

October 12, 2025

GOD'S PLAN: NUMBERS 22:22-35

****Teacher's note: We are going to work through the passage quickly because I want to spend some time on the big picture in the conclusion of the lesson.****

Introductory Activity (Adapted from ETB LG, 71)

Introduce: Have someone read the opening paragraph on page 55 of their personal study guide. (See Notes Box.)

Ask group members to "share experiences when they sensed God speaking to them." (ETB LG, 71)

Explain: Today, we are going to examine one of the most bizarre but illuminating stories in the Bible. In the account, God is going to speak to a man in a variety of ways.

Skip to Transition below.

Introductory Activity 2

Ask the group if anyone in the group has ever had to rig up a solution to solve an intractable problem. For example, you might have to get the 70-inch TV home from the store, but you are driving a small car. Or the baby just will not go down for the night. Have you ever had to come up with an ingenious solution to a problem like this?

Explain: Sometimes these types of ingenious solutions become infamous in your family. We have all seen, at least in pictures, the king-size mattress strapped to the top of a compact car. We might even have put a ladder on the back of our truck and leaned it against a small limb that needs cutting. We find ingenious ways to solve problems. Well, God has more sense than we often demonstrate, but He, too, finds ways to accomplish His plan. Today, we are going to examine one of the most bizarre but illuminating stories in the Bible. In the account, God is going to speak to a man in a variety of ways and use various mechanisms to accomplish His plan.

Transition: "Use Pack Item 1 (*Map: From Kadesh-Barnea to Moab*) to explain that the Israelites had moved from Kadesh-barnea to the Plains of Moab across the Jordan River from Jericho. Summarize this background: 'Balak, king of Moab, heard about Israel's victory over the Amorites, and his people were quite concerned (Num. 22:2-4). So, he sent messengers to Balaam, a diviner who lived near the Euphrates River, and asked him to come and curse the Israelites (22:5-6). When Balaam inquired of God, the Lord told him not to go with the Moabite leaders (22:7-14). The officials returned and informed Balak that Balaam had refused to come. Balak then sent another delegation and offered Balaam an even greater reward (22:15-17). Again, Balaam inquired of the Lord. This time, the Lord told

Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *Preaching the Word: Numbers* (Preaching)
- *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Numbers* (TOTC)
- *Numbers* (Harrison)
- *New American Commentary: Numbers* (NAC)

"God speaks to us through His Word. He speaks to our hearts or makes holy impressions when we seek Him and His will in prayer. Sometimes, when we hear someone preach, teach, or sing a particular song, we know "those words were for me. That was the answer I needed." The same can occur in a conversation. We realize that God has delivered a personal message in that moment. We sense an internal confirmation that we have heard from Him." (ETB PSG, 55, and ETB LG, 70)

him to go. So, Balaam saddled his donkey and accompanied Moab's leaders (22:18-21)." (ETB LG, 71) Our lesson picks up with Balaam on the road to meet the king.

1. OBSTACLES MET (NUM. 22:22-27)

Read (or have someone read) Numbers 22:22-27.

Explain: The first question we have to ask is why "God was incensed that Balaam was going." Initially, God told Balaam not to go. Later, He relented with the instruction to "only do what I tell you." (v20) Scholars tend to disagree in their answers, but it might help us to look at passages from the New Testament to help us understand. (You might ask two group members to mark these passages beforehand and be prepared to read them.)

Read: 2 Peter 2:15 and Jude 11 (See Notes Box)

Explain: Balaam's "besetting sin was greed." (Preaching, 274) It appears that God knew his heart, and it was set on doing what was necessary to get his payday. On the outside, he was doing what God told him to do (to go with the messengers), but on the inside, he was intent on doing what he wanted to do (get paid).

Apply and Discuss: This should cause us to stop and consider our own lives. What kinds of motivations, both positive and negative, drive people today? (Allow time for answers.) On the positive side, people can be driven by a desire to care for their families, help those who are suffering, or expand God's Kingdom. Some people are driven by greed, like Balaam. Others might be driven by ego and want to be known. Others might be driven by low self-esteem and want to prove something to the world. A believer should stop and consider what is driving their life and their motivation to accomplish a task. Motivations are important; while others might not know them, we cannot hide them from the Lord. If they lead us to make decisions and take actions opposed to God's purposes, He will intervene. That is what the angel is there to do in Numbers 22.

Verse 22 tells us that the angel "took his stand on the path to oppose him." Not only was the angel there to oppose Balaam the agent of God was there to kill him with the "drawn sword." Harrison notes that the angel was "a surrogate for the Lord Himself." (Harrison, 298) Here we see the first "pair" presented in this passage. Balaam was **a devious diviner** motivated by his own advancement. The angel was **a dutiful delegate** of God, motivated to accomplish God's will.

