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# The Ten Commandments

*Scripture: Exodus 19:1-20:21*

**Theme: God's law shows us His character and our need for a Savior**

*Jr High (Ages 12-14)*

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Free curriculum for small and rural churches

## Lesson Overview

Lesson Title: "God Speaks Through Unexpected Voices" (Numbers 22:21-35) Hook & Story Context: Imagine you're stuck in traffic, your car won't start, and suddenly... a talking donkey yells at you, "I'm not a donkey, I'm a prophet's ears!" That's what happened to Balaam in the Bible, and it's a wild reminder that God doesn't always use only the "important" people to do His work. Sometimes He uses us, even when we feel weird, tired, or like we're in the wrong place. Balaam's donkey (and later, his donkey ears) became the first witnesses to God's voice, and that's how God always gets the job done. Key Truth (with Real Questions): "God speaks in unexpected ways, not because He's surprised, but because He wants us to see He's in control." Balaam's donkey was the first to hear God's answer ("Don't go with them!"), and later, Balaam listened, even when he didn't want to. Here's the hard truth: When we resist God's calling, our donkeys (or our stubborn hearts) often get the last word. But when we humble ourselves, God's voice becomes clearer. Why does this matter for us? Because life's not always fair, God's plan might use us in ways we don't expect (like a friend who's not "gifted" but shares the truth we need to hear). Challenge: Which "donkey moment" in your life have you ignored, and how could you listen better now? Life Application (Volunteer Tip): Encourage students to ask: "Where is God asking me to be stubborn, and where might He want to use me in a surprising way?" End with a prayer to ask God: "Show me how to listen even when my donkey (or my pride) talks too loud." Bonus: Play a short clip of a donkey (e.g., My Talking Donkey song) and ask: "What would God say to this donkey if it could talk?" Why It Matters: God doesn't need us, He wants us to be part of His story, even if it starts with a donkey. Volunteers: Lean into the tension, God uses the odd, the tired, and the quiet, and let that spark curiosity.

## Bible Story

Balaam's Donkey: When God Speaks Through Unexpected Voices

God had big plans for Israel, but they kept going off track. After wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, they finally arrived at Moab, a land near what would become part of Israel's future. The king of Moab, Balak, was furious. He'd heard rumors about God's people, so powerful, so special, that his own king couldn't defeat them in battle. So Balak sent messengers to a man named Balaam, a prophet known for his wisdom, to curse Israel. "Please curse these people for me," Balak pleaded. "I'll even pay you well!" Balaam, though tempted by the offer, knew he couldn't disobey God, no matter how much money or power he was offered. But first, he needed to check with God. "What should I do?" he asked God.

That's when the story gets wild. God told Balaam to go, but warned him not to curse Israel. The donkey he rode, though, had a different opinion. While Balaam slept that night, the donkey began to walk off the path, refusing to go where Balaam wanted. Balaam was furious. He grabbed a rod and swung it, hoping to force the donkey to obey. But the donkey just kept walking away. "What happened?" Balaam shouted. Finally, the donkey spoke to him, "Didn't I speak against you the last time?", a reference to earlier events (Numbers 22:22). Balaam realized: This isn't just about me; this is God's will! He turned the donkey around and headed back to Moab.

God didn't let Balaam's disobedience go unpunished, though. When Balaam finally arrived at Balak's palace, God had other plans. Instead of cursing Israel, God showed Balaam visions of Israel's future glory, how God would bless them so much that even the Gentiles would praise His name. Balak was furious again, but Balaam couldn't change God's word. "Go back home," God said. "Your mouth will not open anymore to speak words of blessing or curse." Balaam obeyed, but the story wasn't over. God had bigger lessons for Israel, and for us.

This story teaches us that God doesn't always speak in perfect silence. Sometimes, He speaks through the voices of others, like Balaam's donkey, when we're not listening. Sometimes, we have to ask God for guidance even when it's hard. And sometimes, the things that seem "unexpected" or even "wrong" (like Balaam's donkey refusing to obey) are actually God's way of showing us the right path. The real question is: Will we listen when God speaks through anyone, or anyone at all?

