



General Church Office of Education

Family Lesson: Numbers 22-24

The Story of Balaam

Family Talk

Level 3

Level 1

Level 4

Level 2

Level 5

Family Lesson 4 - A

The Story of Balaam
Numbers 22:1-20

Family Talk:
THE STORY OF BALAAM

Rev. Donald Rose

Sometimes we see clearly what is truly valuable in life. There are times when we see this as one sees on a bright day in the sunshine. Because this is not always so clear to us, it is useful for us to try to hold on to the clear sight, and to try to remember it, even when it seems as if there are clouds in our sky and our values are not clear.

The clear sight of the right values was expressed by Balaam when he was asked to come to do something that was harmful. Even though there were times in the story when he did not see clearly, he did have the right answer when asked if he would do something that was wrong for the sake of riches.

He had been asked by King Balak to come and curse some people, and the Lord had told him they were not to be cursed, but blessed. (Cursing is to speak evil against people with the hope that bad things will happen to them. Blessing is to speak what is good with the hope that what is good and happy may come to them.)

The answer he had given was “no.” Although they had brought money and riches, he had sent them back to the king with the answer that this was something the Lord would not allow. But later, the king sent even more servants with even greater promises of honor and riches. That is when Balaam spoke these clear words:

“Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the Word of the Lord my God...” (*Numbers 22:18*).

And later in the story when the king spoke angrily to him and said, “The Lord has kept you back from honor,” (*Numbers 24:11*) Balaam responded:

“Did I not speak to your messengers whom you sent to me, saying ‘though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the Word of the Lord?...?’” (*Numbers 22:13*)

Would you hurt someone for a little bit of money? When you are seeing clearly, of course you would not. And would you do it for some more money? The right answer is still no. And what if you were offered all the money in the world to do what you knew was wrong and hurtful? Well, listen carefully to something the Lord said about this to His disciples. He put it in the form of a question:

"What is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (*Matthew 16:26*)

Listen to another way that question is put by the Lord:

"What advantage is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?" (*Luke 9:25*)

The Lord allowed the disciples to answer that question within their own minds. And He allows us to think it over within our minds. When we are thinking rightly, the answer is perfectly clear, isn't it? It would not make any sense to lose yourself for the sake of gain, even if it were everything in the world.

Such clear truth not only helps us in the big decisions of life, but it also helps in the little ones. Just think of the little decisions we make in the way we talk. When we speak it can be to try to encourage others and help them, or it can be to discourage them and harm them.

The way people talk can make a lot of difference to whether their life is one that makes others happy, or whether their life brings discouragement and pain to others.

There are plenty of times when we just don't think of whether what we say is helpful or hurtful. In the cloudy moments of life, we just do and say what happens to come to us without even thinking of it. It is useful, then, to put the question: In your life and in the days of your life, do you want to be an influence for good on others that encourages them and makes them happy?

You would answer, "Yes." And what if you might get the reward of a little personal satisfaction or fun by speaking ill of others or making life unpleasant for them. Is it worth it? The right answer (one we may not always see) is that it is **not** worth it.

Let us remember this as we remember a true story about a man named Balaam who was called to curse. It is a story with ups and downs, but it has a good ending. It ends not in a curse, but in a blessing. And it is the story in which a man says no to what is wrong:

"Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the Word of the Lord my God" (*Numbers 22:18*).

The Story of Balaam
Numbers 22:24
LEVEL 1 – THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

Following is a project that illustrates the part of the story of Balaam where Balaam's spiritual eyes were opened, and he saw the Angel of the Lord.

1. Color the pictures that are on the next two pages.
2. Parents: show your child how to look at the first picture, of Balaam before his spiritual eyes were opened (page 1).
3. Then hold the two pages together, in front of a window or lamp. Notice what happens when the second picture, showing the angel (page 2), is held up behind the picture of Balaam. Suddenly an angel appears!
4. Discuss how Balaam could then see clearly to follow the Lord, because his spiritual eyes were opened.



"THE LORD OPENED BALAAM'S EYES AND HE SAW THE ANGEL OF THE LORD" (Numbers 23:31)



The Story of Balaam
Numbers 22-24
LEVEL 2 – A TABLEAU FOR CHILDREN

THE STORY OF BALAAM
(A "tableau" for one or more Primary children)

The idea of this project is to have your child act out the part of Balaam in this story, or if more than one child, the parts for Balak's men, God's voice, the donkey and the angel.

