

## BEWARE OF THE ENEMY'S SUBTLE DEVICES

**21** <sup>21</sup>Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, <sup>22</sup>“Let me pass through your country. We will not turn aside into any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well. We will travel along the king’s highway until we have passed through your territory.” <sup>23</sup>But Sihon would not allow Israel to pass through his territory. He mustered his entire army and marched out into the wilderness against Israel. When he reached Jahaz, he attacked Israel. <sup>24</sup>Israel, however, struck him down with the sword and took possession of his land from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River, but only as far as the Ammonite border, because their border was fortified. <sup>25</sup>Israel captured all the cities of the Amorites and occupied them, including Heshbon and all its surrounding suburbs. <sup>26</sup>Heshbon had been the [royal] city of Sihon king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab and had taken from him all his land as far as the Arnon River. <sup>27</sup>That is why the poets say: Come to Heshbon; let the city of Sihon be rebuilt and restored. <sup>28</sup>Fire went out from Heshbon, a blaze from the city of Sihon. It consumed Ar of Moab, the citizens of Arnon’s heights. <sup>29</sup>Woe to you, O Moab! You are destroyed, O people of Chemosh! He has given up his sons as fugitives and his daughters as captives to Sihon king of the Amorites. <sup>30</sup>Indeed, we have overthrown them; Heshbon is destroyed all the way to Dibon. We have demolished them as far as Nophah, which extends to Medeba.” <sup>31</sup>So Israel settled in the land of the Amorites. <sup>32</sup>After Moses had sent spies to Jazer, [the Israelites] captured its surrounding suburbs and drove out the Amorites who were there. <sup>33</sup>Then they turned and went up along the road toward Bashan, and Og king of Bashan and his whole army marched out to meet them in battle at Edrei. <sup>34</sup>Jehovah said to Moses, “Do not be afraid of him, for I have handed him over to you, with his whole army and his land. Do to him the same as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon.” <sup>35</sup>So they struck him down, together with his sons and his whole army, leaving them no survivors. And they took possession of his land.

**22** Then the children of Israel traveled to the plains of Moab and camped along the Jordan [River across from] Jericho. <sup>2</sup>Now Bakak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. <sup>3</sup>Moab was terrified of the people, because they were so numerous. Indeed, Moab was filled with dread because of the children of Israel. <sup>4</sup>The Moabites said to the elders of Midian, “This horde will lick up everything around us, like an ox licks up the grass of the field.” Now Balak the son of Zippor was king of Moab at that time. <sup>5</sup>So he sent messengers to summon Balaam the son of Beor, who was at Pethor, which is near the Euphrates River, in his native land. He said, “A people have come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the land and are encamped next to me. <sup>6</sup>Now, therefore, please come and curse these people for me, because they are too powerful for me. [If you curse them], I might then succeed in defeating them and driving them out of the land; for I know that whomever you bless is blessed, and whomever you curse is cursed.” (Num. 21:21-22:6)

## **Introduction**

One of the most amazing military campaigns of all time began in the spring of the year 218 B.C.

In May of that year the Carthaginian general, Hannibal, amassed an army of some 40,000 infantry and cavalry, together with 38 African war elephants, and began his march against Rome. With his massive contingent of men and animals, Hannibal started out from his base in Spain and marched northeast over the Pyrenees into France. Then he actually marched over the Alps by way of the mountain passes and down into the Italian peninsula. A contemporary historian admitted that Hannibal's crossing of the Alps came "as a thunderbolt" to the Romans who were unable to stop him until he had come within three miles of the fortified walls of Rome itself. (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol.11, pp. 65-67)

Incredible as that military campaign was, an even more incredible, demonic, military strategy is recorded here in the Book of Numbers. When the Moabite king, Balak, sees that he cannot personally defeat Israel, inspired by the devil operating through the counsel of the false prophet, Balaam, he seeks to enlist the LORD Himself against them.

We must realize that the enemy of our souls will resort to any and every device in his effort to oppose and destroy the children of God who pose a threat to him. Because the devil will stop at nothing in his efforts to do us mortal harm, we must be aware of the enemy's subtle devices.

### **I. Beware of the Enemy's Subtle Devices, Which are Motivated by Fear and Hatred**

Balak, the king of Moab, saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites (Num.22:2.) Israel defeated Sihon, king of the Amorites (Num. 21:23-32.) Sihon and all his people came to fight against Israel (vs. 23.) Israel defeated them all and took possession of their territory (vs. 24.) Israel conquered the very king who had previously conquered Moab and confiscated all their land to the border of the Arnon River (vs. 25-26.)

