



Youth Adventures Youth Resource



Free to use – please acknowledge when using beyond local church children's and youth work so others can find and use the resource themselves.

Embedded in Faith Adventures: Children Together, this youth resource is intergenerational in nature and designed to foster God-connection in church, home and beyond.

For guidance on the purpose of the resource and how to use it as a launch pad for your engagement with children and families, please use this link: www.bit.ly/How-To-FAYR

Title: Numbers 22: 21–35

Theme: The unexpected voice

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Introduction: What would be helpful to know in my planning?

Fantastic Beasts Introduction

The Bible is full of a fascinating variety of stories: family dramas and heroes overcoming unlikely odds; songs and poetry; historical sagas – not to mention some surprisingly ordinary situations described in Jesus' parables! But not all of these fabulous tales are about humans and their relationship with the God who created them – sometimes humans don't get a look in! The Bible is full of stories and songs which delight in the created world and the animals that are a part of it. We are often reminded not to underestimate animals or the wonderful world that we share with them.

We continue to explore our theme of 'Fantastic Beasts' with a story from the Old Testament about a talking donkey.

The donkey belonged to Balaam. Balaam was a prophet – but he wasn't an Israelite. He was hired by King Balak of Moab to curse the Israelites because the king was afraid of Israel's growing numbers and power.

God was not happy about this! But, rather than talk to Balaam directly, he spoke through Balaam's trusty donkey – after getting the donkey to try to show Balaam that what he was doing was wrong and dangerous.

This story has everything – a fantastic beast, an obstinate man, an angel, and God himself.

It shows how God will do anything to be heard, and will keep trying, even though we sometimes ignore what God is saying – or try to.

The passage does include themes of animal cruelty and domestic violence, so do not use if you are aware of abuse, and be prepared for disclosures and ensure you know the procedures for safeguarding in your context.

Even when animals, or humans, are doing things we don't like we should never hit them. That doesn't mean we can't confront them about their behaviour, but we should not resort to violence.

Together – prayer and games

Let's start our time with God and each other well

Use this opening prayer or encourage young people to open the session with a prayer of their own.

All mighty God,

Be with us as we learn more about you through stories and people in the Bible.

Help us to walk in your way and follow your path.

Be with us as we make decisions that affect our lives, and the lives of those around us.

Amen.

Alternatively, you may join with the widgeit prayer found in Faith Adventures: Children Together, or else the Lord's Prayer found at the end of this session.

Active Game – Hearing the voice

You will need:

- a scarf or something similar to use as a blindfold

Remind the children that, in the story, Balaam heard God's voice when his donkey spoke to him. We will play a game that involves listening to voices that might come from unexpected places.

Take it in turns to blindfold one child, if they wish to do this.

The blindfolded child stands or sits still while the other children walk or run around, depending on how much space is available. The leader shouts "Stop!" and everyone stands

where they are. The children take it in turns to say something, such as "Hello!" to see if the blindfolded child can recognise the child speaking.

This works well if the group of children know each other well.

Alternative: one child is blindfolded and the other children move around. One child calls out and the blindfolded person sees if they can point in the direction the sound is coming from.

Quieter game - Codebreakers

God tried to tell Balaam that Balaam was doing something that displeased God – but didn't just talk to him. He used the donkey as a code and Balaam had to crack the code.

You will need:

- paper with coded phrases on them
- pencils/pens

What you do:

Prepare some simple coded phrases (alphanumeric codes, in which 1=A, 2=B, etc., or substitution codes, in which each letter represents the letter before it in the alphabet). Invite your group to work together, or individually, to decode the phrases.

