

The Book of Numbers, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 14: Balak Summons Balaam

Numbers 22:1–41

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrinal stake in Numbers 22 is the sovereign faithfulness of God to protect and bless His people. Balak believes a curse can be purchased; God shows that the blessing He has pronounced cannot be undone by any diviner, fee, or scheme. Teach the class that God's purposes for His people stand firm over every human plot, and that even a man whose heart is divided and drawn by reward can be restrained and overruled so that God's will is done. This is not magic versus magic; it is the living God refusing to be hired against His own.

Handle Balaam with care. He is not a model of faith, and the teacher should know where the story is going: the New Testament repeatedly condemns the way of Balaam for greed and for leading God's people into sin (2 Peter 2:15–16; Jude 11; Revelation 2:14). In this chapter Balaam speaks piously about not going beyond the word of the LORD, yet his feet and his heart lean toward Balak's silver. Let the class feel the tension of a man who says the right things while his heart is bent on gain, and use it as a mirror, not as a hero. The donkey episode is not comic relief but a sharp lesson on spiritual blindness: a heart fixed on reward can leave a famous seer unable to see what a beast plainly perceives.

Aim the lesson at the formation of the student's loyalty. Most of us are more like Balaam than we care to admit, dressing our wants in spiritual language and asking God again when His answer is already clear. Lead the class to rest in God's protection (if God is for us, who can be against us) and to root out divided loyalty, the love of gain or recognition that quietly steers our choices. The goal is a heart that belongs wholly to the Lord, that takes His clear word as sufficient, and that no reward can buy.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read Numbers 22:1–6. Balak is gripped with dread and tries to defeat Israel with a hired curse rather than a sword. What does his fear reveal about how the nations perceived God's presence with His people, and why is a curse powerless against those God has chosen to bless?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Israel is encamped on the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan, on the edge of the promise (22:1). Balak son of Zippor has seen what Israel did to the Amorites, and Moab is filled with dread, sick with fear of a people too numerous to count (22:2–4). The fear is not of Israel's weapons but of Israel's God, whose hand has been on display.

Balak's strategy is telling. Unable to face Israel with the sword, he reaches for a curse, sending for Balaam with the promise that whomever Balaam blesses is blessed and whomever he curses is cursed (22:5-6). He believes in the power of the spoken curse and in Balaam's reputation as a man who can wield it.

From the outset the contest is decided, though Balak cannot see it. You cannot hire a curse against a people God has chosen to bless. The entire narrative will be God making that impossibility plain, turning every attempted curse into a blessing.

The fear of the nations is a recurring theme in Scripture: when God is manifestly with His people, the world senses it and is unsettled. Israel's strength here is not numbers or arms but the covenant presence of the LORD, and that is precisely what Balak is, rightly, afraid of.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The nations dreaded Israel because of God's presence, not because of military might
- A curse is powerless against those God has chosen to bless
- Human schemes against God's people are doomed from the start
- God's covenant presence is the true strength of His people
- Balak's resort to a hired curse shows a fear that refuses to reckon honestly with God

Discussion Prompts

- What did Balak's dread reveal about how the nations perceived Israel's God?
- Why is a hired curse useless against a people God has blessed?
- Where do we see the world unsettled today by the evident presence of God with His people?

Question 2

Student Question:

Balak responded to a threat by working an angle instead of facing the truth about God. When you feel threatened or cornered, do you tend to scheme and manage the problem, or to turn honestly to God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Balak meets a threat by scheming. Rather than reckon honestly with the God who is so plainly with Israel, he tries to work an angle, hiring a spiritual specialist to manage the danger. It is the move of a man who wants the problem to go away without facing the truth.

We do the same. When we feel cornered, our instinct is often to manipulate circumstances, manage appearances, or find a workaround, anything but bring the matter honestly before God and submit to His will.

Balak's approach assumes that the right technique or the right hired help can bend reality to his wishes. It is a refusal to face the One who is actually in control, and it leads him deeper into futility.