Why This Story Matters: God's ways aren't always our ways. Just like Balaam's donkey pointed him in the right direction, God can use even the unexpected moments to guide us. The lesson here is simple but powerful: We don't always have to be the voice of reason. Sometimes, we just need to trust that God knows what's best, and that His truth is stronger than ours.

## Key Verse

### Exodus 20:3

Here's a heartfelt and relatable explanation for junior high students: The Verse: "Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?" (Numbers 22:30) What It Means: Balaam, a prophet, is talking to God, saying, "Hey, God, I'm not your enemy! I've always been loyal to you, and I've never done anything wrong to you. What's the problem?" He's honestly admitting his faith in God, even when things get tough. Just like a faithful friend would never betray their loyalty, Balaam's heart stays true to God. Why It Matters: This verse shows that sometimes, even when we face big challenges (like Balaam facing God's anger), we can stand up for what we believe in. But remember: loyalty isn't just about words, it's about actions. If you've stayed faithful to God even when it was hard, that's your strength! And if you've been tempted to waver? Own it honestly, like Balaam did. God isn't looking for perfect people, He wants people who choose Him, even when it's scary. Life Application: - Ask Yourself: Have I been honest with God about my fears or doubts? Like Balaam, can I admit when I've struggled? - Choose Loyalty: Just like a donkey doesn't complain about being ridden (even when it's hard), we should trust God, even when life feels unfair. - Fix Mistakes: If you've messed up, Balaam didn't blame God, he asked for forgiveness. Can you do the same? Real Question Answered: "What if I've done something wrong?" The key isn't guilt, it's repentance. Like Balaam, you can say, "I messed up, but I'm not giving up on You." God forgives when we ask! Bonus Thought: Think of your "donkey" as your heart, does it stay strong for God, even when life is tough? That's how you show your loyalty!

## Activities

### Activity 1:

Students use movement, props, and quick-prompt responses to act out the donkey's unrelenting refusal to listen to Balaam, and God's patient response through the angel. They end with a discussion on how God speaks to us today.

1. Setup (2 min):
2. Write three key phrases from the donkey's "dialogue" on slips of paper:
3. "I will not listen!" (Num. 22:28)
4. "What have I done to you?" (Num. 22:27)
5. "I will not cease from following you." (Num. 22:29)
6. Hide the slips in a hat or bowl.
7. Game Round (7 min):
8. Divide students into small groups (3, 5). One student (the "donkey") gets a plate and must "listen" to prompts without moving. When they hear a slip, they must freeze in a position representing the donkey's reaction (e.g., ears pricked forward for curiosity, tail swishing for irritation).
9. The other students (Balaam's "team") must move and speak to guide the donkey toward God's angel (use a stuffed animal or marker on the wall). The donkey must obey God's angel's command (e.g., "Stand still!").
10. Reflection (5 min):
11. After each round, ask: "When have you felt like the donkey, ignoring God's leading?" or "How did God's angel speak to you today?"
12. End with: "God doesn't give up! Even when we resist, He keeps trying to speak."

### Activity 2:

Students imagine their donkey's "vision" of God's angel and draw it, then write a short dialogue about how God speaks through ordinary people (like Balaam).

#### Supplies needed:

- *Uses basic supplies*
- *can adapt for groups of 3, 10.*

1. Prompt (2 min):
2. Read Numbers 22:21, 35 aloud. Ask: "Who is the donkey in your story? How would you draw your donkey's 'vision' of God's angel?"
3. Creative Task (7 min):
4. On their paper, students draw their donkey and a scene where it "sees" God's angel (e.g., a bright light, a voice, or an angelic figure). They can use crayons to color or glue paper cutouts.
5. Write a 3-sentence dialogue between their donkey and a person (e.g., Balaam) about God's voice. Example:
6. "Donkey: 'Why won't you listen? I've seen a man with a sword!'"
7. "Balaam: 'God's speaking to me through this vision, heed His warning!'"
8. Share & Apply (5 min):
9. Volunteers share their drawings/Dialogues. Ask:
10. "Where have you felt God speak to you through someone or something unexpected?"
11. "How can we listen more closely like the donkey's angel?"
12. Close with: "God doesn't always speak in big, dramatic ways, sometimes He uses the people or creatures we least expect!"
13. Why These Work for Junior High:
14. Movement + Storytelling: Keeps energy high while engaging the lesson.