You may devise simple scenery. For example, blankets over backs of two rows of chairs to make the narrow passage where Balaam's donkey sees the angel.

You, the parent(s) will be the narrator(s), and as you will see, all the readings are actually from the Word, except for the Introduction. It would be a good idea to read Numbers, chapters 22-24, for yourselves so you can lead the child(ren) easily through their actions during the reading.

Introduction

Narrator:

The Children of Israel have wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Now they are camped by the Jordan River, across from the city of Jericho. The people of Jericho are called Moabites. They are afraid of the Children of Israel because there are so many and they are so strong that they might try to conquer the Moabites. So Balak, their king, sends messengers to Balaam, who knows magic and lives nearby.

Messengers to Balaam:

"...please come at once, curse this people for me, for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed."
(Numbers 22:6)

Balaam:

"Go back to your land, for the Lord has refused me permission to go with you."

Messengers go back to Balak and say:

"Balaam refuses to come with."
(Numbers 22:14)

Balak sends back princes:

"...I will honor you greatly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Therefore, please come, curse this people for me."
(Numbers 22:17)

Balaam:

“Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the Word of the Lord my God....Stay here tonight, that I may know what more the Lord will say to me.” (Numbers 22:18)

All lie down and sleep

God's voice to Balaam:

“If the men come to call you, rise and go with them; but only the Word which I speak to you, that you shall do.” (Numbers 22:20)

(In the morning, Balaam goes.) (Scene switches to a narrow path.)

Narrator reads while action continues:

Narrator:

“Then God's anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the Lord took His stand in the way....And he (Balaam) was riding on his donkey....”

Now the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way with His sword drawn in His hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the way and went into the field. So Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back onto the road.

Then the Angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on this side and a wall on that side.

And when the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, she pushed herself against the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall, so he struck her again.

Then the Angel of the Lord went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn either to the right hand or the left.

And when the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam, so Balaam's anger was aroused and he struck the donkey with his staff.” (Numbers 22:22-28)

Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam:

(Tableau again)

Donkey to Balaam:

“What have I done to you that you have struck me these three times?” (Numbers 22:28)

Balaam:

“Because you have abused me. I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!” *(Numbers 22:29)*

Donkey:

“Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden, ever since I became yours, even to this day? Was I ever disposed to do this to you?” *(Numbers 22:30)*

Balaam: “No.”

(Numbers 22:30)

Narrator:

“Then the Lord opened Balaam’s eyes, and he saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand, and he bowed his head and fell flat on his face.” *(Numbers 22:31)*

(Tableau Again)

Angel to Balaam:

“Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because your way is perverse before me.

Balaam:

“The donkey saw me and turned aside from me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, surely I would also have killed you by now, and let her live.” *(Numbers 22: 32,33)*

Balaam:

“I have sinned, for I did not know you stood in the way against me.” *(Numbers 22:34)*

Angel:

“Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak.” *(Numbers 22:35)*

Narrator:

So Balaam went to see Balak, king of the Moabites. While he was there, the Lord opened Balaam’s mouth to speak many wise sayings, and Balaam also was inspired to speak a beautiful prophecy of the Lord's coming on earth:

“I see Him but not now;
I behold Him, but not near;
A Star shall come out of Jacob,
A Scepter shall rise out of Israel.” *(Numbers 24:17)*

THE END

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Numbers 22-24
LEVEL 3 – A MEMORY GAME

MATERIALS NEEDED

Scissors

THE STORY OF BALAAM

Can you think of some things that are symbols? For instance, our flag stands for our country.

One of the Lord's gifts to the New Church is a new understanding of the way the things in this world stand for spiritual things. (We say they *correspond*). Water stands for truth—it cleans our bodies just as the Lord's truth cleans our minds. And there are many, many more. You can begin to get a glimpse of just a few of them.

The wisemen who brought gold, frankincense and myrrh knew their gifts had a good meaning—they stood for the gifts we should all give the Lord—we should love the Lord, and we should love other people, and we should obey the Lord's commandments.