For example:

Alphanumeric code

7,15,4	19,15,14,11,5	20,8,17,14,21,7,8	1	4,14,16,11,5,25
G o d	S p o k e	T h r o u g h	a	D o n k e y

Substitution code

AZKZZLT CNMLDX RONJD SN GH

BALAAMS DONKEY SPOKE TO HIM

Experience – Bible story and songs

Hear, watch and sing the Bible story

This link takes you to Numbers 22: 21–35 in Easy-to-read version

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Numbers%2022%3A%2021%20-%2035&version=ERV>

Balaam and his Donkey

²¹ The next morning, Balaam got up, put a saddle on his donkey, and went with the Moabite leaders. ²² Balaam was riding on his donkey. Two of his servants were with him. While Balaam was traveling, God became angry. So the Lord's angel stood in the road in front of Balaam to stop^[a] him.

23 When Balaam's donkey saw the Lord's angel standing in the road with a sword in his hand, the donkey turned from the road and went into the field. Balaam could not see the angel, so he was very angry at the donkey. He hit the donkey and forced it to go back on the road.

24 Later, the Lord's angel stood at a place where the road became narrow. This was between two vineyards. There were walls on both sides of the road. 25 Again the donkey saw the Lord's angel. So the donkey walked very close to one wall. This crushed Balaam's foot against the wall. So Balaam hit his donkey again.

26 Later, the Lord's angel stood at another place where the road became narrow. There was no place where the donkey could go around him. It could not turn to the left or to the right. 27 The donkey saw the Lord's angel. So the donkey lay down with Balaam sitting on top of it. Balaam was very angry at the donkey. So he hit it with his walking stick.

28 Then the Lord caused the donkey to speak. The donkey said to Balaam, "Why are you angry at me? What have I done to you? You have hit me three times!"

29 Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made me look foolish. If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now!"

30 But the donkey said to Balaam, "Look, I am your donkey. You have ridden me for so many years. And you know that I have never done this to you before!"

"That is true," Balaam said.

31 Then the Lord allowed Balaam to see the angel. The Lord's angel was standing in the road, holding a sword in his hand. Balaam bowed low to the ground.

32 Then the Lord's angel asked Balaam, "Why did you hit your donkey three times? I am the one who came to stop you. But just in time,^[b] 33 your donkey saw me and turned away from me. That happened three times. If the donkey had not turned away, I probably would have killed you already. And I would have let your donkey live."

34 Then Balaam said to the Lord's angel, "I have sinned. I did not know that you were standing in the road. If I am doing wrong, I will go back home."

35 Then the Lord's angel said to Balaam, "No, you can go with these men. But be careful. Speak only the words that I will tell you to say." So Balaam went with the leaders that Balak had sent.

Easy-to-Read Version (ERV)

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You may wish to research different versions of this reading on www.biblegateway.com
Recommended versions to try are NRSV, Easy-to-read, The Message, NIRV

Listen: Speak O Lord, by Keith and Kristyn Getty

<https://youtu.be/aH1Wn4fTiBs?si=CTbpvVdbukC40lt7>

Questions for discussion

- What sorts of things do the lyrics suggest we need to do if we want to hear God's voice loud and clear?

Explore

Ideas and activities to explore this week's Bible passage together

A new way to explore the theme

This is a new way to explore the Bible passage and the theme for this week.

Alternatively, you may wish to use the Explore section from this week's Faith Adventures: Children Together to guide your exploration of the theme this week.

The remembered Bible is a way of engaging with the Bible but, rather than reading the stories, we recall the stories we remember. They do not need to be remembered word for word.

Today, let's remember what examples in the Bible there are of hearing God's voice?

Instead of reading a text, say what you remember of the times in the Bible when people hear God's voice, such as the stories of Eli and Samuel, and Mary, Jesus' mother.

Write them down and then peg them on a washing line in the order you think they happen.

Modern parables

This section includes references to TV programmes, films, books, TED talks, TikTok etc aimed at this age group that will have been widely seen, or where a clip is available to use as a stimulus for discussion. You may also enjoy the picture book recommended for Faith Adventures: Children Together and explore the relevance of the story to the theme of the session in more depth – young people and adults are often well tuned in to the deeper meanings in materials aimed at younger people and the authors are often very aware of the adults reading the books to or with younger ones.