In verses 23-27, we see a second pairing. The author presents us with **an aware animal** and **a blind diviner**. The angel appears unseen before Balaam three times. The keenly aware donkey breaks with the stereotype of stupidity and tries to avoid the angel. First, she tries to flee, and Balaam beats her to get her back on the path. Second, in a tight space between two stone walls, she tries to squeeze past the angel and crushes Balaam's foot

Notes:

2 Pe 2:15

They have gone astray by abandoning the straight path and have followed the path of Balaam, the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of wickedness

Jud 11

Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, have plunged into Balaam's error for profit, and have perished in Korah's rebellion

in the process. The dumb diviner beats her again. Lastly, in a location that does not allow for running or squeezing by the donkey simply cowers down and refuses to move. The angry prophet beats her again. Now, let's use our holy imagination here and picture the scene from the eyes of Balaam and his two companions. All Balaam knows is that his donkey is acting odd. First, it takes off into the field. Then, for some odd reason, she squeezes against the stone wall. Finally, it just lies down and refuses to move. From this companion's perspective, it might have been humorous. First, their master's donkey runs him into a field. Then presses up against the wall, crushing his foot. Finally, it just lies down below him.

Discuss: Instead of presenting the application points below, ask the group to brainstorm some application points from this passage. (You might ask them to discuss with a neighbor or to simply call them out.) After a few minutes, present the points below (If one of them is brought up by a group member, you might present the information below at that time.)

- 1) **God wants to guide us in the right direction.** We don't really understand the relationship between God and Balaam. As we will see later in the book of Numbers, he is not a godly man and actually brings sin into the nation of Israel. Nevertheless, God communicates with him. Believers, on the other hand, have a special relationship with the Lord. We can know that God will guide us to keep us on the right path. When we are acting outside of God's will, He might try to get us back on the path of godly decision-making by intervening in our lives directly. This might include discipline.
- 2) **We are not always aware of what God is doing.** Sometimes things happen in our lives that do not fit with the way we thought things would go, or unexpected twists and turns occur. God is active in our lives, and He does things like orchestrate conversations or events to help move us in the right direction.
- 3) **We should respond by seeking the Lord** when our plans keep getting sidetracked or conversations or our Bible reading seem to contradict our desired plan. The Lord wants us to be on the right path, seeking His best for us. Instead of beating our heads against the wall or beating up those around us, we should stop and ask the Lord to open our eyes.

Summarize Transition: In this passage, Balaam was in trouble and did not know it. We might find ourselves in a similar situation. We must decide if we will be devious like Balaam or dutiful like the angel. Moreover, are we blind like the diviner or are we spiritually aware like the donkey? In the next passage, the Lord is going to open the donkey's mouth and the man's eyes.

2. ATTENTION GAINED (NUM. 22:28-31)

Read (or have someone read) Numbers 22:28-31.

Notes:

"[The narrator] regarded Balaam as a man inspired by the Spirit to declare God's will, but that does not necessarily mean that he thought Balaam a good man or a true believer in Yahweh." (TOTC, 189)

Explain: While Balaam is beating the donkey, the Lord empowers the donkey to speak. What is humorous about this situation is that Balaam is so caught up in what is going on that the talking donkey doesn't even arrest his attention. In effect, the donkey defends her actions. She says, "What are you doing? Clearly, you don't see what is going on because if you did, you would know that I am trying to care for your needs just like I have always done." In response, Balaam announces his desire to kill the donkey.

Apply and discuss: We do not have to look too hard to find some practical application here. Ask the group to brainstorm some practical applications from this account.

Explain: Yes, we can first be reminded that God is the sovereign creator and can do what He wants regarding the creatures He made. If God wants a donkey to talk to a man, a great fish to swallow a man, or lions to refrain from swallowing a man, He can do so. Practically, though, we can be reminded that sometimes we beat up on those who are just trying to help us. We might do so in two situations. First, we might lash out at the person who is trying to guide us away from sin or a sinful decision. Second, we might attack the person who is trying to help us in times of difficult decision-making. We might see their guidance as a desire to hold us back from "our best life" or an indication that we are not equipped with the smarts, the skill, or the ambition to achieve our goals. When these situations arise, we should stop and consider our motivations and God's best for us. (See Notes Box for examples.) Of course, we should consider the source of the advice and ensure that the advice giver is walking with the Lord and providing godly counsel. In Balaam's case, he was talking to a donkey—not the best source of information. In order to affirm the donkey's words, God opened Balaam's eyes to the spiritual reality of the situation.

Discuss: What are some ways that we can "test" the advice of others?

Explain: When making an important decision, we should practice three habits. First, seek guidance in God's Word. Second, seek guidance from God's people. Third, seek guidance from God's Spirit. When we do these three things, we then need to think logically, not emotionally, about the "opportunities" and actions before us. The essential factors in making decisions are (1) the effects it will have on our spiritual growth and (2) the growth of God's Kingdom.

Summarize and Transition: Balaam was responding emotionally and violently against the donkey when the donkey was only trying to help him. We should be careful in our response to those giving us counsel. Be careful not to beat up on those trying to help, and be careful to seek God's best when receiving counsel. With opened eyes, Balaam stops beating his donkey and starts responding properly.

