

LESSON 9

BALAAM AND THE TALKING DONKEY

BEFORE YOU TEACH

Curse

A curse is “the expression of a wish that misfortune, evil, doom, etc., befall a person, group, etc.” and “a formula or charm intended to cause such misfortune to another.” Balak, king of Moab, saw how numerous the Israelites were and became afraid. He hired Balaam to curse the Israelites, hoping great misfortune would come upon to them. But the Bible tells us that those who bless God’s chosen people will be blessed; those who curse God’s chosen people will be cursed (Num 24:9b). In addition, no curses or occult power will do harm to God’s chosen. “For there is no sorcery against Jacob, nor any divination against Israel” (Num 23:23).

While men curse others with the intention to do harm, God uses curses to punish sins and immoral behavior. After Adam sinned, God cursed the ground (Gen 3:17-19). God’s curse upon the earth drained the ground of its vitality, and the land brought forth thorns and thistles. The fig tree that Jesus cursed withered immediately, its strength having been drained. The Bible teaches us that we should bless others, including those who curse us. “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Mt 5:44).

Balaam

Balaam was a diviner and soothsayer (Num 22:6; Josh 13:22). He was the son of Beor from Pethor in Mesopotamia (Num 22:5; Deut 23:4). His name means “not of the people.” This could be because he was not Jewish, or because his worship of God contained pagan rituals and practices of the occult, which was not correct and was condemned by God (Deut 18:10-13). Despite this, Balaam had the gift of blessing those he blessed and cursing those he cursed. Balak, the king of Moab, hired Balaam to curse the Israelites hoping that calamity and misfortune would fall on the Israelites. Although Balaam knew that it was wrong to curse God’s people, he “loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Pet 2:15) and ignored God’s instructions. Eventually, God used a talking donkey and an angel to discipline Balaam. Even though Balaam did not curse the Israelites this time, what he did later brought great destruction and harm upon the Israelite nation. When the Israelites were about to enter the land of Canaan, Balaam advised the Moabite women to commit sexual immorality with the men of Israel (Num 31:16). This incurred God’s wrath and a great plague came upon the Israelites, killing 24,000 people. Balaam was later killed by the Israelites during a battle with the Midianites (Num 31:8; Josh 13:22).

BIBLE TEXT

Numbers 22:1-24:25

BIBLE TRUTHS

1. We should bless and not curse.
2. We should not be greedy.
3. We should not look good on the outside but have unclean hearts on the inside.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. To submit to God by asking Him to guide our hearts and deeds.
2. To know that God uses people and things to remind us of our sins and bring us back.
3. To ask God for protection.
4. To learn not to curse, but bless, our enemies.

MEMORY VERSE

“Love your enemies, bless those who curse you.”

(Matthew 5:44a)

PRAYER

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. We praise and thank You for guiding us always with Your love. From the day we were born, You have chosen us to be Your special people. You have showered blessings abundantly upon us. Lord, please guard our hearts and help us to overcome our weaknesses. Inspire us through Your word and Holy Spirit to love and obey You continually. May Your Spirit guide today’s class as we learn how to obey You from our hearts. Hallelujah! Amen.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR STUDENTS

Our students might be confused about why God had allowed Balaam to go with Balak's men when he was still angry with Balaam. Explain to the students that God desires us to obey Him from our hearts. Outwardly, Balaam obeyed God and refused to go with Balak's men; inwardly, he desired the fortune and honor offered to him. This explains why Balaam inquired of God a second time if he should go with Balak's men.

Christians also face this problem: outwardly, we obey God; inwardly, we wish to follow our desires. The students

must understand that we express obedience not only through action, but by our attitude as well. Do we obey God with joy, or do we obey God grudgingly and laboriously? Explain to the students the importance of obedience that stems from the heart. Ask the students to come up with practical examples, such as doing a chore with a glad heart or listening attentively to parents when they're speaking to them. God desires us to obey Him from our hearts, "for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam 16:7).

