

פרשת בלק במדבר כ"ב-כ"ד

Inleiding

Naast de Masoretische tekst geven we de targoem Jeroesjalmi, bekend onder de naam Neofiti, echter alleen de hoofdtekst zonder de opmerkingen in de marge e.d. Het complete materiaal is te vinden op de website [https://mg.alhatorah.org/Dual/Targum_Yerushalmi_\(Neofiti\)/Bemidbar/22.1->#m7e0n6](https://mg.alhatorah.org/Dual/Targum_Yerushalmi_(Neofiti)/Bemidbar/22.1->#m7e0n6) (gebaseerd op http://cal.huc.edu/get_a_chapter.php?file=54001&sub=422&cset=H).

Daarna volgt het bekende commentaar van Rasjje.

Aan het slot hebben we toegevoegd de traditionele tekst van de **מִדְרַשׁ תַּנְחוּמָא**,¹ een tekst die door Rasjje nogal eens wordt geciteerd, met een vertaling. Ter completering geven we ook nog de tekst van de uitgave van een andere versie van de **מִדְרַשׁ תַּנְחוּמָא**, zoals uitgegeven door Solomon Buber.² Rasjje citeert uit beide versies zonder onderscheid te maken. De verschillen tussen beide versies zijn het grootst in Bresjiet en Sjemot.

In het appendix vindt men C.A. Simpson's discussie betreffende het verhaal van Bilam uit zijn studie *The early traditions of Israel*, Oxford 1948, als voorbeeld van het bronnenonderzoek van Tenakh, en daarnaast het materiaal over dit verhaal naar J. Milgrom, *The JPS Commentary Numbers במדבר*, Philadelphia - New York 5750/1990, als voorbeeld van een commentaar dat de samenhang van het geheel voorop stelt. In een excurs bij deze laatste tekst is een vertaling van de zogeheten Deir-Alla-tekst te vinden.

1 Voor het eerst gedrukt in Constantinopel in 1525, herdrukt Venetië 1545; latere edities zijn weergaven van de tekst zoals gedrukt in Mantua in 1563.

2 שלמה באבער, שלמה באבער, מדרש תנחומא: הקדום והישן, מיוחס לרבי ברבי אבא על חמישה חומשי תורה אשר היה טמון וספון בכתב יד באוצרות הספרים עד כה. יצא עתה פעם ראשונה לאור עולם על פי כתב יד ישן נושן הנמצא באוצר הספרים באוקספורד, אשר היה מקדם בגני הרב הגאון ה"ר דוד אפפענהיים ז"ל, וע"י השואה עם עוד שמונה כתבי יד אחרים: א. כ"י הגנוז ברומי בואתיקן ב.ג.ד.ה: כ"י גם כן מאוצר הספרים באוקספורד ואחד מהם היה לפנינו בבית עקד הספרים של הרב החכם הגדול ה"ר חיים מיכל ז"ל ו. כ"י מאוצר הספרים במינכען ז. כ"י ספרדי ח. כ"י שלמה באבער, באבער, מדרש בכלל ובפרט, ממניע שלמה באבער מלבוב, ווילנא תרע"ג evenals de traditionele tekst is ook deze versie herhaaldelijk herdrukt.

