Balak, children to be “the wall”

Setting the scene:

Balaam and the messengers wear scarves over their heads.

Balaam carries a stick. The broom will be Balaam’s donkey, and Balaam will pretend to beat the donkey with the stick.

Balak wears a crown. His messengers carry cloth bags or purses of money.

Have the rest of the class form two groups and stand side by side, each group facing the other, arms spread out to act as the narrow walls in the story.

Have Balak in one corner with the messengers. Have Balaam in an opposite corner. Pause as indicated to prompt actors to do the action.

Read or tell the story.

King Balak looked down from the hill into the valley beside the Jordan River. *[Balak shields his eyes with his hand.] Two million people! he thought. Two million people called Israelites, and they win every war!*

Then Balak said to himself, “If they attack us Moabites, there is no way we’ll survive! They’ve been winning all the battles. They’ll lick us up just like a cow licks up the grass in a field!”

Balak scratched his head and rubbed his chin *[children do the same]* and thought about what he could do to stop them. Suddenly an idea popped into his head! He had heard of a man named Balaam. People said that if Balaam blessed someone, they were blessed. And if he cursed

someone, they were cursed. Right then, King Balak decided he would ask Balaam to put a curse on the Israelites!

So Balak sent some messengers to Balaam. *[The messengers go from Balak to Balaam.]* The messengers patted the money *[messengers do so]* they carried in their sacks while they talked to Balaam.

[Balaam moves away from messengers and kneels to pray.] But when Balaam talked to God that night, God said, “Don’t put a curse on those people. I have blessed them.”

The next morning Balaam called the messengers to him. *[Messengers go to Balaam.]* “Go home. The Lord will not let me go with you.” *[Messengers go to Balak and “talk” to him.]*

The messengers told Balak that Balaam would not come to him. But Balak decided to ask again. So he sent more messengers, with more gold. *[Messengers go back to Balaam, carrying heavy bags.]* But when they talked to Balaam, he still said no, even though he was greedy and wanted the money. *[Balaam shakes his head.]*

That night God said to Balaam, “Go with these messengers. But say only what I tell you to say.”

Early the next morning Balaam called the messengers together *[messengers approach Balaam]* and told them that God had said he could go. He got on his donkey *[Balaam straddles the broomstick, carries the other stick, and starts across the room]* and began to ride into the valley.

All at once Balaam’s donkey ran off the road into a field! *[Balaam turns to the side and “beats” the donkey.]* Balaam beat the donkey until it turned back to the road. *[Balaam and donkey move forward.]*

Soon Balaam came to a really narrow place in the road *[“walls” come up and stretch their arms out, while Balaam rides*

between them]. All at once, the donkey pressed so close to the wall that Balaam's foot was crushed! *[Balaam bumps into "wall."]* And Balaam beat the donkey again. *[Balaam does so.]* The poor donkey cried out, but she went on.

At last the road became so narrow *[wall of children move to close space]* that there was only room for Balaam and the donkey. The donkey couldn't go forward because there was an angel in the way, so it just stopped and lay down on the road. *[Balaam and donkey stop, go down on knees.]* Balaam beat it again. And then, the most surprising thing happened! That donkey looked up at Balaam and talked to him!

"What have I done to make you beat me these three times?" the donkey asked.

And Balaam talked right back to the donkey. *[Balaam speaks.]* "You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now!"

But the donkey reminded Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey which you have always ridden? Have I ever done this before?"

Balaam sheepishly shook his head. *[Balaam shakes his head.]* And then his eyes were opened, and he saw the angel. The angel told Balaam that if the donkey had not stopped, the angel would have killed Balaam, but spared the donkey.

At last Balaam came to the place where King Balak met him. *[Balak and Balaam meet.]* "Look down on these people and curse them for me," Balak ordered.

First, Balaam warned King Balak that he could say only what God told him to say. Then he raised his arms over the valley. *[Balaam raises his arms.]* And when he opened his mouth, only blessings came out. Three times, in three different places, Balaam blessed the Israelites instead of cursing them!

The third time, Balak shouted at Balaam, "Go home! I'm not giving you

any money. I hired you to curse these people, and you've blessed them three times!"

But before Balaam left, God had him say one more thing. He told Balak what the Israelites would do to Balak's country. And he told of a star that would "rise out of Jacob." That star would be Jesus, the one who would save the world.

And Jesus did come, and He will come again.

Debriefing

Allow response time as you ask:

How did Balaam disobey God's instructions? How did Balaam obey God's instructions? What did God do to help Balaam obey?

How do you think Balaam felt when he heard his donkey talking? Do you think he realized he was talking to the donkey? Can God help you so that only good things come out of your mouth?

How did Balak try to convince Balaam to go with his servants to curse the Israelites? (a reward) Balaam was tempted with money. What tempts people today? How do you resist temptation? Let's say our message together:



WE WORSHIP GOD WHEN WE FOLLOW HIS INSTRUCTIONS.