The contrast the lesson invites is between scheming and surrender. The believer learns to bring threats and fears directly to God, to ask honestly what He requires, and to trust Him with the outcome rather than trying to control it from the shadows.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The temptation to manage threats by scheming rather than facing God honestly
- Manipulation is a refusal to reckon with God's actual control
- Bringing our fears directly and honestly to God
- Trusting God with outcomes rather than controlling them by our own devices

Discussion Prompts

- When you feel threatened, do you scheme or do you turn honestly to God?
- What does Balak's reaction teach us about avoiding the truth about God?
- What would it look like to bring a current fear directly to God instead of managing it alone?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read Numbers 22:7–14. God tells Balaam plainly not to go and not to curse the people, for they are blessed. What does God's clear first answer teach us about the sufficiency of His revealed will, and about the danger of asking again when He has already spoken?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Balaam houses the messengers, and that night God speaks plainly: do not go with them, you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed (22:12). The answer could not be clearer. God's revealed will leaves no room for doubt.

Balaam reports to the princes that the LORD has refused to let him go (22:13), and they return to Balak. On the surface this looks like obedience, but the narrative will soon reveal a heart that has not really let go of the prospect.

The crucial lesson here is the sufficiency of God's clear word. When God has spoken, the matter is settled; to keep asking is not faith but a search for a different answer. Balaam knows what God said, yet the door of his heart stays open to a second inquiry.

This warns us against treating God's plain will as negotiable. The danger is not usually outright rebellion but the slow erosion that begins when we hope a clear command might somehow change if we ask again or wait for better terms.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The sufficiency and clarity of God's revealed will
- When God has spoken plainly, the matter is settled
- The danger of asking again in hope of a different answer
- Outward compliance can mask a heart that has not truly submitted

Discussion Prompts

- How clear was God's first answer to Balaam?
- Why is asking God again, after a clear no, a spiritual danger?
- How do we treat God's plain word as if it were negotiable?

Question 4

Student Question:

Think of a time you knew clearly what God's word required but kept looking for a different answer. What was your heart really seeking in that moment?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

We have all stood where Balaam stood: knowing what God's word requires, yet hoping for a different answer. The honest question is what our hearts are really seeking when we keep looking for a loophole.

Often we are not seeking guidance at all; we are seeking permission. We know the answer and we want God, or a teacher, or a circumstance, to release us from it so we can do what we already want to do.

This is the subtle work of a divided heart. We keep the conversation open not because the will of God is unclear but because we are unwilling to accept it. The asking becomes a way of stalling our obedience.

Honesty before God begins by naming what we actually want. When we admit that we are looking for permission rather than direction, we can repent of the divided desire and submit to the word we already have.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Seeking permission from God rather than genuine direction
- A divided heart keeps the question open to avoid obedience
- Naming our true desires as the first step toward honesty with God
- Repenting of the wish to be released from a clear command

Discussion Prompts

- When have you kept asking God after His answer was already clear?
- What were you really seeking in that moment, direction or permission?
- How does naming your true desire help you submit to God's word?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read Numbers 22:15–21. Balak sends more honorable men and greater rewards, and Balaam, though he speaks piously about not going beyond the word of the LORD, asks God again. How does the lure of greater reward expose the true bent of a divided heart even behind religious-sounding words?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Balak escalates, sending more honorable princes and promising great honor and whatever Balaam asks (22:15–17). Balaam answers with lofty words: even a house full of silver and gold could not make him go beyond the word of the LORD his God (22:18). The speech sounds devout.

But then he says, stay here tonight, that I may learn what more the LORD will say to me (22:19). He already knows what God said. To ask again, with greater rewards now on the table, exposes a heart that is reaching for the silver while the mouth recites piety.

God permits him to go but on a tight leash, only to speak what God commands (22:20). The permission is not approval; it is God turning a divided man's stubbornness to serve His own ends, as the rest of the story makes clear.