Notes:

Example of people guiding us in decision making:

Maybe a student wants to go to the "big" college, but you know it's a party school. You also know the student might be spiritually mature enough to avoid those temptations. Maybe a young married couple wants to move to the big city, but they have no support there. Someone might guide them to spend a few years shoring up their marriage or their finances before moving. Maybe a couple who is dating have looked at the finances and determined that is best to live together for a while before getting married. Someone might guide them to either delay the marriage and live at home for a while or to go ahead and get married and struggle for a few years.

3. GOD'S PLAN (NUMBERS 22:32-35)

Read or have someone read Numbers 22:32-35.

Explain: The agent of the Lord confirmed the words of the donkey. Let's focus on Balaam's response and the angel's instruction. First, he declares his ignorance of the situation. He says, "I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing in the path to confront me." This response sounds good, and it might be the *reason* for Balaam's actions against his donkey. However, ignorance of God's ways is not an excuse for those opposing God. We said before that Balaam's motivations and true intentions did not align with God's. Feigning ignorance of the consequences (the angel "standing in the path to confront" him) does not excuse his sinful desires and plans. In response to the now-revealed consequences for his decisions, he offers to "go back." Again, this sounds good, but that, too, was not God's plan. Remember, God *had* told him to go. God's instructions in verse 20 were "Since these men have come to summon you, get up and go with them, but you must only do what I tell you." The angel was not there to punish him for going. The angel was there to punish him for going *with the hopes of getting his way in the situation*. That is why the angel gives him instructions in verse 35. "Go with the men, but you are to say only what I tell you." This is a stern reminder to Balaam to get off his high horse and remember that God is in control. "Had [Balaam's] offer [to return home] been implemented, it would have frustrated God's plan to use him..." (Harrison, 303)

Summarize and Transition: From this conversation, we can be reminded that we should respond to God's instructions so that we do not have to respond to God's judgment and the consequences of bad decisions. God has a plan for us, and if we stay on the right path and follow Him, not ourselves, into the future, we will experience His blessings and His best.

CONCLUDE

I want us to back up a moment and consider the big picture before we end our lesson. The lesson is titled "God's Plan," and the main point of the lesson printed on page 55 of the Personal Study Guide is "God can use any means He chooses to accomplish His will." Remember, the people of God are camped on the plains of Moab. Balak, the Moabite king, knows that war is coming. Instead of fighting a conventional war, he seeks out a weapon of mass destruction to defeat the Israelites. (c.f. Preaching, 270) That weapon is the "super prophet" Balaam (Harrison, 183). In so doing, Balak has set himself up as an enemy of God. In Genesis 12, God made a promise to Abraham.

Read Genesis 12:2-3 (²I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Explain: God had a plan for His people, and Balak could not stop it even though he sought to do so. We see this in his request for Balaam's help.

Read Number 22:6 *"Please come and put a curse on these people for me because they are more powerful than I am. I may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I know that those you bless are blessed and those you curse are cursed."* (emphasis added)

Explain: Not only was he opposing the plans of God, but he was also putting his faith in the wrong person. He expected Balaam to have power over a promise from the sovereign King of the universe. Duguid writes, "By summoning Balaam to curse Israel, Balak had set himself against the Lord and the Lord's people, and therefore he was under a curse of his own." (Preaching, 270) In the end, Balaam pronounced blessings, not curses, upon the people (Numbers 23:7-24:9). According to Wenham, each blessing referenced the promises of God made to Abraham (c.f. TOTC, 190).

In reality, God is determined to bless believers. Far too often, our personal motivations and our sinful desires cause us to forget this. Instead of expecting God's blessings, we become anxious. This results in efforts to enact our plan and not God's plan. Jesus speaks of this type of anxiety in Matthew 6.

Read Matthew 6:26-29 ²⁶Consider the birds of the sky: They don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they? ²⁷Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don't labor or spin thread. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these.)

Explain: Balaam was anxious to accomplish his plan and thwart God's plan, that is why God became angry at him. While we might not actively seek to thwart God's plans, we sometimes oppose them because of sinful motivations or anxiety over our future. God desires to bless us. We should simply trust Him to do so as we faithfully follow Him.

We can note one final unsaid element in this passage about Balaam. "Israel was most likely unaware of this whole episode at the time when it happened. This is probably just as well, since the news that an international wizard was on his way to place them under a curse might well have sent them into yet another frenzy of worry and grumbling... Isn't that a lesson we need to internalize as well? There are many dangers in life of which we are not even aware because the Lord extracts their sting before they even reach us." (Preaching, 277) There is enough in life to concern us. We should stay focused on those things within our control and let God take care of the things we can't control.

We can end our lesson today with four challenges:

- Let your motivation in life be to please God and to expand His Kingdom.
- Don't beat up those who want the best for you and test any advice against His Word with the help of His Spirit.
- Stick to God's plan and don't concoct your own.
- Remember God's desire to bless you and His power to protect you.