Balaam understood correspondences, and he used his knowledge of how natural and spiritual things work together to be “magician.” [Do you remember Pharaoh's “magicians” in Egypt who were able to turn their rods into snakes?] But the Lord turned Balaam's actions and words into good. So Balaam prophesied that the wisemen would be led by a star to Bethlehem.

A MEMORY GAME

This “memory” game will help you learn a few of these things in the world that stand for something that the Lord's Word teaches us about.

First print out the word cards on page 12 of this lesson. Here is a link to the four pages of [color game cards](#). Print out pages 2-5. Cut them out along the lines.

The object of the game is to match each card with one that “corresponds”.

First study the list at the bottom of the next page. For each of the chosen words there are four things that go with it. For example, fire, oil, gold and red all mean LOVE.

Then read the rules below to find out how to play the game:

1. First take out all the cards that have *words only*. Arrange them in a row with the words showing.
2. Place all the other cards face down, and play a simple game of memory.
3. First player turns over two cards. If they match (meaning: if they have the same correspondence), the player keeps the pair, and may have another turn. If they do not match, cards are returned to original spot.
4. Next player turns over two cards, continuing as before. Everyone should watch so they will remember where cards are placed. Play until all cards are paired. But the real object is non-competitive, to learn correspondences.
5. Players may wish to add other rules, such as extra points for matching Lord cards.
6. When all cards are paired, find the card with **writing only** on it that each pair corresponds to. (Each card with words only has two pairs—4 picture cards—that go with it.) Place the cards under the correct heading.

Other ways to use the cards:

1. Place all the cards with *writing only* in a row. These are your headings.

Place the rest of the cards picture side up.

See how quickly you can arrange each card under the correct “heading.”
(You could use a timer and see how fast you can get.)
2. Use the cards to play a card game, like “Go Fish.”

ANSWERS: *Study this list before you begin using the cards*

LORD - Sun King David father

LOVE - fire oil gold red

HEAVEN - Canaan treasure seed pearl

CHURCH - Jerusalem mother bride crown

TRUTH - light water wine stone

THE LETTER OF THE WORD - John the Baptist Elijah clouds well

TEMPTATION - forty wilderness storm bitter herbs

SELFISHNESS - dragon slime giant brambles

LORD

LOVE

HEAVEN

CHURCH

SELFISHNESS

TRUTH

TEMPTATION

THE WORD

The Story of Balaam
Numbers 22-24
LEVEL 4 – READING THE STORY OF BALAAM

The story of Balaam is a long and interesting one.
In your lesson you will read the whole story in the Word.

Start at the beginning of the 22nd chapter of the book of Numbers.
Answer these questions as you go along.

- 22:1 1. Where were the Children of Israel camped?

- 22:3,42. 2. Who was the king of the Moabites and why was he afraid of the
Israelites?

- 22:7-21 3. How many times did they send for Balaam?

- 22:20 4. The Lord said that if he went with the Moabites, he must only

- 22:23-27 5. Balaam’s donkey saw the Angel of the Lord three times. In
each case, where was the angel and what did the donkey do?
1st _____
2nd _____
3rd _____

22:28 6. Balaam saw the angel only after his donkey had done something else remarkable. What was it?

22:35 7. The angel came to warn Balaam again that _____

”

22:41 8. Balak gave Balaam many gifts and took him up to the high places of _____ to observe the people.

23:1 9. What did Balaam tell Balak to build, and what to prepare?

23:7-10 10. After the sacrifice, Balaam consulted the Lord. Did he then curse Israel as Balak wanted?

23:13 11. So Balak took Balaam to another place where they could see only

23:14 12. What did they do at the top of Pisgah?

23:18-24 13. What did the Lord tell Balaam to say this time? (One sentence is enough.)

23:29 14. A third time, at Peor, Balaam had Balak prepare

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LEVEL 5 – BALAAM

HOW FAR CAN I GO? • THE COLLISION COURSE • ANGER



The story of Balaam is probably one with which you are familiar. You are probably also familiar with the idea that within the stories of the Word are living truths. In this project we will consider three points in the story that may help you see clearly how it actually applies to your own life. They are:

1. The question - How far can I go?
2. The collision course
3. Anger and rage

Let us look at these one by one, and see if at least one of these rings a bell for you relative to your life.

1. How far can I go?

It is not at all unusual for people to want to "have it both ways" in life. They would like to be included among honest, fair and well-meaning people, but they want to see **how far** they can go in a wrong direction.