פרק כב

1 Daarna reisden de kinderen van Israël, en ze legerden zich in de vlakke velden van Moav, aan deze zijde van de Jordaan van Jericho.	א [וַיִּסְעוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּעֶרְבֹת מוֹאָב מֵעֵבֶר לַיַּרְדֵּן יְרֵחוֹ: ס ס ס]
Daarna reisden de kinderen van Israël, en ze legerden zich in de vlakke velden van Moav, aan deze zijde van de Jordaan van Jericho.	תרגום נאופיטי ונטלו בני ישראל ושרון במישרה דמואב במעבר ליר<דנ>א ליריחו:
2 Balak, de zoon van Tsiptor, zag al wat Israël aan de Amorieten gedaan had.	[פרשת בלק] ב וַיֵּרָא בָּלָק בֶּן-צִפּוֹר אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאֹמְרֵי:
En Balak, de zoon van Tsiptor, zag al wat Israël aan de Amorieten gedaan had	תרגום נאופיטי וחמא בלק בר צפור ית כל מה די עבדו ישראל לאמריי:
<i>Balak, de zoon van Tsiptor, zag al wat Israël aan de Amorieten gedaan had; hij zei: die twee koningen op wie wij vertrouwden konden geen stand houden tegen hen, hoeveel te minder kunnen wij dat dan, vandaar En Moav vreesde zeer voor dit volk (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 2).</i>	רשי וירא בלק בן צפור את כל אשר עשה ישראל לאמרי. אמר, אלו שני מלכים שהיינו בטוחים עליהם לא עמדו בפניהם, אנו על אחת כמה וכמה, לפיכך ויגר מואב (תנחומא):
3 En Moav vreesde zeer voor dit volk, want het was veel; en Moav was beangstigd voor de kinderen Israëls.	ג וַיֵּגֶר מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי הָעָם מְאֹד כִּי רַב-הוּא וַיִּקֶּן מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
En de Moavieten vreesden zeer voor het volk, want ze waren sterk, en Moav was bang voor de kinderen van Jisrael.	תרגום נאופיטי ודחלו מואביי מן קדם עמא לחדה ארום תקיפין אינון ועיקון מואביי מן קדם בני ישראל:
<i>Moav was bang (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 2). Ijv drukt vrees uit, als (Ijov 19:29): Weest bevreesd. Moav was beangstigd, ze waren bang voor hun leven.¹</i>	רשי ויגר מואב, ויגר. לשון מורא, כמו גורו לך (איוב י"ט): ויקן מואב. קצו בחייהם:
¹ Vgl Bresj. 27:46: קצתי בחיי, <i>ik heb een afkeer van mijn leven</i> ; Rasjie neemt aan dat קוץ hier elliptisch is gebruikt.	
4 Moav zei tot de oudsten der Midianieten: Nu zal deze gemeenschap oplikken alles wat rondom ons is, zoals de os het groen van het veld oplikt. Balak, de zoon van Tsiptor, was in die tijd koning over Moav.	ד וַיֹּאמֶר מוֹאָב אֶל-זִקְנֵי מִדְיָן עֲתֵּה יִלְחֲכוּ הַקָּהָל אֶת-כָּל-סְבִיבֵינוּ כְּלַחֵד הַשּׁוֹר אֶת יֶרֶק הַשָּׂדֶה וּבְלֹק בֶּן-צִפּוֹר מֶלֶךְ לְמוֹאָב בְּעַת הַהוּא:
De Moavieten zeiden tegen de wijzen van de Midjanieten: Welnu, deze gemeenschap zal alle steden vernietigen die in het rond liggen zoals een os met zijn het gras op het veld oplikt. Balak, de zoon van Tsiptor, was in die tijd koning over Moav.	תרגום נאופיטי ואמרין מואביי לחכימי מדייני כדון ישצון קהלל הדין ית כל קירויא די חזור חזור היך מה דלחך תורא בלשניה ית עשבה דאפי ברא ובלק בר צפור הוה מלך למואביי בשעתה ההיא:
<i>Tot de oudsten van Midian, maar haatten dezen elkaar niet van oudsher? Want er is gezegd (Bresj. 36:35): Die Midjan had geslagen in het veld van Moav, waaruit volgt dat Midjan ten strijde was gekomen tegen Moav. Maar uit angst voor Jisrael sloten ze onderling vrede (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 3; cf. Sanhedrin 105a). En wat deed Moav raad vragen aan Midjan? Toen ze merkten dat Jisrael op een onaardse manier overwon zeiden ze: de leider van dezen groeide op in Midjan, laten we hen vragen wat zijn karaktertrekken zijn; ze zeiden hen: zijn kracht is alleen in zijn mond (in het gebed), waarop zij zeiden: dan moeten we tegen hen opkomen met iemand wiens kracht in zijn mond ligt (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 3). Zoals de os oplikt, overal waar de os likt, daar rust geen zegen meer op (ibid., cf. Shabbat 140b, 141a). In die tijd, hij had geen recht op het koningschap, want hij was een van de prinsen van Midjan, maar toen Sichon stierf stelden ze</i>	רשי אל זקני מדין. והלא מעולם היו שונאים זה את זה, שנאמר המכה את מדין בשדה מואב (בראשית ל"ו), שבאו מדין על מואב למלחמה? אלא מיראתן של ישראל עשו שלום ביניהם; ומה ראה מואב לטל עצה ממדין? כיון שראו את ישראל נוצחים שלא כמנהג העולם, אמרו מנהיגם של אלו במדין נתגדל, נשאל מהם מה מדתו, אמרו להם אין כחו אלא בפיו, אמרו, אף אנו נבא עליהם באדם שכחו בפיו (תנחומא): כלחך השור. כל מה שהשור מלחך אין בו ברכה (שם): בעת ההוא. לא היה ראוי למלכות, מנסיכי מדין היה, וכיון שמת סיחון מנוהו עליהם לצרף