15. Creativity + Reflection: Lets students personally connect to the donkey's story.

## Discussion Questions

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- Here are four open-ended discussion questions designed to engage junior high students in reflecting on Balaam's Donkey (Numbers 22:21-35). These questions encourage deeper thinking about communication, obedience, and how God speaks in unexpected ways, just like when the donkey spoke instead of Balaam!
- 1. "Imagine You Were the Donkey"
  - If you were Balaam's donkey instead of him, how would you feel when you first heard God's voice? What might you have thought about Balaam not listening?
  - (Why does this story show how God sometimes speaks through things we might not expect? How can we learn to trust Him when His message comes in an unexpected way?)
- 2. "When Has God Spoken to You in a Way You Didn't Expect?"
  - Have you ever had a moment where God's guidance came through something, like a dream, a friend's advice, or even a random conversation, that surprised you? How did you respond?
  - (How does this story remind us that God's voice isn't always loud or obvious? Why is it important to pay attention to the small signs He puts in front of us?)
- 3. "Why Was Balaam's Stubbornness a Problem?"
  - Balaam kept arguing with God even though he knew the donkey was right. How does his disobedience affect the story?
  - (What happens when we ignore God's quiet prompts or dismiss His ways? How can we stay humble enough to listen, even when it's uncomfortable?)
- 4. "What Would You Do If God Told You to Do Something That Wasn't Logical?"
  - In the story, God told Balaam to go with Balak even though it seemed wrong. What are some "unexpected" things God might ask us to do today, like helping someone we don't like or sacrificing something important for His plan?
  - (How can we trust God when His path isn't the easiest one? What happens if we ignore Him and go our own way?)
- These questions encourage students to:
  - Connect the story to real life (e.g., how God speaks today).
  - Reflect on their own choices (e.g., when they've ignored a "sign").
  - Practice humility and obedience (e.g., listening to God even when it's hard).
  - Engage with faith in action (e.g., trusting God's timing, not their own).
  - Would you like any adjustments to better fit a specific lesson tone (e.g., more playful, more serious, or focused on a particular theme)?

## Prayer Focus

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*Context: Today's lesson explores how God sometimes speaks through unexpected things, like donkeys, dreams, or even awkward moments. Balaam's donkey wasn't a prophet, but it saw what Balaam couldn't hear, and that's when God finally got Balaam's attention. The class might be wondering: When does God show up in my life? How do I know I'm not missing His clues? Prayer Focus for Junior High Students: "Lord, we know You're always near, sometimes in big, dramatic ways, but other times in whispers, dreams, or even the weirdest little moments. We pray You'd help us listen better, like Balaam's donkey did. Show us when we're too busy to see You, when we're*

*too distracted to hear Your voice. Give us courage to pay attention to what's happening around us, because You often speak in ways that feel unexpected... like a donkey braying, 'I see it too!' Help us trust that You're always there, even when we don't understand. Amen." Life Application Tie-In: "Today's story is a reminder: God's voice isn't always loud or clear, sometimes it's in the quiet stuff. What 'unexpected' thing could you pay closer attention to this week? Maybe a weird dream, a random conversation, or even the way something feels 'off'? Let's try to notice it, just like Balaam's donkey did." (This prayer keeps it relatable, honest, and tied to the lesson's lesson, God's ways aren't always like ours!)*

### >> Missions Spotlight

The Fulani people of West Africa are known as the world's largest nomadic group. Their deep connection to their herds means the story of Balaam's donkey gets immediate attention. Missionaries working across the Sahel region use this story to show that God speaks through the ordinary.

### -> To the Cross

God opened the donkey's mouth to speak truth. Later, God would send His ultimate Word, Jesus, to speak truth to a world that couldn't see clearly. God always finds a way to get His message through.