Memory Verse

Write the memory verse on the board and have all the students repeat it. Then ask one volunteer to erase one word. Have everyone repeat the verse again, filling in the missing word. Repeat until all words are erased and the children know the verse.

The memory verse is: **"Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching." (John 14:23).**

You Need:

- chalkboard or whiteboard
- chalk or marker
- eraser

You Need:

- Bibles
- paper
- pen

Bible Study

In advance, write, on separate pieces of paper, the texts in the list that follows on separate pieces of paper. Have adults ready to help the children find the texts.

To begin, ask: **Can you think of any other story in the Bible that includes a donkey?** Ask someone to read Matthew 21:1-3, 7-11 to the class.

Let's look at some other Bible texts about animals. Form six groups and give each a paper. Have them read their text and be prepared to report what they learn to the class.

1 Kings 17:1-6	(Elijah fed by ravens)
Daniel 6:16-23	(Daniel in the

Jonah 1:17	lions' den) (Jonah and the big fish)
John 21:1-6	(Jesus and the disciples' net full of fish)
Matthew 17:24-27	(the coin in the fish's mouth)

Ask: **What do these stories tell us about obeying God?** (Even animals obey God.) **What is the result of obeying God?** (When we obey God, we are blessed with a character that is more like Jesus'.) **What do we do when we obey God?** (We worship Him.) **Let's say today's message together.**



WE WORSHIP GOD WHEN WE FOLLOW HIS INSTRUCTIONS.

3

Applying the Lesson

You Need:

- Bibles
- parents of children in your class

Parent and Child Instructions

If possible, invite the parents to come in for the last 10 or 15 minutes of Sabbath School. Keep parents and children separate initially.

Say: **God gave the children of Israel lots of instructions, such as the Ten Commandments and about how to live. He wanted them to be health and, happy, and to live peacefully together.**

Ask for children to volunteer to read aloud Exodus 20:12 and Ephesians 6:1-3. After the texts are read, say to the children: **God gave us parents to look after us. What do these verses say about God's instructions to children?** Allow time. **God also has words of instruction to parents.** Ask for parents to volunteer to read Ephesians 6:4 and Deuteronomy 6:5-9. Allow time, then ask: **What do these texts say to parents about raising their children?**

Debriefing

Say: **Children, take a minute and think of one way you can show your parents that you love and honor them. Parents, how can you show your children you love and honor them? When you have an idea, touch your ear, so I'll know you're ready.**

Allow response time as you ask the children: **What do we do that shows our parents that we love and honor them? What tells our parents that we don't honor them? What does honoring them mean? Why is it important to obey God in honoring our parents?**

Why is it important for parents to love their children? Let's say our message so your parents can hear it too:



WE WORSHIP GOD WHEN WE FOLLOW HIS INSTRUCTIONS.

Ask the parents to stay for the next activity.

Sharing the Lesson

Paper Tearing

Now pair the students with their parents. Ensure that any children without parents present are paired with a teacher or another adult. Give each person (children and parents) a piece of colored construction paper. Instruct them to tear the paper into a shape to show one way they can honor their parents or children. For example:

a bed—to promise that the child will make their bed when asked to

a shovel—to say that the child will help in the garden

a set of lips—they will speak nicely to each other or say thank you more often

Help the children write on their

papers, “Because Jesus loves me and I love you, I will . . .” Ask the parents to write the same words.

Debriefing

Invite the children and parents to share their torn paper with each other and to explain what it means. Then invite children and parents to pray together, asking God to help them be obedient to Him and loving to each other. Say: **Let’s say our message together one last time:**



WE WORSHIP GOD WHEN WE FOLLOW HIS INSTRUCTIONS.

Closing

Sing together “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus” (*Sing for Joy*, no. 119). Pray that God will help the children follow His instructions.

You Need:

- colored construction paper
- pencils or pens
- parents of children in your class

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References

Numbers 22-24;
Patriarchs and
Prophets,
pp. 438-452

Memory Verse

"Anyone who loves
me will obey my
teaching."
(John 14:23).

The Message

We worship God
when we follow His
instructions.

Have you ever seen a dog do tricks? Some dogs can roll over and sit up. In our story, a man heard a donkey talk, really talk! Let's find out what it said.

The Israelites were nearing the Promised Land. But the surrounding nations had tried to stand in their way, forcing the Israelites to go to war with them. But God was on their side, and each victory sent a message.

Balak, the king of Moab, knew he didn't have any hope against that kind of strength. But then he remembered what he had heard about Balaam. Some said that whatever Balaam blessed was truly blessed. And whatever he cursed was cursed. If Balak could get Balaam to curse the Israelites, his army might have a chance. So he sent some messengers to bring Balaam to him. They took along a lot of gold, the money of their day.