VOCABULARY

messenger: a person who carries a message or goes on an errand for another

curse: to wish for something bad or evil to come upon someone

bless: to ask God to give good things to another person

diviner/soothsayer: someone who can tell the future

unrighteous wages: a reward for doing something that is not right in the eyes of God

REVIEW

Last week, we learned about how the Israelites came to the edge of the promised land. What did the Lord tell Moses to do? (He told him to send out twelve spies.) The spies went and explored the land for forty days. When they came back, what did ten of them say about the land? (They said the land did flow with milk and honey, but the people there were too powerful for them.) When the Israelites heard this report, they complained against Moses and even wanted to go back to Egypt. Two of the spies thought differently than the other ten. What were their names and what did they say about the promised land? (They were Caleb and Joshua. They reported that the land was good and that God would help them conquer the people.) What did we learn from Caleb and Joshua? (We can always trust in God's mighty power and His promises. This will give us the strength to stand up for what is right, even though everyone around us is doing something different.)

Because the Israelites lacked faith, God did not allow them to enter the promised land. Instead, they would wander in the desert for forty years, and only Joshua and Caleb and those who were younger than twenty would see the promised land.

BIBLE STORY

Teaching Ideas

Display a map of the region. Point out the land of Canaan, Moab, and Mesopotamia. This will demonstrate to the students how far Balak's messengers traveled to reach Balaam.

The Israelites in the Land of Moab

After hearing the report from the twelve spies, the Israelites decided to rebel. That means they went against God's original plan for them. So God punished them by having them wander through the wilderness for forty years. After forty years, the Israelites who had come out of

Egypt and saw God's miracles in the desert were now dead, and their children were now ready to enter Canaan. They were now at the border of the promised land and camped on the plains of Moab.

When King Balak of Moab saw all the Israelites, he was scared. King Balak had heard of the Israelites' defeat of the great and powerful Amorite nation and how their God was fighting for them. He felt his country had no chance against God's people. The Moabites feared that the Israelites were going to take everything that belonged to them.

Balak Sends for Balaam

King Balak thought of a plan to bring a curse on the Israelites, so they would be weakened and lose the battle. This means that he thought if he could find someone who could say bad things about the Israelites, and those bad things would come true, then the Israelites would not be so strong and maybe even lose against the Moabites. So he sent his men to find Balaam, a soothsayer. What is a soothsayer? It is a person who can tell the future. Balaam was well known for bringing blessings or curses on people. A blessing is when we ask for good things to come upon someone. A curse is the opposite. When we curse someone we wish for something bad or evil to happen. But Balaam the soothsayer lived in the land of Mesopotamia, about 400 miles east of Moab. [Show this on the map.] Balaam must have been a powerful soothsayer because despite the great distance, King Balak was willing to send messengers to see Balaam. When they arrived they told Balaam what the king said. "Look, a people has come out of Egypt, and they cover the face of the earth. Come now, curse them for me; perhaps I shall be able to overpower them and drive them out. Moreover I will pay you and bring honor upon you for doing this."

What did King Balak want Balaam to do? King Balak wanted Balaam to curse the Israelites. Do you think it is right to wish for evil or bad things to happen to others? No, it is wrong. Let's read Matthew 5:43-48 to find out what the Bible says about this. The Bible tells us that we should bless others and not curse. Also, the Israelites are God's chosen people and are blessed by Him. God will not allow harm to happen to them. God will protect His people from curses, and curse those who curse His people.

Do you think Balaam should go with the messengers to curse the people? Do you think God would be happy?

The Lord Does Not Allow Balak to Go

When the messengers arrived, Balak said to them, "Spend the night here, and I will tell you what the Lord tells me." So the messengers spent the night there.

God asked Balaam, "Who are these men who are at your home?"

Balaam answered, "These men are from Balak, the king of Moab. His message was: 'Come and put a curse on these people who have come from Egypt. Then I will be able to fight them and make them go away.'"

But God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on these people, because they are blessed."

The next morning, Balaam got up and said to Balak's messengers, "Go back to your own country, because the Lord will not let me go with you." At this time, Balaam listened to God, and did not follow the messengers back to Moab. God did not want Balaam to curse His people.