The lesson is sobering: greater reward has a way of exposing the true bent of the heart. Balaam's religious language cannot hide that his interest is being drawn by the prize. The New Testament will name this plainly as the way of Balaam, the love of the wages of unrighteousness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The lure of greater reward exposes the true bent of the heart
- Pious words cannot disguise a heart leaning toward gain
- God's permission is not always His approval (2 Peter 2:15)
- The way of Balaam is later condemned as love of unrighteous wages

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Balaam ask again when more honor is promised?
- How can religious language hide a heart bent on reward?
- What does it mean that God let him go but only to speak God's words?

Question 6

Student Question:

Where is the love of gain or recognition quietly shaping your decisions, even decisions you dress up in spiritual language?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns Balaam's divided heart into a mirror. The love of gain and the hunger for recognition are powerful, quiet forces that shape choices we would never admit are about money or applause.

Like Balaam, we are skilled at dressing such decisions in spiritual language. We frame a self-serving choice as wisdom, stewardship, or calling, when the real driver is what we stand to gain.

Scripture treats the love of money as a root of all kinds of evil and warns that we cannot serve both God and wealth. The danger is rarely a dramatic sellout; it is the slow tilt of the heart toward the reward.

The remedy is honest self-examination and contentment. When we name where gain or recognition is steering us, we can repent and ask God to give us a single, undivided heart that values His approval above every prize.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The quiet power of the love of gain and recognition (1 Timothy 6:9–10)
- Dressing self-serving choices in spiritual language
- We cannot serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24)
- Contentment and honest self-examination as the remedy for a divided heart

Discussion Prompts

- Where is the love of gain or recognition quietly shaping your decisions?
- How do you tend to dress self-interest in spiritual language?
- What would an undivided heart, content in God, change about your choices?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read Numbers 22:22–35, the donkey and the angel. The animal sees the angel with the drawn sword that the famous seer cannot see. What does this reversal teach us about spiritual blindness, and how a heart bent on gain can leave us unable to see what God is plainly doing?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

On the road God's anger is kindled, and the angel of the LORD stands in the way with a drawn sword (22:22–23). The donkey sees the angel and turns aside, is driven into a wall, then lies down, and three times Balaam beats her in his rage (22:23–27).

Then the LORD opens the donkey's mouth, and she protests her master's blows (22:28–30). Finally God opens Balaam's eyes, and he sees the angel and falls on his face (22:31). The reversal is stunning: the dumb animal perceives the holy messenger that the celebrated seer is blind to.

The angel rebukes Balaam: your way is perverse before me, and the donkey saved your life by turning aside (22:32–33). The man who claims to see what God reveals could not see the sword in his own path, while the beast beneath him saw clearly.

This is a pointed lesson on spiritual blindness. A heart bent on gain dulls our perception of what God is plainly doing. Balaam was so set on his errand that he was blind to the danger and deaf to God's restraint until God forced both his ears and his eyes open.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A heart bent on gain produces spiritual blindness
- The reversal of the blind seer and the seeing donkey exposes Balaam's condition
- God can use the lowliest means to confront a stubborn heart (2 Peter 2:16)
- God's restraint of Balaam shows His determination to protect His people
- Anger and self-will can blind us to plain warnings

Discussion Prompts

- What is striking about the donkey seeing what the seer could not?
- How does a heart fixed on reward blind us to God's warnings?
- Why did God use a donkey to confront a famous prophet?

Question 8

Student Question:

When have you been so set on what you wanted that you missed warnings God was placing right in front of you, and what finally opened your eyes?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Balaam's blindness is uncomfortably familiar. We too can be so locked onto what we want that we miss the warnings God places directly in our path, mistaking His obstacles for mere nuisances to be pushed through.

The donkey turned aside three times, and each time Balaam responded with violence rather than curiosity. How often do we react to the very things God uses to slow us, the closed door, the uneasy conscience, the friend's concern, with irritation instead of attention?

