

A Prophet With a Price Tag

Numbers 22-25

Introduction

Please turn in your Bible to Numbers, chapter 22. We will pick up our study where we ended our previous discussion. The next few chapters in the book of Numbers are really a parenthesis in the history of Israel.

A question that you and I often ask is, “What in the world is God up to.” We especially ask this question when we cannot identify His hand or observe how He is working in our lives. So it is fascinating that in the next few chapters of Numbers, God allows us to see what is happening from the other side of the fence.

So far we have viewed the Israelites through their eyes. We have seen what they are doing, what they are feeling, and where they are going. However, in our study today, God allows us to see the Israelites from the viewpoint of their enemies – how they look at Israel and what is happening in their lives.

As a result of this viewpoint, we are introduced to a man by the name of Balaam. More importantly, we are introduced to what God is doing behind the scenes that the Israelites are completely unaware of.

Is There a Prophet to be Bribed?

Look at Numbers, chapter 22, verses 1 and 2.

Then the sons of Israel journeyed, and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan opposite Jericho. Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.

This was recorded in chapter 21 of Numbers. Continue to verse 3.

So Moab was in great fear because of the people, for they were numerous; and Moab was in dread of the sons of Israel.

Now one of the first questions we need to answer is, “Who is Balak?”

We understand, from scripture and from history, that Balak was the king of the Moabite nations. This was one of the two most powerful nations during Israel’s time of wandering. Balak was captain of one of these great nations.

This passage tells us why Balak wanted Balaam. According to verse 3, Moab was “in great fear”. That could be translated, “terrified”. The last part of the verse says they were “in dread”. That could be translated, “they were nauseated with fear”. They were so fearful that they could not eat or sleep.

Moab is terrified that Israel will come and encamp against them. They do not know the record of scripture that God had promised these people a lasting inheritance from Esau. This meant that the Israelites were not going to hurt them. They did not know that and Israel did not know what the Moabites were about to do.

Balaam first approached

Now let me answer the question of who Balaam is. Look at Numbers, chapter 22, verses 4 and 5.

Moab said to the elders of Midian, “Now this horde will lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field.” And Balak the son of Zippor was king of Moab at the time. So he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor, at Pethor, which is near the River, in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying, “Behold, a people came out of Egypt; behold, they cover the surface of the land, and they are living opposite me.”

Continue to verses 6 and 7 and note the message that Balak sends to Balaam.

“Now, therefore, please come, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me; perhaps I may 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.” So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam and repeated Balak’s words to him.

Now Joshua, chapter 13, verse 22, tells us that Balaam was a “qasam,” which could be translated, “soothsayer”. In verse 7 of Numbers, chapter 22, we are told that they were coming to him with the “fees

for divination in their hand". That tells us that Balaam was also a diviner, a "baruwth" prophet.

Now we have to rely on history, and there are a lot of extant manuscripts going back to this time that let us know exactly what a "baruwth" was. This kind of individual would sacrifice animals, take their livers, and dissect them. From the dissected liver, they would tell what was going to happen. I know that sounds rather gory, so that is all I will say. They would also note the formation of clouds, would drop oil in water and notice the configuration, and would watch the movement of animals. Basically, these men were specifically interested in the movements of animals, the livers of animals, and the sacrificing of animals.

So we learn that Balaam was a "baruwth"; he was the diviner that observed the movement of the animals. It would be by these strange practices that he would curse or bless people or nations.

So Balaam was an internationally known seer or soothsayer. They had heard of him in Moab and Midian, and they call on this "baruwth" prophet. They say, "If you will curse Israel, we know we've got a chance. We can't handle them on the plains of war, but maybe we can handle them by some voodoo; some strange spiritual practice. If you curse them, we have a shot at this. If you bless them, we don't have a chance."

It is interesting, as we learn about Balaam, that he feels he has a way with the gods. He, in fact, somehow had some supernatural underworld power. He figures that Yahweh, the God of Israel, can be manipulated and moved in the same way as the false gods of all the other peoples. Is he ever in for the surprise of his life!

So they come to Balaam and in fact, will approach him twice. The first approach is rebuked. Look at verse 13.

So Balaam arose in the morning and said to Balak's leaders, "Go back to your land, for the Lord [Yahweh] has refused to let me go with you."

Yahweh had come in a vision. It is interesting that from this story, we can glean a couple of principles. The first one is that God can use anyone to accomplish His purposes. God can even use an unbeliever. Balaam never believed in Yahweh.