Balak Sends More Messengers

When the messengers returned to their own country and

told King Balak everything, the king sent more messengers to Balaam than the first time. When the messengers came to Balaam they told him what the king said. "Please do not let anything stop you from coming to me. I will certainly reward you greatly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Therefore please come, curse this people for me." The king promised to give Balaam a lot of money if he would curse God's people.

Then Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "Though King Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I have to do what the Lord tells me."

The messengers from Balak spent the night with Balaam. That night, Balaam once again asked the Lord if he could go with them. God said to Balaam, "Since these men have come to call you, go with them, but only do what I tell you."

The next morning, Balaam got on his donkey and went with Balak's messengers. But God was angry with Balaam as he went.

Why was God angry with Balaam when He said Balaam could go with the messengers?

God had already told Balaam that he couldn't go and curse the Israelites the first time. This was because they were a blessed people and it was wrong to curse them. So when Balaam asked God again, God was angry because Balaam did not really want to listen to God. Even though Balaam said he could only do what God told him to, inside his heart, Balaam was greedy for the money and honor that King Balak promised him. The reward that he would receive was for doing something that was not right in the sight of God. The Bible describes it as "unrighteous wages." So in the end, God allowed Balaam to go, but only because He knew Balaam really wanted to go, even though it was wrong. Have we ever behaved like Balaam? Have we ever wanted something very badly but at the same time know that it would go against God's commandments? For example, our best friend is having a birthday party, but it is on Saturday. We ask our parents if we can attend, and they say, "No." If we really wanted to attend the party, what would we do? We would probably ask our parents again. Our parents may eventually allow us to go but they would be unhappy and angry with us. This was exactly what Balaam did. Although he knew it was wrong to curse the Israelites, he kept asking God because he desired riches and honor. God eventually let him go but God was very displeased with Balaam.

An Angel of the Lord

As Balaam rode on his donkey, God did something very unusual to stop Balaam. God sent an Angel to stand in the road to stop him. In the Angel's hand was a sword. What do you think the Angel of the Lord was going to do? Yes, He was going to punish Balaam because of his disobedience. Balaam couldn't see the Angel of the Lord, but his donkey could because God opened her eyes. When the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the road

with a sword in His hand, she wanted to avoid Him, so she turned off the road and went into the field. Because Balaam could not see the Angel of the Lord, he must have thought his donkey was not listening, so he beat her to get her back on the road.

The Angel of the Lord then stood in a narrow path between two walls. When the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, she pressed herself against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot. Balaam beat her again.

Then the Angel of the Lord went ahead of them and stood in a place where there was no room for the donkey to pass or turn away. When the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, she lay down and would not move. This time, Balaam became so angry he beat his donkey with his staff.

The Talking Donkey

Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth. How do donkeys normally speak? [Have students demonstrate.] They probably make sounds but this donkey spoke with words, like we do. Have you ever seen a talking donkey?

Isn't it amazing how God allowed a donkey to speak? God can use unusual ways to teach us important lessons or to remind us of our sins. Here, God opened the mouth of the donkey to teach Balaam an important lesson.

The donkey said to Balaam, "What have I done to make you beat me three times?"

Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword, I would kill you right now!"

The donkey replied, "Am I not your donkey which you have always ridden? Do I usually do this to you?"

"No," he said.

Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the road with a sword in His hand. Balaam bowed low with his face to the ground.

The Angel of the Lord asked Balaam, "Why have you beaten your donkey three times? I have come here to stop you because what you are going to do is not good. The donkey saw Me and tried to move away. If she had not turned away, I would have surely killed you by now, but I would have saved her."

Balaam said to the Angel of the Lord, "I have done wrong against the Lord. I didn't know that You were standing in the road to stop me. If You do not want me to

go, I will turn back."

The Angel of the Lord said to Balaam, "Go with these men, but only say what I tell you to say." So Balaam went with the messengers.