Next Israel defeated Og, king of Bashan (Num. 21:33-35.) Og and all his people came out against Israel (vs. 33.) The same thing happened to them as had previously happened to Sihon and the Amorites: Israel totally conquered the armies of Og and took possession of his territory (vs. 35.)

Balak saw what Israel had done to the Amorites, and now he finds these unstoppable people encamped on the plains of Moab (Num. 22:1.)

So it is that Moab was very much afraid of the people of Israel and was distressed because of them: *"Moab was terrified of the people, because they were so numerous.*

*Indeed, Moab was filled with dread because of the children of Israel” (Num. 22:3.)* Now, motivated by fear and terror, as well as by hatred against the people of God, the king of Moab is about to plot his subtle strategy against them.

Beware of the devil’s subtle devices, which are motivated by fear and hatred.

In John 8:44b our Lord Jesus describes the character of the devil: *“the devil ... was a murderer from the beginning and is not established in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he is speaking in accordance with his own [nature], because he is a liar and the father of lies.”* Revelation 12:7-9,12 testifies to the fury and panic of the devil:

*And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels waged war against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. <sup>8</sup>But they could not prevail, and so they lost their place in heaven. <sup>9</sup>The enormous dragon was flung down—the ancient serpent, he who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. He was flung down to the earth, and his angels were flung down with him. ...<sup>12</sup>Therefore, rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and to the sea, because the devil has come down to you. He is filled with fury, because he knows that he has only a short time. (Rev. 12:7-9, 12)*

The Apostle Peter issues this warning: *“Be [spiritually] sober. Be alert. Your adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion, is prowling around, looking for someone to devour”* (1 Pet. 5:8.)

## **II. Beware of the Enemy’s Subtle Devices, When His Direct Assaults Fail**

Balak has seen what happened when Israel was attacked by a direct military assault: no matter how large the armies amassed against them, by the LORD’s strength Israel was victorious.

Knowing that he had no hope of defeating Israel by a direct confrontation on the battlefield, Balak plots a more subtle strategy. He sends out messengers to solicit the services of a strange eastern prophet named Balaam (Num. 22:5.) Balak desires to hire Balaam to put a curse on Israel and thereby enable the Moabites to defeat them (Num. 22:6a.) Balak is confident that whomever Balaam curses is, indeed, cursed, and will thus be unable to gain any further victories (22:6b.)

Numbers 23-24 describe Balaam’s effort to put a curse upon the people of Israel. Three times Balak takes Balaam to a prominent high place overlooking the plains below where Israel is encamped. But each time Balaam seeks to curse the people, the LORD causes him to pronounce a blessing instead.

Balak knows that he cannot defeat Israel in battle, now he discovers that he cannot get Balaam to arbitrarily pronounce a curse against them, but he does not

give up. With Balaam's help, he plots a more subtle strategy, recorded in Numbers 25. Instead of trying to beat Israel, he gets Israel to join him; the Moabites invite Israel to participate in their religious sacrifices and orgies:

*While Israel encamped at Shittim, the people began to indulge in sexual immorality with the Moabite women; <sup>2</sup>because they had invited the people to offer sacrifices to their gods, and the people ate with them and bowed down to their gods (Num. 25:1-2)*

Consequently, when the people of Israel participated in these pagan rituals and practices, *"the anger of Jehovah was aroused against Israel"* and He struck them with a plague that killed 24,000 of them: *"So it was that Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor; and the anger of Jehovah was aroused against Israel ... <sup>9</sup>Those who had died from the plague numbered twenty—four thousand"* (Num. 25:3,9.) Here is one of the most subtle, incredible, and demonic military strategies of all time. When Balak sees that he cannot personally defeat Israel, under the instigation of the devil operating through the counsel of Balaam, he finds a way to enlist the LORD Himself against them.

Beware of the devil's subtle devices, especially when direct assaults fail. Note the case of our Lord Jesus. When the direct assault of the devil, in the form of the temptations in the wilderness failed, it was followed up by more subtle assaults. Following the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, the devil seeks to have the Lord Jesus swept away by the appeal and power of the crowd: *"Jesus, perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force in order to make him king, withdrew again into the hills by himself"* (Jn. 6:15.)

On another occasion the devil seeks to seduce the Lord Jesus by means of the well-meaning advice of one of His own disciples:

*"Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup>Now he spoke these things publicly. So Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup>But [Jesus], turning around and seeing his disciples, rebuked Peter, and said, Get behind me, Satan; for your mind is not focused the things of God, but on the things of men"* (Mk. 8:31-33.)

