



LESSON 2

BALAAM'S DONKEY

LESSON AT A GLANCE

WONDER TRUTH: God's Good Plans Cannot Be Stopped

SCRIPTURE: Numbers 22–23

GOD'S BIG STORY: An enemy king wants a prophet named Balaam to curse God's people, Israel. But God gets Balaam's attention through a talking donkey and reminds him through an angel not to curse Israel, for God's good plans cannot be stopped.

WORD OF WONDER: God is able to do far more than we could ever ask for or imagine. He does everything by his power that is working in us. —Ephesians 3:20

CURIOSITY

BELIEF

FAITH

- Welcome Question: What are some plans you have for your life? What do you want to do when you grow up?
- SMALL GROUP
- Declaring God's Wonder
- Prayer of Invitation
- Worship: Unstoppable God, Here With Me
- God's Big Story
- Connecting the Wonder Truth
- Responding in Worship: I Exalt Thee / I Speak Jesus
- Blessing Your Kids



INVITATION

We invite you to pause, listen, and shift your gaze toward the Father ...

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WORD OF WONDER: Ephesians 3:20

One of the best sermons I've ever encountered came in the form of a broken seashell.

I had gone to see the sunrise, but it was cloudy so there wasn't one to see. I was disappointed and decided instead to hunt for seashells. The shoreline was full of shells, but most of them were broken.

Soon a mother with her girls joined me and, oh my, the shrieks of delight! "So many shells, Mommy! They are so beautiful!" These girls didn't care the shells were broken. They saw the beauty in their brokenness.

I felt God say to me, "I love broken shells too." That brief encounter spoke volumes to me about the love of God. It changed me.

I wonder if that's how Balaam in our story felt. Here he was, casting curses for money, when God interrupts his life through a talking donkey and a sword-wielding angel. Could he ever go back to the way things were again?

Read Numbers 22:24–38. The final statement, "I can only speak the words God puts in my mouth," is pretty telling (Numbers 22:38). I tend to believe Balaam's words indicate more of a life change than a momentary utterance.

In what unexpected way has God spoken to you? What broken thing, familiar item, or everyday moment became life-altering and transformational? How has God used something ordinary—something unexpected—to further His plans in your life? God's good plans cannot be stopped.

—Christina Embree

Nonprofit Ministry Director and Minister of Generational Discipleship

Contributor to Wonder Ink

DID YOU KNOW?

FOUNDATION BUILDING BLOCKS

WHO?

Balak, the king of Moab; Balaam, well-known Aramean diviner and prophet; the people of Israel, who have entered Canaan and set up camp near Moab; Balaam's donkey; the angel of the Lord.

WHAT?

Israel has gained a reputation for conquering lands in Canaan, and the Moabite king, Balak, is scared of them. He employs the diviner Balaam to curse them, but the Lord intervenes, and Balaam is only able to bless them.

WHERE?

Israel is camped in the plain of Moab, east of the Jordan River, after their entrance into Canaan. The kingdom of Moab was located east of the Dead Sea in what is now Jordan.

WHEN?

This narrative takes place close to the end of the Israelites, 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, shortly before the death of Moses and before God's people cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land.

CONNECTING TO GOD'S BIG STORY

God protected His people from being cursed by Balaam while they wandered in the wilderness. God had promised land to His people, and in 2 Corinthians, Paul reminds us that God's promises are "all 'Yes' because of what Christ has done" (1:20). Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of God's good plans!

Large Group

Spark curiosity, encourage exploration, and get kids thinking about the wonder of God.

LESSON AT A GLANCE

WONDER TRUTH: God's Good Plans Cannot Be Stopped

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WORD OF WONDER: Ephesians 3:20

As kids arrive...

Around 20 minutes before service begins, display series theme loop.

Play high-energy music in the background.

LG Leader walks around the room on mic and greets kids by name as they enter the room. Be sure to move to their level and introduce yourself to any new friends. Welcome kids by name and greet them with enthusiasm. Be extra intentional about hearing and responding to what they say.

SLIDE: SERIES THEME LOOP

Welcome Question

Consider using a **30 or 2:00 Countdown** to let leaders and kids know it's almost time to begin!

At Your Start Time...

SLIDE: WELCOME QUESTION

At service start time, draw kids' attention to the Welcome Question board:

Welcome Question: **What are some plans you have for your life? What do you want to do when you grow up?**

Encourage kids to be creative as they share their answers with one another.

They might share about a person they know or a character from a book or movie. If kids prefer, they can draw a picture answering the question. Invite small group leaders to begin.

"We all have plans—plans for today and plans for the future—and that's great! Sometimes our plans don't work out the way we think they will. But God always has a plan, and His plans are always good! Kind of like with our coded messages, we might not always understand right away what God's plan is, but we can trust that He will communicate it with us in a way we can understand.