What finally opened Balaam's eyes was God's direct intervention. Sometimes only a clear act of God breaks through our determination, and even then we are slow to fall on our faces and admit our way has been perverse.

The invitation is to soften, to treat obstacles and warnings as possible mercies rather than obstacles to overcome, and to ask God to open our eyes before we have to be stopped by a drawn sword.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Being so set on our wants that we miss God's warnings
- Reacting to God's obstacles with irritation rather than attention
- Treating closed doors and uneasy consciences as possible mercies
- Asking God to open our eyes before we are forced to a halt

Discussion Prompts

- When have you pushed past warnings God was placing in your path?
- How do you typically react to obstacles, with irritation or with attention?
- What finally opened your eyes, and what did you learn from it?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read Numbers 22:38 with 23:8 and Proverbs 21:30. Balaam admits he can speak only the word God puts in his mouth, and later asks how he can curse whom God has not cursed. How does God's sovereign protection of His people stand firm over every scheme of man, and what does it mean that no wisdom or counsel can prevail against the LORD?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Even Balaam must confess the limit on his power: the word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak (22:38). He cannot curse where God has blessed, and he will soon ask, how can I curse whom God has not cursed (23:8). The hired diviner is utterly hemmed in by the will of God.

This is the doctrinal weight of the chapter: God's sovereign protection of His people stands firm over every scheme. Balak's silver, Balaam's reputation, the repeated attempts to find an angle, all of it shatters against the simple fact that God has pronounced His people blessed.

Proverbs 21:30 states the principle plainly: there is no wisdom, no understanding, no counsel that can prevail against the LORD. The cleverest plot against God's purposes is futile. He overrules even a divided man so that His blessing, not a curse, falls on His people.

For the church this is enormous comfort. The same God who would not be hired against Israel guards His people now. As Paul writes, if God is for us, who can be against us. No curse, scheme, or power can undo what God has pledged to those who are His in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God sovereignly protects and blesses His people against every human scheme
- No wisdom or counsel can prevail against the LORD (Proverbs 21:30)
- God overrules even a divided, reward-seeking man to accomplish His will
- The blessing God pronounces cannot be reversed by any curse
- This protection is the church's comfort: if God is for us, who can be against us (Romans 8:31)

Discussion Prompts

- How does Balaam's confession show the limits of human power against God?
- What does Proverbs 21:30 add to our confidence in God's purposes?
- How is God's protection of Israel a comfort to His people in Christ today?

Question 10

Student Question:

Name one specific way Christ is teaching you, through this chapter, to trust that God Himself is guarding you and to root out any divided loyalty so that your heart belongs wholly to Him.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone draws the chapter into personal trust and undivided loyalty. The God who would not let Balaam curse His people is the God who guards His people still. The student is invited to rest in that protection rather than live in fear of the schemes around him.

At the same time, the chapter is a warning against being a Balaam, a person who speaks of devotion while a divided heart leans toward gain. Christ calls us to a single loyalty, a heart that values His approval above every reward.

Spiritual formation here is twofold: deeper trust that God Himself is our defender, and a steady rooting out of divided loyalties. Ask the class to name a specific divided loyalty, a love of money, comfort, status, or approval, that competes with their devotion to Christ.

The aim is a heart that belongs wholly to the Lord, confident in His protection and uncorrupted by the lure of gain. The student who learns both lessons can face a hostile world without scheming and without selling out, because he knows whose he is and Who guards him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Resting in God's protection rather than living in fear of others' schemes

- The warning not to become a Balaam, divided between devotion and gain
- Rooting out specific divided loyalties that compete with Christ
- A single, undivided heart that values God's approval above every reward

Discussion Prompts

- How does God's protection of His people free you from fear of others' schemes?
- What specific divided loyalty is competing with your devotion to Christ?
- What would it look like for your heart to belong wholly to the Lord?