"Shrek's Swamp" – a clip from *Shrek* (2001), by JoBlo Animated Videos

Shrek did not want to listen to Donkey, even though he tried to get his attention.

- I wonder if you have deliberately not listened to God or someone you know, even when they have tried to get your attention.

Group discussion

- Why didn't God speak directly to Balaam?
- I wonder how Balaam felt when his donkey spoke to him?

Personal reflection

- I wonder if God has ever spoken to you?
- Are we listening to God? Are we ready to respond?

Express – prayer and creative activities

Praying together: enabling your group to respond spiritually

Praying together

Prayers Respond to the theme by writing or saying a short prayer. Alternatively, use the creative prayer from Faith Adventures: Children Together for this session, or use the prayer activity below. Alternatively, light a candle and play some music while you listen and talk to God together.

Creative prayer – quiet listening

Picture by
Beatrix M Bell
2026



We live in a noisy world. There are noises that we hear just because of where we are, such as a teacher talking, laughter in the playground, the sound of a siren going off. There are noises we might choose to listen to, like music, watching a film, or talking with our friends.

Encourage the children to be still. Say that we are going to make time to listen to God's voice.

The thought of being quiet and still can be tricky for children (and adults), so start the time by releasing some energy, perhaps wriggling our bodies, letting out a loud sound. Encourage everyone to sit or lie down, whatever feels most comfortable for them. Having a part of our body, such as our feet or our back, connected to the earth is very grounding.

Then play a piece of music that encourages everyone to be still. Song suggestions: "Be still for the presence of the Lord"; "Breathe" or "Come to the quiet" (Fischy Music). At the end of the song, spend several minutes in silence, slightly longer than what usually feels comfortable. Explain this beforehand and say that being quiet can be a root into rest and to hearing the unexpected, like Balaam heard his donkey speaking.

At the end of the quiet time, have a conversation about what this felt like. Did they like it? What did they notice about their bodies? What thoughts went through their head? What did they hear? Have they ever heard God speaking to them in silence? Might they try listening to God like this at other quiet times? Is it easier to hear God's voice in some places more than others, for example when they are outside rather than in a busy building?

Spoken Prayer

The leader says the first line and then everyone repeats, reducing the prayer as you go.

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know

Be still and know

Be still

Be still

Be

Be

Responding together

This is an opportunity for a social justice challenge, some research, craftivism, or a craft or STEM activity. You may have a specific activity chosen but free choice is also an option. Here are some suggestions for this week's theme. Choose whatever will work best for your group.

Bookmarks

See if you can find stories in the Bible in which people hear God's voice, especially those which you recalled in the Explore section. Write the Biblical book, chapter and verse onto a bookmark-style card. See if there are any more you could add.

Use the bookmark when reading your Bible; you could keep adding stories you remember to it as you look at, and read, your Bible.

<https://at.pinterest.com/pin/18155204744600099/> for some example bookmarks.

Challenge

Discipleship doesn't stop when you walk out of the church door – it is a part of everyday life. Take a challenge with you and try to make it part of your week.

You may think of your own suggestion of what you as an individual or a group might do in the coming week in response to what you have explored today. If not here are some suggestions:

- Use one of the "conversation starter" questions or the question below to talk with someone of a different generation or from a different setting and share your questions, thoughts and insights together. **When have you heard an unexpected voice?**
- Research something suggested by JPIT Resources (jpit.uk) or *Commitment for Life* (cforl.co.uk).

- Make a point of seeing how many different ways God might be speaking to you this week. Is it through nature? Is it through your friends? Was it while you were asleep? If you think God did speak to you, how could you respond?

Thank you for exploring the **Numbers** passage with us.

Please let us know what you liked or what you would find useful by emailing sharon.lloyd@urc.org.uk or by sharing it on www.bit.ly/FACT_FB

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread

and forgive us our sins As we forgive those who sin against us

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory

For ever and ever . Amen