hem over zich aan vanwege de behoefte van het moment (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 4).	שָׁעָה (שם):
5 Die zond boden aan Bilam, den zoon van Beor, te Pethor, dat aan de rivier ligt, in het land van de kinderen van zijn volk, om hem te roepen, zeggende: Zie, er is een volk uit Egypte getrokken; zie, het heeft het oppervlak van het land bedekt, en het blijft liggen recht tegenover mij.	ה וַיִּשְׁלַח מִלְאָכִים אֶל-בִּלְעָם בֶּן-בְּעֹר פְּתוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר עַל-הַנָּהָר אֲרָץ בְּנֵי-עַמּוֹ ¹ לִקְרֹאֵלּוֹ לֵאמֹר הֲנֵה עִם יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם הֵנָּה כֶּסֶה אֶת-עֵינֵי הָאָרֶץ וְהוּא יֵשֵׁב מִמֶּלִי:
¹ Oude vertalingen en sommige Hebreeuwse MSS lezen hier Ammon, עַמּוֹן.	
En hij zond boodschappers naar Bilam, de zoon van Beor, de uitlegger van dromen, die aan de oever van de rivier was, het land van de zonen van zijn volk, om hem te ontbieden: Kijk, een talrijk volk is uit Egypte gekomen, en kijk, en ze hebben het oppervlak van het land bedekt, en kijk, ze wonen tegenover mij.	תרגום נאופיטי ושלח שליחין לוות בלעם בר בעור פתורה ¹ חלמייה די על גף נהרא ארע בני עמיה למיקרי ליה למימר הא עם סגין נפקו מן מצרים והא כסון ית חווה דארעא והא אינון שרין מן כל קבלי:
¹ Er bestaat een Aramees woord פתור dat zowel 'tafel van een geldwisselaar' als 'uitlegger' kan betekenen en beide betekenissen worden in de commentaren voor פְּתוֹרָה teruggevonden.	
פתורה, als deze geldwisselaar bij wie iedereen haastig geld komt brengen, en zo zenden alle koningen hem gehaast hun brieven, maar volgens de eenvoudige betekenis van de tekst is het een plaatsnaam (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 4). <i>Het land van de kinderen van zijn volk</i> , namelijk van Balak, want daar was hij vandaan en hij (Bilam) had geprofeteerd en hem gezegd: Jij zult later koning worden. En als je vraagt: Waarom liet de Heilige, gezegend zij Hij, Zijn Sjechina rusten op zo'n goddeloze heiden, dat is opdat er geen reden zou zijn voor de volkeren om te zeggen: als we profeten hadden gehad dan waren we ten goede veranderd, heeft Hij voor hen profeten doen opstaan. Maar zij hebben de grens van de wereld doorbroken, want eerst waren ze afgeschermd tegen verboden seksuele relaties, maar deze gaf de raad om zich over te geven aan prostitutie (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 1; cf. Rasjie op BeMidbar 24:14). <i>Om hem te ontbieden</i> , de oproep was voor hem en voor zijn genoeg, want hij stelde voor hem een forse geldsom vast. <i>Een volk uit Egypte getrokken</i> , en als je zegt: wat schaadt dat jou? <i>Zie, het heeft het oppervlak van het land bedekt</i> , Sichon en Og die ons beschermden stonden tegen hen op, maar zij doodden hen (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 4). <i>En het blijft liggen recht tegenover mij</i> , ממלי is defectief gespeld: ze zijn voldoende nabij om mij af te snijden, ¹ zoals (Teh. 118:10): <i>dat Ik hen zal afsnijden</i> (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 4).	