Balaam again approached

You would think, if the story ended at this point, that at least Balaam had some character or a listening ear to Yahweh. However, look at verses 17 and 18 of Numbers, chapter 22, when Balak's messengers come back. Now they are talking Balaam's language.

"for I will indeed honor you richly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Please come then, curse this people for me." Balaam replied to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, either small or great, contrary to the command of the Lord my God."

Perhaps Balaam is giving a hint when he talks of giving a house full of silver and gold. Continue to verse 19.

"Now please, you also stay here tonight, and I will find out what else the Lord will speak to me."

In other words, "Now you've got a large enough fee. Let's go back to this Yahweh and have another chat, and maybe we can talk Him into letting me go with you and perhaps, curse Israel."

Balaam has the audacity to say,

. . . "I will find out what else the Lord will speak to me."

The Lord had already spoken to Balaam. The Lord had already said, "They belong to Me. Don't curse them."

Balaam sounds a little like us though. We go to God when He has already spoken to see if somehow, we can have a little talk and change His mind.

I like the story that I heard of a preacher, although I am sure it is not true. The preacher comes home and says to his wife, "Honey, a new church has called me to be their pastor."

He was the pastor of another church at the time. He continues, "It's a bigger town. It's a bigger salary. It's a bigger church."

Then he says, "I'm going to go upstairs and pray to see what God wants me to do."

His wife said, "Great, I'll go up and pray with you."

He said, "No, you stay here and start packing!"

That is the kind of attitude Balaam had. He was basically saying, "I'm going to go to God and pray,

but I know what I want to do and I know what I'm going to do."

It is interesting, in fact, that God does not violate human will in this instance. He allows Balaam to go, but He will not allow Balaam to in any way, put an obstacle in the way of His divine or sovereign plan.

This is a study in itself and leads us to a second principle that we can glean. God can use anyone to be His spokesman. He allows this unbeliever to speak for Him. Look at verses 20 and 21.

God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men have come to call you, rise up and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you shall you do." So Balaam arose in the morning, and saddled his donkey and went with the leaders of Moab.

Is There a God to be Manipulated?

You may remember what happens next to Balaam, but let us read through it in verses 22 through 34 of Numbers, chapter 22.

But God was angry because he [Balaam] was going, and the angel of the Lord took his stand in the way as an adversary against him. Now he was riding on his donkey and his two servants were with him.

When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand, the donkey turned off from the way and went into the field; but Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back into the way.

Balaam thought he had a runaway donkey.

Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path of the vineyards, with a wall on this side and a wall on that side. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she pressed herself to the wall and pressed Balaam's foot against the wall, so he struck her again.

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

When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam was angry and struck the donkey with his stick.

And the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"

This is what any donkey would say about this time. So Balaam starts talking back to the donkey.

Then Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a mockery of me! If there had been a sword in my hand, I would have killed you by now."

The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden all your life to this day? Have I ever been accustomed to do so to you?" And he [Balaam] said, "No."

In other words, "Well, uh, come to think of it, no."

Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed all the way to the ground.

"The Lord opened the eyes of Balaam," by the way, is the same Hebrew phrase as "the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey".

So, literally, Balaam fell flat on his face.

The angel of the Lord said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out as an adversary, because your way was contrary to me.

"But the donkey saw me and turned aside from me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, I would surely have killed you just now, and let her live."

Balaam answers the angel while watching the sword in the angel's hand.

Balaam said to the angel of the Lord, "I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing in the way against me. Now then, if it is displeasing to you, I will turn back."

Now this again, is a study in itself. I will, however, pause just long enough to point out something that I find fascinating about this.

Balaam was the great international seer who had vision into the supernatural world and all of the unseen things. He could tell, by the movements of

animals, which way the gods were moving. Yet in this passage, he could not observe the movement of his own donkey. He who could see into the unknown, could not see the reality of true spiritual light – and the angel of the Lord was reality. But who could see it? The donkey. The donkey, in a sense, saves Balaam's life.

Because of the donkey, Balaam lives to give basically, four prophecies. Turn to chapter 23 of Numbers.

Now you know that Balaam is going to say only what God will force him to say, but he approaches God as any pagan prophet would do in that day. Look at verses 1 through 3.