As He hung on the cross, the devil sought to seduce the Lord Jesus to come down by means of the challenge of His enemies: *"the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. <sup>42</sup>"He saved others,' they said, 'but he cannot save himself! He is the king of Israel! Let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in him'"* (Matt. 27:41-42.)

### III. Beware of the Enemy's Subtle Devices, and Trust in Christ's Saving Work

The basic aim of the devil's devices is to separate us from the LORD and destroy us. He does so by seeking to enlist the LORD's judgment against us—just as Balak sought to have Balaam curse the people in the name of the LORD. An example of such an effort is portrayed for us in Zechariah 3:1,3, *"Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of Jehovah, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him ... <sup>3</sup>Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel."* Satan was seeking to have the LORD carry out His righteous judgment against Joshua in his sin—being clothed in filthy garments represents Joshua's sinful condition before the LORD.

Another way in which the devil attempts to accomplish his desired goal is by seeking to render us helpless with the intention of overwhelming us—just as Balak commanded Balaam to curse Israel so that *"I might then succeed in defeating them"* (Num. 22:6.) In this regard, note the Apostle Paul's counsel to the Corinthian church, urging them to restore a repentant member: *"you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. <sup>8</sup>I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him ... <sup>11</sup>in order that Satan might not outwit us; for we are not unaware of his schemes"* (2 Cor. 7-8,11.) The Apostle Paul instructs the Corinthian church to forgive and comfort a repentant sinner. The reason they are to do so is in order that the repentant offender does not become swallowed up with an overwhelming sense of sorrow and grief, (as was the case of Judas after he had betrayed the Lord Jesus.) Paul explains that he does not want the devil to gain the advantage over us, for we are not unfamiliar with his devices; namely, Satan's attempt to convince us that after we have sinned there is no hope, we are beyond forgiveness and there is no way to be restored to fellowship with God.

Bearing in mind the subtle devices of the devil and his ultimate aim, listen to these words that Balaam speaks under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

*Listen; I have received [a commandment] to bless; he has blessed, and I cannot reverse it. <sup>21</sup>He has not seen iniquity in Jacob, he has not observed obstinate behavior in Israel. Jehovah his God is with him; the shout of a king is among them.* (Num. 23:20-21)

What is Balaam saying under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? The LORD is determined (and fully able) to pronounce blessing upon His people and not cursing. When the LORD looks upon His people He does not behold iniquity: *"He has not seen iniquity in Jacob."* Therefore, He is with His people in blessing and fellowship, and for their protection as their great King.

How can Balaam say these things—especially about the LORD not beholding iniquity in Israel—and say them under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? It is certainly not because Israel was without sin, and not because the LORD was

indifferent to their sin. These things can be said about God's people only because the LORD has dealt with their sin. Moses, as their mediator, would make intercession for Israel—in his capacity as mediator Moses was an Old Testament model of Christ. The LORD Himself provided the atoning blood—of the Passover Lamb and the sacrificial blood that covered the mercy seat upon the ark of the covenant—to cover the sins of the people, (all of the Old Testament sacrifices pointed to the one great sacrifice of Christ upon the cross.) As the LORD will explain through the prophet Jeremiah, *"In those days, at that time,' declares Jehovah, 'search will be made for Israel's guilt, but there will be none, and for the sins of Judah, but none will be found, for I will forgive the remnant I spare'"* (Jer. 50:20.) The prophet Isaiah foretells the means of that divine forgiveness: *"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but Jehovah has laid upon him [the divinely appointed Messiah, who is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ] the iniquity of us all"* (Isa. 53:6.)

Beware of the devil's subtle devices—his efforts to bring your sin between you and the LORD so as to isolate you from the LORD and cut you off from His blessing—and trust in Christ's saving work:

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (1 Jn. 1:9)

*... if anyone sins, we have someone who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. <sup>2</sup>He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins ...* (1 Jn. 2:1b-2a)

*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered ... <sup>5</sup>I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to Jehovah; and you forgave the guilt of my sin.* (Psl.32:1,5)

## **Conclusion**

Remember that the great enemy of your soul will resort to any and every device in his effort to oppose and destroy the children of God. But remember, too, that the one great Refuge for your soul is the Lord Jesus Christ, Ever resort to Him and rest in Him. As the writer of Hebrews assures us: *"[Jesus] is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them"* (Heb.7:25.)