רשי פתורה. כְּשֶׁלַחְנִי זֶה שֶׁהִכֵּל מְרִיצִין לוֹ מַעוֹת, כָּךְ כָּל הַמְלָכִים מְרִיצִין לוֹ אֲגֻרֹתֵיהֶם, וּלְפִי פְשׁוּטוֹ שֶׁל מִקְרָא כָּךְ שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם (שם): אֲרָץ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹ. שֶׁל בָּלָק, מִשֵּׁם הָיָה, וְזֶה הָיָה מִתְנַבֵּא וְאוֹמֵר לוֹ, עֲתִיד אֶתָּה לְמֹלֵךְ; וְאִם תֹּאמַר מִפְּנֵי מָה הַשָּׂרָה הַקִּבְ"ה שְׂכִינָתוֹ עַל גּוֹי רָשָׁע? כִּדִּי שְׁלֹא יִהְיֶה פְתָחוֹן פֶּה לְאַמוֹת לֹמֵר, אֱלוֹ הֵיוּ לָנוּ נְבִיאִים, חֲזָרְנוּ לְמוֹטֵב, הָעֶמִיד לָהֶם נְבִיאִים וְהֵם פָּרְצוּ גֵדֵר הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁבִּתְחִלָּה הָיוּ גְדוּרִים בְּעֲרִיזוֹת, וְזֶה נָתַן לָהֶם עֲצָה לְהַפְקִיר עֲצָמָן לְזִנוּת: לִקְרָא לוֹ. הַקְרִיאָה הֵיחָה שְׁלוֹ וְלִהְנָאָתוֹ, שֶׁהָיָה פּוֹסֵק לוֹ מִמוֹן הַרְבֵּה: עִם יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם. וְאִם תֹּאמַר מָה מְזִיקָךְ? הֵנָּה כֶּסֶה אֶת עֵין הָאָרֶץ. סִיחוֹן וְעוֹג שְׁהָיוּ שׁוֹמְרִים אוֹתָנוּ עֲמָדוֹ עֲלֵיהֶם וְהָרְגוּם: וְהוּא יֵשֵׁב מִמֶּלִי. חֶסֶר כְּתִיב, קְרוּבִים הֵם לְהַכְרִיתָנִי כְמוֹ (תהילים ק"ח) כִּי אֶמְלִים (תנחומא):
¹ Rasjie bedoelt dat met toevoeging van de waw het verband met de wortel מול 'afsnijden' duidelijker wordt.	
6 En nu, kom toch, vervloek mij dit volk, want het is machtiger dan ik; misschien vermag ik dat wij het kunnen verslaan, of het uit het land verdrijven; want ik weet, dat, wie u zegent, die zal gezegend zijn, en wie u vervloekt, die zal vervloekt zijn.	ו וְעַתָּה לְכֶנָּא אֲרַהֲלִי אֶת-הָעָם הַזֶּה כִּי-עֲצוּם הוּא מִמֶּנִּי אוּלִי אוּכַל נִכְהֹבוֹ וְאֶגְרֹשְׁנוּ מִן-הָאָרֶץ כִּי יִדְעָתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר-תִּבְרָךְ מִבְרָךְ וְאֲשֶׁר תֹּאֲר יוֹאֵר:
En nu, kom toch, vervloek voor mij dit volk, want zij zijn sterker dan wij; misschien kan ik hen dan vernietigen, dan zal ik hen uit het land drijven; want ik weet wie u zegent, die zal gezegend zijn, en wie u vervloekt, die zal vervloekt zijn.	תרגום נאופיטי וכדון אתה כען לווט לי ית עמא האליין ארום תקיפין אינון מנן מה דלמה דאכול למשצ[י]א יתהון ואטרוד יתהון מן ארעא ארום ידע אנה די את מברך יהווי מברך וית מה די את לייט הווי ליט:
<i>Wij zullen het verslaan</i> , ik en mijn volk zullen hen verslaan. Een andere verklaring: het is een Misjna-Hebreeuwse uitdrukking (Bava Metzia 105b) 'hij trekt voor hem wat af van de prijs,' dus: (misschien) kan ik hun aantal wat verminderen (Midrasj	רשי נכה בו. אֲנִי וְעַמִּי נִכָּה בָהֶם. דָּ"א — לְשׁוֹן מִשְׁנָה הוּא (ב"מ ק"ה), מִנְכָּה לוֹ מִן הַדָּמִים — לְחֶסֶר מֵהֶם מַעֵט (תנחומא): כִּי יִדְעָתִי וְגו'. עַל יְדֵי