Then Balaam said to Balak, "Build seven altars for me here, and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me here." Balak did just as Balaam had spoken, and Balak and Balaam offered up a bull and a ram on each altar. Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stand beside your burnt offering, and I will go; perhaps the Lord will come to meet me, and whatever He shows me I will tell you." So he went to a bare hill.

Now do not misunderstand this for a legitimate sacrifice. We learn, from materials still in extant today, that this was their basic, common, superstitious approach to reaching deities. You can see the way it so closely counterfeits that of the Old Testament Israelite approaching the true God.

Let me quote what we learn from a Babylonian tablet that is still extant today, "At dawn, in the presence of Ea, Shamash, and Marduk, [Babylonian deities], you must set up seven altars, place seven incense burners of cypress, and pour out the blood of seven sheep."

In other words, what is happening in this passage is nothing unusual and it is nothing spiritual. Balaam and Balak are going to try to do everything they possibly can to get a favorable reading. They are going to give God, or whoever up there, something that they think He might appreciate; such as, seven altars and seven sacrifices. I am sure they have heard that Israel sacrificed, so they were, in effect, going to manipulate the God of heaven and bribe Him to give them what they wanted.

I am getting a little closer to where you and I are today. I do not mean to imply that Balaam was a believer, but we, as believers, often tend to view God

with the same trite view. We think God can be manipulated by something we do; that God can be moved; that God can somehow be bought or bribed. We have the thought, "If I give God what I think He wants, then maybe He will give me what I want."

God is not impressed, however. In fact, look at the next verse, verse 4.

Now God met Balaam, and he said to Him, "I have set up the seven altars, and I have offered up a bull and a ram on each altar."

Balaam is saying, "Aren't you impressed with that, God?" Continue to verse 5.

Then the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth and said, "Return to Balak, and you shall speak thus."

In other words, God completely ignores the altars; He completely ignores the sacrifices. Why? Because it was not true.

God just thrusts a word into Balaam's mouth, and says, "I'm ignoring that, just go back and say what I want you to say. I am not to be bought. I cannot be bribed. I am not impressed by you doing things that are unbiblical, even though you think I might somehow be moved by them."

Ladies and gentlemen, we, as believers, so often think that we can in some way, bribe God with spiritual activity – with praying; with reading the Bible; with coming to church. We think that somehow, if we do these things, God will be impressed with us and give us what we want, even though He knows our hearts. In fact, I think the entire motivation for giving to God financially, is very often to receive something from God. Haven't we heard that? "If you give Him this amount, He will give you multiplied blessings."

What is that thought teaching us? It is teaching that we can bribe God.

I heard, in fact, when I was on the staff of another church, the sad story of a man and woman. They were both married to someone else and yet, they were having a licentious relationship. When it came to my attention, they were praying and having devotions before being involved. It was as if somehow, as believers, they could manipulate the heart of God to overlook what they were doing by praying.

When I came to this town, I heard that one of the breweries had a preacher come out and pray a prayer

of dedication. That is brilliant – as if somehow, his prayer would sanctify all the bars in town.

Just because we stand up and say, “Oh, God,” or use His name, does not mean He is manipulated. God is never bought; He cannot be bribed. God is holy. So Balaam might as well forget the altars, it is not working.

Balaam’s four visions

Now, let us take a look at Balaam’s four visions or prophecies.

Balaam’s first prophecy – Israel’s special calling from God

1. Now, Balaam’s first prophecy is basically that Israel has a special calling from God.

Look at verse 11 of Numbers, chapter 23.

Then Balak said to Balaam, “What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, but behold, you have actually blessed them!”

Continue to verse 12, and do not think that Balaam is standing there with his chest sticking out and saying this with great courage. I think he is shielding his head.

He replied, “Must I not be careful to speak what the Lord puts in my mouth?”

In other words, “I didn’t say this, God did. Don’t blame me.”

Balaam’s second prophecy – Israel’s acceptance by God

2. Balaam comes out with a second prophecy which could be summarized as, Israel is accepted by God.

Look at verse 13.

Then Balak said to him, “Please come with me to another place from where you may see them [the Israelites]. . .”

Skip to verses 19 and 20. Balaam says,

“God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? Behold, I have received a command to bless; when He has blessed, then I cannot revoke it.”

I love Balak’s response to this in verse 25.

Then Balak said to Balaam, “Do not curse them at all nor bless them at all!”