Today, we are going to hear about a prophet named Balaam (BAY-luhm) and his donkey and how God did something unexpected to help Balaam follow God's good plans.

SLIDE: WONDER TRUTH

As today's Wonder Truth says, **GOD'S GOOD PLANS CANNOT BE STOPPED."**



Small Group

Introduce small group time. While kids are in small group, consider sitting in the groups for a few minutes each. Engage and interact as is appropriate.

Countdown

After about 15 minutes of small group, give a 5 minute warning and begin the countdown.

VIDEO: COUNTDOWN

"Hey everyone! Welcome to our Large Group Worship time! My name is _____ and I'm excited to take this time to worship God, review what we just read, and talk about ways we can respond to what we are learning about God! I have a little game for us first today!"

Declaring God's Wonder

SLIDE: WONDER TRUTH

Read each line boldly and invite kids to repeat after you.

Thank You, God, that You are good! (Kids repeat.)

You made me on purpose, for a purpose. (Kids repeat.)

And I am Your kid! (Kids repeat.)

You know me, love me, and lead me. (Kids repeat.)

You have good plans for me. (Kids repeat.)

Your good plans cannot be stopped! (Kids repeat.)

My life can tell of Your wonder! (Kids repeat.)



Prayer of Invitation

Before entering into God's big story, lead kids in a prayer of invitation. Use your own words. Here is an example: **God, thank You so much for being here with us through Your Holy Spirit. We are excited to be with You and to learn from You. Help us learn more about Your love and Your good plans for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.**

Worship

****NEW SONGS!!** Consider sharing some about the songs you are going to sing. What they mean, why we sing them, why they are meaningful and important to you!

"We're going to stand and sing together! One way that we show love to God is to worship through song! So stand up, sing loud, and join in the motions with us. God loves to hear us sing praises to Him! Let's stand together and sing!"

WORSHIP VIDEOS: Unstoppable God, Here With Me

God's Big Story

SLIDE: TITLE

Leader Tip: The name "Balaam" is pronounced BAY-luhm, and the name "Balak" is pronounced BAY-lak.



Explain that Numbers records the history of God's people, the Israelites, during their 40 years of wandering in the desert after escaping from Egypt but before entering the land God promised them.

"Let's start by watching part of God's big story directly from the Bible. Afterward, we will watch and experience more of the story!"

VIDEO: GODS BIG STORY

LESSON 2 BALAAM'S DONKEY EXPERIENCE IT! SCRIPT

RESOURCES: Charades Answer Sheet

Ahead of time, print the Charades Answer Sheet. You will need four volunteers for this experience. Consider choosing your volunteers prior to the start of the Experience It! Script in order to keep the story moving along.

Gather kids together. **"Today we are going to hear a part of God's big story from the Bible that shows just how amazing our God is. Make sure to pay attention and be ready for a little challenge along the way to see how well you've been following along with this story.**

When God's people, the Israelites, had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years, God freed them and brought them to the edge of the land of Canaan. God promised their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that He would give Canaan to the Israelites in the future. But the Israelites didn't trust God and were too afraid to enter the land. God was angry, but He was also patient with His people. He took them on a 40-year journey through the wilderness, showing them how much He loved them by caring for their needs and protecting them from their enemies. On that long trip, God showed them over and over they could trust Him to keep His promises.

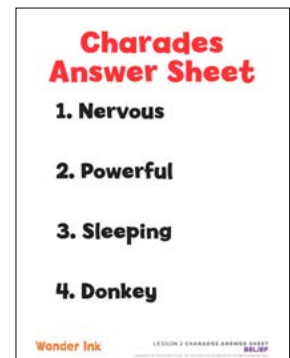
The people of Israel had been journeying a long time and decided to camp in the land of Moab. That made Moab's king, Balak, very nervous. He had heard stories about the people of Israel and was afraid they would try to take his land. He had also heard stories of their powerful God who protected them.

Balak came up with a plan. He sent messengers to the prophet Balaam and asked him to put a curse on the Israelites. King Balak hoped this curse would keep the Israelites from defeating his armies. Balaam was in another city near the great river, the Euphrates. When the messengers came to him, Balaam told them to spend the night while he asked God what he should do. At first, God told Balaam not to go with them. But when they came back and asked Balaam again, God allowed him to go with them, but God warned Balaam to only do what God told him to do and say. Riding his donkey, Balaam set off to see the king. However, God was angry as Balaam left. We don't know why, but we do know God cared about Balaam and about his people, and He decided Balaam needed a reminder not to curse them. So, God sent an angel to block Balaam's path.