Balaam Blesses the Israelites

When Balaam arrived, King Balak was glad to see him. Balak brought Balaam to a high place where he could see the Israelites and curse them. When Balaam opened his mouth, God placed the words into his mouth so that he began to bless the Israelites instead. When Balak heard Balaam bless the Israelites, he cried, "What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, and look, you have blessed them abundantly!" King Balak was upset because he was expecting Balaam to curse the Israelites. Instead, he said good things and blessed them. Balaam replied to the King, "I can only say the words that God has put into my mouth."

King Balak then took him to another place where they could see the Israelite camp. When Balaam opened his mouth, again he blessed the Israelites. When King Balak heard this, he was upset and said, "If you're not going to curse them, then don't bless them either."

Balaam replied, "Did I not tell you I must do whatever the Lord says?"

Then King Balak brought Balaam to another place to look at the Israelite camps. And for the third time Balaam opened his mouth and blessed the people of Israel. King Balak became very angry with Balaam. He struck his hands together and said to Balaam, "I called you to curse my enemies, and look, you have bountifully blessed them these three times! Now leave at once and go home. I said I would greatly honor you, but in fact, the Lord has kept you back from honor." And so Balaam got up and returned to his home and Balak returned to his.

King Balak asked Balaam to come curse the Israelites. But Balaam did not do that. In fact, three times in a row, he blessed God's people. Balak kept taking Balaam to different places so that Balaam could say his curses. But in the end, things did not go the way King Balak had planned. God always protects His people. He will not allow harm to come upon them.

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

- 1. Why were the Moabites afraid of the Israelites?** The Israelites were great in number and the Moabites heard how the Israelites had destroyed the Amorites.
- 2. What did King Balak promise Balaam if he cursed the Israelites?** Riches and honor.
- 3. Why did Balaam's donkey behave so strangely?** She saw the Angel of the Lord carrying a sword standing before them ready to kill Balaam.
- 4. The donkey began to kick and bray after Balaam beat her.** False; she kept trying to save his life.
- 5. King Balak was happy when Balaam blessed the Israelites.** False; he was mad.
- 6. To curse someone is to wish for evil and bad things to come upon them.** True.
- 7. Balaam wanted to go see King Balak because he was greedy for the money and honor he offered him.** True.

MEMORY VERSE PRACTICE

Please reinforce the memory verse every week.
You can practice the memory verse with your students anytime during class.

“Love your enemies, bless those who curse you.” (Matthew 5:44a)

HOMEWORK ANSWER KEY

1. B
2. C
3. C
4. False; she stopped because she saw that the Angel of the Lord was going to kill Balaam.
5. True
6. True
7. True
8. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:21)
9. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." (Psalm 51:10)
10. The Israelites were a blessed people in God's sight. Answers may vary.

SPIRITUAL TEACHING & LIFE APPLICATION

1. Ask God to guard our hearts.

Balak the king of Moab offered Balaam riches and honor if he would curse the Israelites. Balaam's response was, "Even if Balak gave me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord." Outwardly, it seemed as if he was obedient to God. Inwardly, Balaam wanted the riches and honor Balak offered him for cursing the Israelites. Jesus warns us that "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt 6:21). God knows what we are thinking inside, even if our mouths say something else. We cannot hide our real thoughts from God. And God knows if we really love Him or not.

Today, we may not love riches and wealth, but we may love other things instead. These things may cause us to not want to come to church, pray, read the Bible, or obey our parents.

Can you name something that you like or enjoy doing very much that may stop you from obeying God? [Allow students to share.] If we find there are things that will cause our hearts to turn away from God, we need to ask God to guard our hearts and remove them.

2. God uses people and things to remind us of our sins and bring us back.

When we disobey God, He may sometimes use different people or things to remind us of our sins. God used the angel and the donkey to remind Balaam of his sins. What could God use to warn us so we don't do wrong things? How should we respond to these reminders? Share an experience where God stopped you from doing something wrong. (God continues to warn us every day. We have our friends, church brothers and sisters, RE teachers, parents, the Bible, and prayers to warn us when we have done wrong. When God gives us these reminders, we need to turn back to God and be thankful that He loves us so much that He would use these many ways to bring us back.)