Tanchoema, Balak 4). <i>Want ik weet, enz.</i> vanwege de oorlog van Sichon, want jij hielp hem om Moav te verslaan (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 4; cf. Rashi on 21:27).	מִלְחָמָת סִיחֹן שֶׁעָזְרָתוֹ לְהַכּוֹת אֶת מוֹאָב:
7 Toen gingen de oudsten der Moavieten, en de oudsten der Midianieten, en ze hadden het loon der waarzeggingen in hun hand; alzo kwamen zij tot Bilam, en spraken tot hem de woorden van Balak.	ז וַיָּלְכוּ זִקְנֵי מוֹאָב וְזִקְנֵי מִדְיָן וְקַסְמִים בְּיָדָם וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-בִּלְעָם וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֵלָיו דְּבָרֵי בָלָק:
Toen gingen de edelen der Moavieten, en de edelen der Midianieten, (hem) verleidend met verzegelde hulpmiddelen voor waarzeggerij, ze kwamen bij Bilam en ze meldden hem de woorden van Balak.	תרגום נאופיטי ואזלו רברבני מואביי ורברבני מדייניי וגרין דקסמין חתימין בידהון ואתון לוות בלעם ומללו עימיה מלוי דבלק:
<i>Hulpmiddelen voor waarzeggerij in hun hand</i> , allerlei soorten hulpmiddelen voor waarzeggerij, zodat hij niet kon zeggen: ik heb mijn hulpmiddelen niet bij me. Een andere verklaring: dit waarzeggersloon brachten de oudsten van Midjan mee in hun hasd, en ze zeiden: als hij deze keer met ons meekomt, dan heeft hij echt iets, maar als hij ons wegstuurt dan is er hem geen nut, en daarom, toen hij tot hen zei: <i>blijf hier vannacht</i> , zeiden ze: er is geen hoop in hem. Ze gingen bij hem weg, en ze gingen huns weegs, want er is gezegd: <i>Toen bleven de vorsten der Moavieten bij Bilam</i> , maar de oudsten van Midjan gingen weg (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 5).	רשי וקסמים בידם. כָּל מִינֵי קַסְמִים, שֶׁלֹּא יֵאמָר אִין כְּלִי תִשְׁמִישִׁי עִמִּי; ד"א — קָסָם זֶה נִטְלוּ בְיָדָם זִקְנֵי מִדְיָן, אָמְרוּ אִם יָבֹא עִמָּנוּ בַּפֶּעַם הַזֹּאת יֵשׁ בּוֹ מִמֶּשׁ, וְאִם יִדְחֵנוּ אִין בּוֹ תוֹעֵלָת, לְפִיכָד כְּשֶׁאָמַר לָהֶם לֵינוּ פֹה הַלַּיְלָה אָמְרוּ אִין בּוֹ תִקְוָה, הַנִּיחוּהוּ וְהָלְכוּ לָהֶם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׂרֵי מוֹאָב עִם בִּלְעָם, אֲבָל זִקְנֵי מִדְיָן הָלְכוּ לָהֶם (שם): וקסמים בידם.
8 Toen zei hij tot hen: Blijf hier vannacht slapen, dan zal ik jullie een antwoord geven, zoals de Eeuwige tot mij zal gesproken hebben. Toen bleven de vorsten der Moavieten bij Bilam.	ח וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם לֵינוּ פֹה הַלַּיְלָה וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי אֲתָכֶם דְּבַר כְּאֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלַי וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׂרֵי-מוֹאָב עִם-בִּלְעָם:
Toen zei hij tot hen: Blijf hier vandaag en vannacht logeren slapen, dan zal ik jullie een antwoord geven, zoals het mij gezegd zal zijn van voor de Eeuwige. Toen bleven de edelen der Moavieten bij Bilam.	תרגום נאופיטי ואמר להון אביתו הכה יומא הדין וליילא ואתיב יתכון פתגם היך מה די אתמלל מן קדם יי עמי ושרון רברבני מואביי עם בלעם:
<i>Blijf hier vannacht slapen</i> , de Heilige Geest rustte alleen 's nachts op hem, en dit geldt voor alle profeten van de volkeren van de wereld; zo ook Lavan in een nachtelijke droom, want er is gezegd (Bresj. 31:24): <i>En God kwam tot Lavan de Arameeër in een nachtelijke droom</i> , zoals een man heimelijk naar zijn bijvrouw gaat (cf. Wajjakra Rabbah 1 13; Rasjie ad Job 12:4). <i>Zoals de Eeuwige tot mij zal gesproken hebben</i> , als Hij me adviseert met mensen als jullie mee te gaan, dan ga ik met jullie mee, maar mogelijk past het niet bij Zijn eer om mij mee te laten gaan dan alleen met vorsten groter dan jullie. <i>Zij bleven</i> , een uitdrukking die verhindering aangeeft.	רשי לינו פה הלילה. אִין רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ שׁוֹרָה עָלָיו אֲלֹא בַּלַּיְלָה, וְכֵן לְכָל נְבִיאֵי אֲמוֹת הָעוֹלָם, וְכֵן לָבָן בַּחֲלוֹם הַלַּיְלָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (בראשית ל"א) וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים אֶל לָבָן הָאֲרָמִי בַּחֲלוֹם הַלַּיְלָה כְּאֲדָם הַהוּלָד אֲצֵל פִּילְגֶשׁוּ בְּהַתְּבֹא (תנחומא; ויקרא רבה א'): כֹּאשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר ה' אֵלַי. אִם יְמַלִּיכֵנִי לְלַכֵּת עִם בְּנֵי אָדָם כְּמוֹתְכֶם, אֲלֹד עִמָּכֶם, שְׂמָא אִין כְּבוֹדוֹ לְתַתִּי לְהָלֹד אֲלֹא עִם שָׂרִים גְּדוֹלִים מְכֶם: וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לְשׁוֹן עֲכָבָה:
9 En God kwam tot Bilam en zeide: Wie zijn die mannen, die bij u zijn?	ט וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים אֶל-בִּלְעָם וַיֹּאמֶר מִי הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה עִמָּךְ:
En het Woord van de Eeuwige werd aan Bilam geopenbaard, en het luidde: Wie zijn deze mannen, die bij jou zijn.	תרגום נאופיטי ואתגלי מימריה דיי על בלעם ואמר מן אינון גברייא האליין די עמד:
<i>Wie zijn deze mannen, die bij jou zijn</i> , Hij kwam om hem in de war te brengen, en hij zei: soms lijkt dat alles niet bekend is bij Hem, Zijn kennis is niet altijd vergelijkbaar. Daarom zal ik een moment uitzoeken dat ik kan vervloeken zonder dat Hij het merkt (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 5).	רשי מי האנשים האלה עמד. לְהַטְעוֹתוֹ בָּא, אָמַר פְּעָמִים שְׂאִין הַכֹּל גָּלוּי לְפָנָיו, אִין דַּעְתּוֹ שׁוּהָ עָלָיו, אַף אֲנִי אֶרְאֶה עַת שְׂאוּכַל לְקַלֵּל וְלֹא יָבִין (תנחומא):
10 Toen zei Bilam tot God: Balak, de zoon van Tsippor, de koning der Moavieten, heeft hen tot mij gezonden:	י וַיֹּאמֶר בִּלְעָם אֶל-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי בָלָק בֶּן-צִפּוֹר מֶלֶךְ