Among the possible examples we could take are:

- a. Someone who would "never" steal wants to see how far one can go in minor dishonesties. Suppose someone walking in front of you dropped a dollar, what would you do? \$20?, \$100?
- b. Someone who would never be immoral wants to go out on a date with someone and see how far they can go and still not be immoral.
- c. Someone who would never be a drunk or an addict wants to play around with drugs or alcohol and just see how far one can go.
- d. Someone who would never murder another person's reputation or slander another person starts on the path of talking behind another person's back, but only so far.

Point (d) is a particularly good example, because Balaam was being called to injure some people by speaking against them, and what happened in the story?

Well, first of all, he said he would not come and speak against them. But the next time he was asked (with more enticements), he said he would come along, but he would not go against the Lord's command.

The very fact that he set off in the wrong direction was displeasing to the Lord, but the Lord did not stop him. In fact, the Lord does not stop us when we are heading in the direction of going too far. The Lord did provide roadblocks that would remind Balaam, and finally let him know by the words of the angel, “Your way is perverse before Me.” (22:32)

For a while, Balaam had been blind to the sword of truth. The Writings tell us that the sword in the story represents the truth that resists the false thought we are in. (Arcana Coelestia). We can be really thankful when brought to our senses, even when it is a painful realization, such as realizing we are heading in the direction of addictions, natural or spiritual.

2. The Collision Course

The Writings say something very surprising about seeing the Lord’s Providence. They tell us that if we saw the Divine Providence clearly as to our future, we could feel that God is our enemy. (*Divine Providence* 183)

This certainly does seem improbable. We owe everything we have and everything we will have to God. He is our only hope for happiness. Could we regard Him as an enemy?

Think of a little baby with good parents who love the baby very much and who are planning generously for the baby’s future, already putting money away for a college education. Would that baby regard those loving parents as an enemy?

Well, imagine the baby growing up. Will loving parents ever say “no?” What if a young person very much wants to go somewhere that the parents know is dangerous? “No, you can’t go on a car ride with that person driving.” “No, you are not allowed to go to that movie.” If the parents did not **care**, there might be less conflict. But when you have parents who care, then it is very probable that there will come times when you want something and your parents will prevent it. There are times when the wishes of a young person and the wishes of the parents are on a collision course—like the course of Balaam as he went on his way and the angel stood right in the middle of the path.

In that story, the angel of the Lord says, “I have come to stand against you.” or “I went out to withstand thee.” In the original language, this is a very strong word. It says God is acting here like an obstacle, an adversary, an enemy.

As surely as all of us have limited wisdom and selfish natures, there will be times when God *seems* to us as an “enemy.” (*Divine Providence* 183) And the passage says that this can make us “grow angry.” (*Divine Providence* 183)

3. Anger and Rage

Anger comes into this story three times.

- a. Balaam really gets angry at his donkey.
- b. The Lord **seems** to be angry when Balaam sets off on the journey.
- c. Then King Balak is very angry when instead of cursing, Balaam finally blesses the people.

One definition of anger is the feeling that results from whatever opposes selfish love and its ambitions. (*Arcana Coelestia* 357) Selfish love is like a serpent that remains hidden much of the time, but it continually wants to raise its head, the Writings say, and the Divine providence is continually “putting it down.” (*Divine Providence* 211) Just as anger arises in stories of the Word, anger arises in the story of our lives. As the book *Divine Providence* says, we get angry against people, against ourselves, and against what we call our luck. (*DP* 211)

But throughout this story, the Lord is, in quiet ways, gradually moving us away from selfishness. In fact, the comparison given is of someone walking along a path with someone he **thinks** is a friend, but who actually intends to kill him. That is us, walking along with selfishness that is fed by the hells. A good friend then comes along and takes us aside on a secret path, and tells us the enemy is dangerous to us. (*Divine Providence* 211) This may be seen reflected in the story of Balaam who was walking a dangerous path, but who in the end blessed and did not curse.

Application

Choose one of the three headings:

1. How Far Can I Go?
2. Collision Course
3. Anger and Rage

On the next page write out how you can see it reflected in the story of Balaam.

OR

Draw a picture or cartoon of that stage in your life and write a good resolution to the problem.