3. God is our protector.

The Israelites were a people blessed by God (Num 22:12). When their enemies caused them great suffering or treated them unfairly, God would punish the enemies. Today, we are God's children, God's own special people. God protects and loves us the way a father protects his children. How has God blessed or protected us?

4. Bless our enemies, not curse them.

When King Balak saw the numerous Israelites camped in his land and heard the stories of their victory over the Amorites he became scared and asked Balaam to curse the Israelites.

Why is it wrong to curse others even when they hurt us and are our enemies? [Allow students to share. Discuss with the students how they handle bullies or students who tease them. Do they fight, call them names, or ignore them? Discuss Kyle's testimony below.]

Testimony

There was a church brother called Kyle who was having problems with a bully at school. The bully liked picking on boys shorter than him. He would come to Kyle from behind, grab Kyle, shake him, and throw him to the ground. Sometimes, he would grab Kyle's backpack, open it, and dump everything in it onto the ground. Kyle was scared and frustrated. Kyle was constantly looking out to see if the boy was around. He tried to avoid him, and would often try to hide from the bully.

Kyle decided that he would talk to one of his teachers about the bullying. The teacher spoke to the bully. He left Kyle alone but only for a little while. Soon, the bully started picking on Kyle again.

One day, when Kyle was picked up by his mother after school, she noticed Kyle's backpack was a mess. She asked what happened. Kyle told her the bully started picking on him again. Kyle went on to explain that he had asked the bully to stop and that he had told the teacher, but nothing seemed to stop the bully. The bully was taller and stronger than him. The only thing Kyle could do was to hide from him.

After Kyle got home, Kyle's father was extremely angry when he heard about the bully. He demanded that he and Kyle's mother immediately speak to the principal to solve the problem. Kyle's mother remained calm and said she would take care of it. As she was thinking of the best solution to the problem, God's words came to her heart. God reminded her to "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Mt 5:44). God's words reminded her she should treat people kindly, even her enemies. Later, they decided that the best way was to pray about the matter and ask God for mercy so that the boy would stop picking not only on Kyle but on all the other boys who were bullied, too.

Miraculously, after the prayers, the bullying stopped. One day, Kyle noticed the bully running for his life because he was being chased by a bigger and taller kid. God was teaching the bully a lesson and letting him know how it felt to be bullied. Another time, Kyle saw the bully walking down the hall. Kyle became very tense. But the boy walked past Kyle as if he did not know him. From then on, Kyle no longer had to worry about the bully.

Read Matthew 5:44-48, Luke 6:28, and James 3:9. As human beings, we naturally want to hurt those who hurt us. There is an old saying, "An eye for an eye." But Jesus wants us to imitate Him by loving our enemies and blessing those who curse us. That way, we can be perfect as Jesus is perfect. Also, by treating people kindly, we may win them over and become friends.

 ACTIVITIES

1

I Am So Blessed!

Objective: To allow students to reflect on the blessings that God has given them in their lives and to be content with what they have.

Materials

- Colored construction paper
- Crayons/markers
- Glue
- Scissors

Read the following story to the students before making the book of blessings.

"Let's look in the department store first," Mom said as she and Erin entered the shopping mall. They were looking for a birthday present for Erin's cousin, Heidi.

Erin followed her mother into the store. "Oh, Mom, look at that blue sweater! I want one of those!"

Mom smiled and said, "We're looking for something for Heidi, remember?"

"Oh, but it's..." Erin spotted the jewelry counter. "Oh! I want a bracelet like that one!"

"Come on, Erin. We don't have much time," Mom said. "I don't see anything here. Let's go to the toy store."

The toy store was also filled with many nice toys. Erin immediately spotted a doll that she wanted. But she forgot about it as she followed her mother to the game section. "Mom, there's that new game I want," Erin said, pointing.

Mom sighed. "Well, here's a game that Heidi might like. Let's buy it and get home before you want something else."

"What do you mean?" asked Erin.