	מוֹאָב שָׁלַח אֵלָיו:
Toen zei Bilam tot God: Balak, de zoon van Tsippor, de koning der Moavieten, heeft hen tot mij gezonden:	תרגום נאופיטי ואמר בלעם קדם ייי בלק בר צפור מלכהון דמואביי שלח לוותי:
<i>Balak, de zoon van Tsippor etc.</i> , ook al ben ik onwaardig in Uw ogen, ik ben van belang in de ogen van koningen (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 5).	רשי בלק בן צפור וגו'. אַע"פ שְׂאִינִי חָשׁוּב בְּעֵינֶיךָ, חָשׁוּב אֲנִי בְּעֵינֵי הַמְּלָכִים (שם):
11 Zie, er is een volk uit Egypte getrokken, en het heeft het oppervlak van het land bedekt; kom nu, vervloek het voor mij; misschien zal ik ertegen kunnen strijden, of het uitdrijven.	יא הִנֵּה הָעַם הַיֵּצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיִּכְסּוּ אֶת-עֵין הָאָרֶץ עֲתָה לָכֶה קְבֹה-לִי אֹתוֹ אוֹלֵי אוֹכַל לְהַלְחֵם בּוֹ וְגִרְשָׁתִּיו:
Zie, er is een talrijk volk uit Egypte getrokken, en ze hebben het oppervlak van het land bedekt; kom nu, vervloek hen voor mij; misschien zal ik tegen hen kunnen strijden, en hen uitdrijven.	תרגום נאופיטי הא עם סגין נפקו מן מצרים וכסון ית חזווה דארעא וכדון אתה כען לוט לי יתהון מה <ד>איכול למסדרה קרבה לקבליהון ואטרוד יתהון:
<i>Vervloek voor mij</i> , dit is zwaarder dan ארה לי (v. 6), want in dit geval noem je, spreek je [de Naam] uit (cf. Rasjie Wajjikra 24:16) (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 5). <i>Dan zal ik het uitdrijven</i> , nl. uit de wereld, terwijl Balak slechts had 'ik zal ze uitdrijven uit het land. Ik wil niet anders dan hen bij mij vandaan bewegen.' Maar Bilam haatte hen nog meer dan Balak (cf. Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 5).	רשי קבה לי. זו קשה מארה לי, שהוא נוקב ומפרש (שם): וגרשתי. מן העולם, ובלק לא אמר אלא ואגרשנו מן הארץ — איני מבקש אלא להסיעם מעלי, ובלעם היה שונאם יותר מבלק (שם):
12 Toen zei God tot Bilam: je mag niet met hen meegaan; je mag dat volk niet vervloeken, want het is gezegend.	יב וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-בִּלְעָם לֹא תִלְךָ עִמָּהֶם לֹא תֵאָר אֶת-הָעָם כִּי בָרוּךְ הוּא:
Toen zei het Woord van God tot Bilam: je mag niet met hen meegaan; en je mag dat volk niet vervloeken, want zij zijn gezegend.	תרגום נאופיטי ואמר ממרה דיי לבלעם לא תזיל עמהון ולא תלוט ית עמה ארום בריכין אינון:
<i>Je mag niet met hen meegaan</i> , hij zei Hem, als het zo staat zal ik hen vervloeken op mijn eigen plaats. Toen zei Hij hem: <i>je mag dat volk niet vervloeken</i> , hij zei Hem, als het zo staat zal ik hen zegenen. Hij zei hem: Ze hebben jouw zegen niet nodig, <i>want het is gezegend</i> . Een vergelijking: Men zegt tegen de wesp: noch iets van je honing, noch iets van je steek (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 6).	רשי לא תלך עמהם. אָמַר לוֹ אִם בֶּן אֶקְלָם בְּמִקוֹמִי, אָמַר לוֹ לֹא תֵאָר אֶת הָעָם, אָמַר לוֹ אִם בֶּן אֶבְרָם, אָמַר לוֹ אִינָם צְרִיכִים לְבִרְכָתְךָ, כִּי בָרוּךְ הוּא, מִשָּׁל, אוֹמְרִים לְצִרְעָה לֹא מִדְּבַשׁ וְלֹא מִעֶקֶצַד (שם):
13 Toen stond Bilam 's morgens op, en hij zei tot de vorsten van Balak: Gaat naar uw land; want de Eeuwige weigert mij toe te staan met u mee te gaan.	[שני] [חמישי כשהן מחוברין] יג וַיָּקָם בִּלְעָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-שָׂרֵי בָלָק לָכוּ אֶל-אַרְצְכֶם כִּי מֵאֵן יְהוָה לִתְתִּי לְהִלָּךְ עִמָּכֶם:
Toen stond Bilam 's morgens op, en hij zei tot de edelen van Balak: Gaat naar uw land; want het is niet aanvaardbaar van bij de Eeuwige mij toe te staan met u mee te gaan.	תרגום נאופיטי וקם בלעם בצפרא ואמר לרברבני דבלק איזילו לארעכון ארום לית רעוה מן קדם ייי משבק יתי אתי עמכון :
<i>Om met u mee te gaan</i> , maar alleen met vorsten die groter zijn dan u. Het leert ons dat hij een trots iemand was, en dat hij niet wilde melden dat hij onder het gezag van de Plaats stond, dan alleen in ruwe termen. Vandaar (v. 15): <i>Balak [stuurde] opnieuw</i> (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 6).	רשי להלך עמכם. אֵלֹא עִם שָׂרִים גְּדוֹלִים מִכֶּם, לְמַדְנֵנו שְׂרוּחוֹ גְבוּהָהּ, וְלֹא רָצָה לְגִלּוֹת שֶׁהוּא בְּרִשּׁוֹתוֹ שֶׁל מָקוֹם, אֵלֹא בִלְשׁוֹן גְּסוּת, לְפִיכָד וַיִּסַּף עוֹד בִּלָּק:
14 Dus stonden de vorsten der Moavieten op, en kwamen tot Balak, en zij zeiden: Bilam heeft geweigerd met ons mee te gaan.	יד וַיָּקוּמוּ שָׂרֵי מוֹאָב וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-בָּלָק וַיֹּאמְרוּ מֵאֵן בִּלְעָם הִלָּךְ עִמָּנוּ:
De edelen van de Moavieten stonden op, en ze kwamen bij Balak, en ze zeiden: Bilam heeft geweigerd met ons mee te gaan.	תרגום נאופיטי וקמו רברבני מואביי ואתון לוות בלק ואמרין סרב בלעם מייתי עמן:
15 Toen stuurde Balak opnieuw vorsten, meer en eerwaardiger	טו וַיִּסַּף עוֹד בָּלָק שְׂלַח שָׂרִים רַבִּים וְנִכְבָּדִים