To put this in modern day vernacular, “Balaam, keep your mouth quiet. I don’t want you to say something negative or positive. This is getting worse.”

Look at verse 26.

But Balaam replied to Balak, “Did I not tell you, ‘Whatever the Lord speaks, that I must do?’”

Balaam is saying, “Don’t hit me.” Skip to verses 28 and 29.

So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor which overlooks the wasteland. Balaam said to Balak, “Build seven altars for me here and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me here.” Balak did just as Balaam had said, and offered up a bull and a ram on each altar.

In other words, “Let’s try this sacrifice thing again. Maybe we weren’t holding our mouths right the first time. Let’s try to do this one more time and maybe this time, it will catch.”

Balaam’s third prophecy – Israel’s enjoyment of Canaan

3. Balaam’s third prophecy is that Israel will enjoy Canaan.

I love the way this one ends. Look at verse 9 of chapter 24. I think Balaam is whispering this. He is scared to death.

He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him? Blessed is everyone who blesses you [Israel], and cursed is everyone who curses you.

Now Balaam is running for cover. Continue to verse 10. Balak is really upset now.

Then Balak’s anger burned against Balaam, and he struck his hands together; and Balak said to Balaam, “I called you to curse my enemies, but behold, you have persisted in blessing them these three times!”

Balaam’s fourth prophecy – Israel’s future glory is assured

4. The fourth prophecy is that Israel's future glory is assured.

Look at verses 14 through 15a.

“And now, behold, I am going to my people; come, and I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the days to come.” He took up his discourse and said, . . .

I love this because Balak did not ask for this, it is free. Balaam is on a roll and he is not about to stop because, as we know, God has a word in his mouth. So, even though Balak did not ask for it, Balaam keeps prophesying. Skip to verse 17 and note this.

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; a star shall come forth from Jacob, a scepter shall rise from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab . . .

So, the fourth prophecy is that Israel's future glory is assured. This is also a prophetic illustration of Jesus Christ, the star of Jacob.

Is There a Nation to be Seduced?

Now, if the story had ended at this point, we might give Balaam the benefit of the doubt. In fact, if you read the four references to Balaam in the Old Testament, there is nothing that really indicates he is painted the way I am painting him today. So, if you are thinking critically, you may be thinking, “All right, now you need to prove to me that he is really as bad as you're saying he is.”

There are other illustrations of Balaam in the New Testament and there is one I want to point out. Hold your finger in Numbers and turn to Revelation, chapter 2.

The last book of the Bible gives us some insight as to what happened between the last verse of Numbers, chapter 24, and the first verse of Numbers, chapter 25. Did you catch that? There is a gap between the ending of chapter 24 of Numbers and the beginning of chapter 25. Something happened during that gap that explains Numbers, chapter 25. Look at verse 14 of Revelation, chapter 2, to learn what happened.

But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.

From this passage we learn that between chapters 24 and 25 of the book of Numbers, although Balaam knows that he is beat, he still wants the fee. He is, as I have said, a prophet with a price tag; he is willing to say whatever people want him to say, as long as the fee is fat enough. So he comes to Balak and says, “Now look, I can't prophesy a curse against Israel, but I know what can happen to bring this nation to their knees.”

What is it that would bring Israel to its knees? Balaam taught them to eat that which was sacrificed to idols. That is a euphemism meaning that he taught them to become involved in idolatry and also, to commit acts of immorality.

Now we know that the practice of Baal, at Baal-Peor, involved religious prostitution. In fact, in that day, it was diametrically opposed to the Israelite, as usually the high priest was a high priestess; a woman. In fact, the women of that day, the Midianite priestesses, who were nothing less than prostitutes, engaged the men of Midian and Moab in the practice of Baal and immorality, and assumed their acts of immorality were actually acts of worship before their false gods.

Now, I want you to notice what happens. It almost works – Israel almost collapses. Look at verse 1 of Numbers, chapter 25.

While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab.

In other words, these Moabite women, or these prostitutes, invited and infiltrated, and then, introduced idolatry to the people.

Continue to verse 2. The first step is, “Don't do it, just come and watch.” Then, the next steps follow.

For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and then the people ate and bowed down to their gods.

Can you believe this? Continue to verses 3 through 5.

So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the Lord was angry against Israel. The Lord said to Moses, “Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the Lord, so that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel.” So Moses said to the judges of Israel, “Each of you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor.”

Now note verse 6. This is crucial to understanding what happens.