Balaam believed in God. He had once been a prophet. But he had become greedy and no longer served God. Yet, when the messengers came, Balaam asked God for instructions. The answer came back, "Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because I have blessed them."*

So Balaam sent the messengers home. But Balak sent more messengers, with even more gold.

Balaam knew that God did not want him to go. So he said, "King Balak could give me his palace full of silver and gold. But I cannot disobey the Lord."

God knew that Balaam really wanted to go. So that night God said to Balaam, "These men have come to ask you to go with them. Go. But only do what I tell you." So Balaam saddled his donkey and went with the messengers.

Balaam didn't see the angel standing in the road to block his way. But his donkey did, and she turned off into a field. Balaam beat the donkey to get her back onto the road.

The angel appeared a second time. And the donkey moved against a wall, smashing Balaam's foot. Balaam beat her a second time. The third time the angel appeared, there was no place for the donkey to go. So she lay down in the road.

It was after this third beating that the Lord made the donkey speak. "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?" she asked Balaam. (See Numbers 22:28-30.)

Balaam was so angry that he answered without thinking. "You've made a fool out of me," he said.

"You have ridden me for years," the donkey responded. "Have I ever done this to you before?"

And that's when Balaam saw the angel. "If your donkey hadn't turned away from me, I would have killed you by now," the angel said. Balaam's life had been saved by his donkey!

"I have sinned," responded Balaam to the angel. "If I am wrong, I will go back."

The angel said, "Go, but you will only be able to say what the Lord wants you to say."

When Balaam finally met Balak, he warned Balak. "I can only say what the Lord wants me to say."

In three different places that day, Balak asked Balaam to curse the Israelites. But every time Balaam opened his mouth, blessings for the Israelites came out.

After the third time, Balak was angry. "Go home!" he ordered. "I called you here to curse my enemies. But you have blessed them three times!"

"Didn't I tell you I couldn't do anything against the command of the Lord?" Balaam answered. "Before I leave, I will

tell you what these people will do to your people.” Then Balaam prophesied truly. “A ruler will rise from Israel. He will defeat the Moabites. . . . The Israelites will destroy the city.”

God taught Balaam that worship involves everything you do. It is living a life that is pleasing to God. Worship is listening to God’s voice and following His commands. It is using our voices, our speech, and our actions to honor God.

*Much of the dialogue in this story is from Numbers 22-24, ICB.

Daily Activities

Sabbath

- With your family, find a quiet place and read your lesson together. Why did Balaam want to go with the messengers? Do you really think the donkey talked? How do you know?
- Teach your memory verse to your family. Ask them what it means to them.
- Sing some praise songs before prayer.

Sunday

- Sometime today, ask permission to make a cake without following the instructions. Let each family member add something that they think should go into the batter. Bake the cake, then taste it. What difference do instructions make? Where can we find God’s instructions for us?
- Sing a song about the Bible, God’s instruction book. Then thank Him for it.

Monday

- Read and discuss Numbers 22:1-20 for worship. Notice verse 18. If Balaam said that, why did he go with King Balak’s messengers?
- Trace your hands and feet on a piece of paper. Around them, draw pictures of ways you can tell your parents you love them. Give it to your parents with a big hug.
- Sing favorite songs about obeying Jesus. If you really want to obey Him, write your name here: _____. Ask Him to help you.

Tuesday

- Read Numbers 22:21-41 during worship. Why did the angel appear to the donkey? to Balaam? Who saved Balaam’s life? How do you think Balaam felt when he heard his donkey talking to him? Why did he answer the donkey? What kept Balaam from thinking clearly?

- Find out more about donkeys. (Hint: Borrow a book about it from the library or with your parents’ permission check the Internet.) Draw a picture of one.
- Sing a song about animals. Then thank God for animal friends.

Wednesday

- For worship today, read Numbers 23. Talk about the two messages recorded in this chapter. Why do you think Balaam offered sacrifices to God? (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 444.)
- If you have a pet, spend some special time with it today. Or draw a picture of a pet that you would like to have. Think about how you treat animals.
- Pray that God will help you know how to take care of His animals.

Thursday

- Read and discuss Numbers 24 during family worship today. Study Balaam’s third blessing (verses 3-9). Why did these blessings make King Balak angry? What did he tell Balaam to do?
- Now look at the first part of Balaam’s final message from God (verses 10-19). What does it say about Israel? Read verse 17 again. Who is the star that will rise from Israel?
- Thank God for sending Jesus to be your Savior.

Friday

- Act out the Bible story with your family for worship. Who will be the donkey? the angel? the voice of God? Ask each person to tell what they have learned from the story. Is it better to give blessings or curses? Why?
- Sing songs about the Bible. Then pray that God will use you to bless others. Tell Jesus what you’re thankful for this week.