dan die andere.	מֵאַחֶ֑הּ:
En Balak zond opnieuw boden, meer en eerwaardiger dan de andere.	תרגום נאופיטי ואוסיף עוד בלק ושלח שליחין סגין ומי[י]קרין מן אלין:
16 Ze kwamen bij Bilam, en zeiden hem: Zo zegt Balak, de zoon van Tsippor: Laat u toch niet beletten tot mij te komen!	טז וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־בִּלְעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ כֹּה אָמַר בָּלָק בֶּן־צְפּוֹר אֶל־נָא תִמְנַע מִהֲלֹךְ אֵלַי:
Ze kwamen bij Bilam, en zeiden hem: dus spreekt Balak, de zoon van Tsippor: Laat u toch niet weerhouden tot mij te komen.	תרגום נאופיטי ואתון לוות בלעם ואמרין ליה כדין אמר בלק בר צפור לא כען תתמנע מן מייתי לוותי:
17 Want ik zal u zeer veel eer bewijzen, en al wat gij tot mij zeggen zult, dat zal ik doen; zo kom toch, vervloek mij dit volk!	יז כִּי־כִבֹּד אֲכַבֵּדְךָ מְאֹד וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמַר אֵלַי אֶעֱשֶׂה וְלִכְה־נָּא קָבֵה לִי אֶת הָעַם הַזֶּה:
Want ik zal u veel eer bewijzen, en al wat u mij zeggen zult, zal ik doen, maar kom toch, vervloek mij dit volk!	תרגום נאופיטי ארום מיקרה אייקר יתך לחדא וכל מה די תאמר לי אעבד ואתה כען לווט לי ית עמא האליין:
<i>Want ik zal u zeer veel eer bewijzen</i> , ik geef u meer dan wat u eerder ontvangen hebt (cf. Rasjie Bemidbar 21:27; Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 6).	רשי כי כבד אכבדך מאד. יותר ממה שְהִיית נוטל לְשַׁעֲבֵר אֲנִי נוֹתֵן לָךְ (שם): כי כבד אכבדך מאד
18 Toen antwoordde Bilam, en hij zei tot de dienaren van Balak: Wanneer Balak mij zijn huis vol zilver en goud zou geven, zou ik niet in staat zijn het bevel van de Eeuwige, mijn God, te overtreden, om iets kleins of groots te doen.	יח וַיַּעַן בִּלְעָם וַיֹּאמַר אֶל־עֲבָדַי בָּלָק אִם־יִתְּנוּ־לִי בָלָק מָלֵא בֵיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא אוֹכַל לַעֲבֹל אֶת־פִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת קִטְנָה אוֹ גְדוֹלָה:
En Bilam antwoordde en zei tot de dienaren van Balak: Al zou Balak mijn zijn huis vol zilver en goud geven, ik zou niet in staat zijn het uitgesproken bevel van de Eeuwige mijn God te overtreden, om iets kleins of groots te doen.	תרגום נאופיטי וענה בלעם ואמר לעבדוי דבלק אם יתן לי בלק מלא ביתיה כסף וזהב לית יכיל למעברה על פום גזירת מימריה דיי אלהי למעבד זעירה או רבתה:
<i>Zijn huis vol zilver en goud</i> , dit leert ons dat hij hebzuchtig was en begerig naar het geld van anderen. Hij zei: hij zou mij al zijn zilver en goud moeten geven, want, kijk, anders zou hij vele legers moeten huren, maar dan nog blijft het onzeker of hij kan winnen, maar ik zou er zeker bij winnen (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 6). <i>Ik kan niet overtreden</i> , tegen zijn eigen wil maakt hij duidelijk dat hij onder de macht van anderen viel, en hij profeteerde hier dat hij niet in staat was de zegeningen waarmee de aartsvaders gezegend waren door de uitspraak van de Sjechina ongedaan te maken (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 6).	רשי מלא ביתו כסף וזהב. לְמַדְנוּ שֶׁנִּפְשׁוּ רַחֲבָה וּמְחַמֵּד מִמוֹן אַחֲרִים, אָמַר רָאִי לוֹ לִתֵּן לִי כָל כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב שְׁלוֹ, שְׁהָרִי צָרִיד לְשֹׁכֵר חִילוֹת רַבּוֹת, סֶפֶק נּוֹצֵחַ סֶפֶק אֵינוֹ נּוֹצֵחַ, וְאֲנִי וְדָאִי נּוֹצֵחַ (שם): לא אוכל לעבר. עַל כִּרְחוּ גְלָה שֶׁהוּא בִרְשׁוֹת אַחֲרִים, וְנִתְּנָא כָּאֵן שְׁאֵינוֹ יָכוֹל לְבַטֵּל הַבְּרָכוֹת שֶׁנִּתְּבָּרוּ הָאֲבוֹת מִפִּי הַשְּׂכִינָה (שם): לא אוכל לעבר
19 En nu, blijven jullie toch ook hier vannacht, dan zal ik weten, wat de Eeuwige verder tot mij spreken zal.	יט וַעֲתָה שְׁבוּ נָא בָּזָה גַם־אַתֶּם הַלַּיְלָה וְאִדְעָה מִה־יִּסְרָף יְהוָה דְּבַר עַמִּי:
En nu, komt en blijft hier ook vannacht dan zal ik weten, wat van bij de Eeuwige verder tot mij zal gesproken worden.	תרגום נאופיטי וכעין סקון תבו כען הכה אוף אתון בליליה הדין ואדע מה יוסיף מן קדם יי למת[מ]ללה עמי:
<i>Jullie ook</i> , zijn mond deed hem struikelen: ook wat jullie aangaat geldt, ten slotte zullen jullie weggaan net zo teleurgesteld als de eersten (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 6). <i>Wat Hij zal toevoegen</i> , Hij zal Zijn woorden niet van zegen in vloek veranderen, maar ik hoop dat Hij niet te zegenen toevoegt. Hier profeteerde hij dat Hij hen meer zegeningen zou geven door zijn hand (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 6).	רשי גם אתם. פִּיו הִכְשִׁילוֹ — גַּם אַתֶּם סוֹפְכֶם לַיְלָה בְּפִחֵי נֶפֶשׁ כְּרָאוּשׁוֹנִים: מה יסף. לא יִשְׁנֶה דְּבָרָיו מִבְּרָכָה לְקָלָלָה, הַלּוֹאִי שְׁלֹא יוֹסִיף לְבָרֵךְ; כָּאֵן נִתְּנָא שְׁעָתִיד לְהוֹסִיף לָהֶם בְּרָכוֹת עַל יְדוֹ (שם): מה יסף
20 God nu kwam 's nachts tot Bilam, en zei tot hem: Omdat die	כ וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים אֶל־בִּלְעָם לַיְלָה וַיֹּאמַר לוֹ