Then behold, one of the sons of Israel came and brought to his relatives a Midianite woman, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, while they were weeping at the doorway of the tent of meeting.

Let me explain some of this, since it is couched in Hebrew euphemism. The Midianite woman has a definite article which means, the Midianitess. Most believe that this was the high priestess of the Baal of Peor religion or false system. He brings her to the tent of the meeting; that is, the doorway to the tabernacle. The verse says that they are weeping there. That was a euphemism for laughing with physical pleasure. I think it is obvious, without description, what is happening, but I want you to see that this couple is, in effect, taunting the holiness of God in the doorway of the tabernacle. This is the high priestess of Baal with an Israelite, involved in immorality, in the sight of the people, in the place where God's holiness dwelt.

Evidently, immorality was happening among the camp because a plague had started. Continue to verses 7 and 8a.

When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. . . .

Phinehas was probably the only one who was not so stunned that he could not move. He literally pierced this man and woman through their stomachs. In other words, with one thrust of his spear, he pins them to the sandy floor of the tabernacle, as an act of justice, defending the honor and the holiness of God.

I read this and thought, "Good night!"

Look at verses 8b through 9.

. . . So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked. Those who died by the plague were 24,000.

That was the number who died before the plague was checked.

Skip to verse 15, which identifies the woman.

The name of the Midianite woman who was slain was Cozbi the daughter of Zur, who

was head of the people of a father's household in Midian.

Look at verse 18.

for they have been hostile to you with their tricks, with which they have deceived you in the affair of Peor, and in the affair of Cozbi, the daughter of the leader of Midian, their sister who was slain on the day of the plague because of Peor.

That is the end of the story. Israel is safe. They were judged, yet safe.

Principles Learned from Balaam

The Israelite's forty years of wandering are nearly over. In fact, they have already registered some victories against the people that opposed them in entering the land. However, before we end this story, let us apply some things to where you and I live today.

There are so many applications that I cannot give them all. We will start with what we learn from Balaam.

It is possible to do spiritual things without being spiritual

1. First, it is possible to do spiritual things without being spiritual.

It is possible to do things that would please God without having a heart in tune with God. In other words, it is possible to have the correct message, but the wrong motive.

We can go through the motions and everyone will say, "Aren't they spiritual? Look at what they do."

However, in our heart, the motivation is not spiritual; that is, our heart is not in tune with God.

It is possible to say spiritual things without being spiritual

2. Secondly, similar to the first point, it is possible to say spiritual things without being spiritual.

Think of Balaam, an ungodly prophet; an unbeliever – did you read the prophecies that he gave? It is possible to say some things to which everyone would say, "Wow! That sounds spiritual." But, at the same time, to be completely out of it, spiritually speaking.

Ladies and gentlemen, your spirituality and mine is not determined on Sunday at church. We can come to church and sing with the saints and raise the roof, but it is not what we say on Sunday at church that marks us, it is what we say afterward. It is not how we look; it is not the smile on Sunday, although that is important, it is what we do tomorrow; it is how we live tomorrow – that is the barometer of our credibility. It is not what we do when we are in church on Sunday, but what we do when we leave church. It is under the stress and pressure of the outside that determines whether our hearts are really in tune with Jesus Christ.

It is possible to understand enough about God to fear Him, but not enough to love Him

3. Thirdly, it is possible to understand and know enough about God to fear Him, but not enough to love Him.

One of the things that struck me about Balaam is that he was like a child. He knew enough about Yahweh to know that he had better sit up straight.

We, as children, obeyed our parents for the most part, because we were afraid. We were afraid of being grounded; of being punished or disciplined or whatever word you used. My parents did all three. Yet, it is as I grow older and more mature that I understand that they are to be honored because I love them.

It is possible, ladies and gentlemen, for you and I to do all that we do in our Christian lives as infants because we fear Him. We think, “I’d better give something to Him because He might zap me. I’d better live a certain way; I’d better say a certain thing because that rod up there is mighty long.”

We find it hard to get beyond that point, however, as we grow in Christ; to get to the point at which we begin to obey Him because we love Him. That is the mark in our hearts. *We love Him*. As a result, we do what we do and we say all we say and we live like as we live not out of fear, but out of gratitude and out of love.