Before we go any further, let's see just how well you've been following along with God's big story. I'm going to need four super volunteers to come help me review this story from the Bible.

Our volunteers have a very important job of helping all of us review this story. There are a lot of different names and details, so we're going to do our best to recall those details. There is one little catch, though. Our volunteers can't speak when they help us review. I'm going to show them a word, and they will act out that word using different motions and gestures to try to get you to guess that word. They can't talk at all! I know this task sounds difficult, but if we were all paying attention, we should do fine. Every word describes something from our story.

Show the first volunteer the word Nervous from the Charades Answer Sheet.



Leader Tip: For Younger Kids. Younger kids and beginning readers can participate in this activity. Simply whisper the word instead of using the Charades Answer Sheet.

Our first volunteer is going to act out a word from our story. When you think you know the word, shout it out!

Leader Tip: Ahead of time, consider hints you can give the volunteers if they have trouble acting out these words. For example, you could discreetly show the volunteers the action of biting your nails for *Nervous* or flexing your muscles for *Powerful*.

After kids guess *nervous* or *scared*, explain how this word ties into the story. **Great job! Yes, our word is *Nervous*. King Balak was very nervous when he saw all the Israelites camping nearby.** Allow the first volunteer to sit back down with the group.

Show the second volunteer the word *Powerful*. **Let's see if you can guess this next word from our story.** Give time for kids to guess. **That's right! Now who from our story was powerful?** Pause for kids to answer. **God is! King Balak was nervous when he saw so many Israelites because he knew that the Israelites' God is a powerful God.**

Continue with the third and fourth words in the charades game: *sleeping* and *donkey*. After the third word, remind kids that Balaam told the messengers from King Balak to spend the night while he waited for God to tell him what to do. After the fourth word, say the following:

Great job guessing all the words! Our last word is *donkey* because Balaam rode a donkey on his way to see King Balak. Now, we're about to hear a very interesting part of this story from the Bible. Balaam's donkey is going to try to tell Balaam there is an angel blocking their path, but you just saw how difficult it sometimes is to communicate without words.

Allow the third and fourth volunteers to return to their seats.

Balaam couldn't see the angel, but his donkey could! Balaam's donkey kept swerving and refusing to move, and Balaam got so upset that three times he hit his donkey and yelled at it. Suddenly, the donkey opened its mouth and started talking!

"What have I done to you? Why did you hit me these three times?" the donkey asked. "I'm the one you have always ridden. ... Have I ever made you look foolish before?" (Numbers 22:28, 30).

You might think Balaam was too shocked to respond, but he talked right back to the donkey! "I wish I had a sword in my hand," Balaam told the animal (Numbers 22:29). **Then God let Balaam see the angel. The angel reminded Balaam not to curse the Israelites but only to speak the words God would give him. When Balaam got to King Balak, he told the king, four different times, "I cannot curse these people. I can only bless them because that is what God is telling me to do."**

Back in the Israelite camp, they didn't know about all God was doing to stay true to His promise to protect them. He even used a talking donkey to ensure that Balaam could only bless the Israelites, not curse them.

Even though we can't see God and we sometimes don't understand His plans, He is always faithful to His promises. Sometimes, God may use unusual ways to guide us, and He may do things we

don't fully understand, but His faithfulness and care for us go beyond our wildest imagination. God's good plans cannot be stopped.

Connecting the Wonder Truth

SLIDE: WONDER TRUTH

Display the Donkey Wonder Truth Slide. Pose the following question to kids to help them connect the Wonder Truth to God's big story:

Our Wonder Truth today is GOD'S GOOD PLANS CANNOT BE STOPPED. Where did you see our Wonder Truth in the story? Allow kids to answer freely.



After God held back the Red Sea so His people, the Israelites, could escape Egypt, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. During this time, God protected them from being cursed by Balaam. God had promised land to His people, and His good plans cannot be stopped. In 2 Corinthians, Paul reminds us that God's promises are "all 'Yes' because of what Christ has done" (1:20). Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of God's good plans!"

Responding in Worship

SLIDE: RESPONDING IN WORSHIP

Talk about ways we can respond to what we are learning with next steps such as tithing, prayer, asking questions, and worship. Encourage kids to ask their SG leaders any questions they were wondering during the lesson. *****Introduce this next song and invite kids to respond and participate in worship. See the "Worship Posture Tutorial" on the RBKids Resource Page.**



WORSHIP VIDEO: I Exalt Thee / I Speak Jesus

Blessing Your Kids

Speak a blessing over your kids. Use your own words. Here is an example:

Blessing: May the Lord go before you and behind you and surround you on every side. May you know you are loved and that God's good plans for you can never be stopped. And may God fill you with His peace this week.