"Erin, you've seen all kinds of things this morning that you want," Mom answered. "The Bible tells us to be content with what we have. I want you to be a girl who is thankful for what she has instead of always wanting more."

Erin frowned for a moment. Then she suddenly laughed. "You know what? I can't even remember most of the things I told you I wanted. I'd better make sure I don't look at any more things."

"Good thinking," said Mom. "I'll do that, too. Let's both ask the Lord to help us be content with what we have."

When we go shopping are we excited by all the things we see? Do we constantly ask our parents to buy us this or that? The Bible tells us to be happy with the things that we already have (Heb 13:5). How can we remove greed? [Allow students to share.] By giving thanks to God continuously for what we have, we leave no room for greed in our hearts. Let us make a book of all the ways that God has blessed us.

Instructions

1. Cut the construction paper to the desired length, then fold in half lengthwise.
2. Then take the leaves of the paper and fold them back lengthwise into equal segments. The resulting book will expand like an accordion.
3. Have the students design a cover. Tell the students to write "My Blessings" on the cover.
4. Ask the students to draw pictures of each blessing they have received from God.

2

Donkey Puppet

Objective: To help students examine their strengths and weaknesses.

Materials

- Brown, pink, and white construction paper
- Brown lunch bag
- Glue sticks
- Scissors
- Crayons/markers

Instructions

1. Draw a donkey's head, legs, and ears on the brown construction paper. The head should cover the entire bottom of the lunch bag.
2. Cut out the drawings and glue the head onto the bottom of the lunch bag and the legs onto the back of the bag.
3. Draw a tongue from pink construction paper and cut it out. Glue it on the inside fold of the bottom part of the bag.
4. Draw and cut out a big bubble from the white construction paper.
5. Ask the students to think of their weaknesses. Have students write in the bubble what the donkey would say to help them improve if God allowed the donkey to speak to them.
6. Attach the dialogue bubble to the donkey's mouth.

E1 Year 1 Book 3 Lesson 9—Balaam and the Talking Donkey

Homework Assignment

Name: _____ Parent signature: _____ Date: _____

- Bible Truths:**
1. We should bless and not curse.
 2. We should not be greedy.
 3. We should not look good on the outside but have unclean hearts on the inside.

- Lesson Objectives:**
1. To submit to God by asking Him to guide our hearts and deeds.
 2. To know that God uses people and things to remind us of our sins and bring us back.
 3. To ask God for protection.
 4. To learn not to curse, but bless, our enemies.

Bible Reading: Please put a checkmark in the space when you complete the reading each day.

Prayer: Please put a checkmark in the space on the days you prayed to God.

	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Bible Reading							
Prayer							

Memory Verse

Please write down this week's memory verse.

(Matthew 5:44a)

What I Learned from the Bible This Week

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Homework Assignment

Understanding What You Have Learned

Multiple Choice

- Why did King Balak ask Balaam to come, even though Balaam lived so far away?
 - Balaam and King Balak were good friends.
 - Balaam was a soothsayer who had a great reputation. Whomever Balaam blessed was blessed, and whomever he cursed was cursed.
 - There was no soothsayer in the land of Moab.
- How many times did Balaam ask God if he could go with the messengers?
 - 1
 - 3
 - 2
- The Lord opened the mouth of the _____ and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"
 - Horse
 - Goat
 - Donkey

True or False

- The donkey refused to continue walking because she was tired from the journey. _____
- At first, God did not allow Balaam to go and curse the Israelites because they were a people blessed by God.

- The Lord was angry with Balaam because he wanted the riches and honor that King Balak would give him if he cursed the people. _____
- King Balak of Moab wanted to curse the Israelites because he feared that the Israelites would destroy his country.

Fill In the Blank

heart	clean	treasure	create	spirit	where	renew	your
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- For _____ your _____ is, there _____ will be also. (Mt 6:21)
- _____ in me a _____ heart, O God, and _____ a steadfast _____ within me. (Ps 51:10)
- Why did God not allow Balaam to curse the Israelites? How do you know that you are special in God's sight?