It is possible to have the ultimate privileges and miss the ultimate prize

4. Fourthly, it is possible to have the ultimate privileges and miss the ultimate prize.

Balaam is one of the few men in the Old Testament who actually talked with God. He received revelation from God. There are very few who ever received that from God. What a privilege!

In one prophecy, it struck me that Balaam said, as recorded in chapter 23, verse 10 of Numbers,

. . . Let me die the death of the upright . . .

Balaam was so close. He wanted to die a righteous man, but he did not want to live the righteous life. He wanted the rewards of godliness, and so does the world. When they look at you, they see serenity, and peace, and confidence, and fulfillment, and joy. They want those rewards, but they do not want the disciplines that bring those rewards and they do not want the relationship that ultimately produces it.

Principles Learned from Israel

What do we learn from Israel? Let me briefly give two thoughts.

No sin is beyond our reach when we ignore God’s revelation

1. First, no sin is beyond our reach when we ignore God’s revelation.

Can you imagine what happened on that day in the doorway of the tabernacle – the place where God dwelt? Would you have ever believed that the Israelites were coexisting with the Midianites? Would you have believed that the Israelites, who have seen God’s hand in miracle after miracle; who have seen His providential power, would be bowing to Baal?

It is the same with us, as God’s chosen. Ladies and gentlemen, when we hedge on God’s revelation; when we know He says to do this or to say this or to live in a particular way and do not do it, I would not, in my life, fear the stick as much as I would fear where that deviation would take me or where I would end up.

We must be so cautious and so careful. When we know that God speaks through His word to do A, and B, and C, and we say, “God, I’ll hedge there; I’ll say, ‘No,’ to that,” we open the door to denying things that we would *never* think we would deny and to becoming involved in activities that we would *never* think we would be capable of being involved in. It begins by ignoring God’s revelation.

It is possible to be led and to be protected by God without being aware of it

2. Secondly, it is possible to be led and to be protected by God without being aware.

One of the things I like about these chapters in Numbers is that they let us know what God is doing, when the Israelites did not know. The Israelites were not aware of this. In fact, they did not find out about Balaam until later. God was protecting and keeping the Israelites and was not allowing Balaam to curse them. He was telling the Midianites and the Moabites, “This people over here – they belong to Me.” Israel had no idea that was happening.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to drive this thought into your hearts. Even when you and I cannot see God; even when you and I do not know how He is moving, or if He is moving, or where He is moving, He is involved and active behind the scenes. Only heaven will reveal, as we see the story of our lives – perhaps God will allow us to see His providential care. We will see the things He protected us from. We will see the difficulties. We will see the ones He led us into, even though, when we were led there, we thought, “Where did God go?” Yet, He was holding us by the hand and taking us there. When Israel must have wondered, God was at work.

In the early 1800’s, two English missionaries departed from their homeland and then, left the safety and security of their British vessel. This husband and wife team got into a rowboat and rowed toward an island. Their own story tells us that they were filled with fear and yet, they knew God was leading them there.

The island was inhabited by blood-thirsty cannibals. This couple embarked on this journey with the desire to win the cannibals to Jesus Christ. When they reached the shore, not knowing where to begin, they simply pitched their tent and set up a camp on the beach.

Soon, night fell and they spent time praying for protection. They could hear movement about them in the woods and knew the natives were there watching. They finally fell into a fitful sleep and awoke with the sun beating down on the hot sand. They began their work and over a period of years, finally won the chief of that tribe to Christ. Many of the tribesmen followed. Soon they had, what you could call, a Christian community among these once blood-thirsty cannibals.

It was only then that the story came out. The missionary husband was talking to the chief and said, “I wondered if we would ever survive, especially that first night on the beach. We knew you were all around us.”

The chief replied, “Did we forget to tell you? We would have taken you and eaten you, but your tent was surrounded by the flaming figures of soldiers and we were too afraid to attack.”

Now I know, you hear that story and think, “Well, that’s so dramatic and for them, wonderful.”

However, ladies and gentlemen, if God could just pull back the eyes that shroud us from the spiritual world, we would find, surrounding us, the blazing forms of His ministering angels. Nothing comes into our lives except through His design; nothing happens except through His omnipotent design.

While the Israelites could not see Balaam and Balak and could not understand the smoke of seven altars trying to manipulate Yahweh to curse the people, God said, “No, they are mine.”

God says to the underworld, the same for you and I today. Daily, the accuser accuses us, but God says, in effect, “They belong to Me.”

You belong to Him. Take courage.