mannen gekomen zijn, om u te roepen, sta op, ga met hen mee; maar u zult alleen dat doen, wat Ik tot u zeggen zal.	אִם-לִקְרָא לָךְ בָּאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים קוּם לָךְ אִתָּם וְאָדָּ אֶת-הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר-אֲדַבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ אִתּוֹ תַעֲשֶׂה:
En het Woord van de Eeuwige werd geopenbaard aan Bilam in de nacht en Het zei hem: Als de mannen gekomen zijn om u te ontbieden, sta op, ga met hen mee; maar u zult alleen dat doen, wat Ik tot u zeggen zal.	תרגום נאופיטי ואתגלי מימריה דיי על בלעם בליליה ואמר לה אין למקרא לך אתו גבריא קום אזל עמהון ולחוד ית פתגמא דאמלל עמד ייתה תעבד:
<i>Als (het is) om u te ontbieden, als de uitnodiging voor u is, en u denkt daaraan te verdienen, sta dan op en ga met hen mee; maar slechts, ondanks uzelf; maar u zult alleen dat doen, wat Ik tot u zeggen zal, toch ging Bilam, hij zei: misschien kan ik Hem overtuigen en zal Hij ermee instemmen.</i>	רשי אם לקרא לך אם הקריאה שלך וסבור אתה לטל עליה שָׁכַר, קום לך אתם: ואך על כָּרַחךְ את הדבר אשר אדבר אליך אתו תעשה ואף על פי כן וילך בלעם, אָמַר שָׁמָּא אֶפְתָּנוּ וְיִתְרָצָה:
21 Toen stond Bilam 's morgens op, en hij zadelde zijn ezelin, en hij vertrok met de vorsten van Moav.	[שלישי] כא וַיָּקָם בַּלַּעַם בִּבְקָר וַיַּחֲבֹשׂ אֶת-אֶתְנֹו וַיֵּלֶךְ עִם-שָׂרֵי מוֹאָב:
Toen stond Bilam 's morgens op, en hij zadelde zijn ezelin, en hij vertrok met de edelen van de Moavieten.	תרגום נאופיטי וקם בלעם בצפרא ושוי ית אתנתה ואזל עם רברבני מואבי:
<i>En hij zadelde zijn ezelin, hieruit volgt dat de haat de regel verbreekt, want hij zadelde zelf. De Heilige, gezegend zij Hij, zei: Goddeloze, hun vader Avraham ging u al voor, want er is gezegd (Bresj. 22:3): Avraham stond 's morgens vroeg op en zadelde zijn ezel (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 8; cf. Sanhedrin 105b). Met de vorsten van Moav, zijn hart was gelijk aan hun hart (cf. Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 8).</i>	רשי ויחבש את אתנו. מִכָּאן שֶׁהַשְׂנָאָה מְקַלְקֶלֶת אֶת הַשְׂוֹרָה, שֶׁחֲבֹשׁ הוּא בְּעַצְמוֹ; אָמַר הַקֹּב"ה רָשָׁע כָּבֵד קִדְמָךְ אֲבִירָהּ אֲבִירָהּ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (בראשית כ"ב) וַיִּשְׁפָּם אֲבִירָהּ בִּבְקָר וַיַּחֲבֹשׂ אֶת חֲמֹרֹו (תנחומא): עִם שָׂרֵי מוֹאָב. לְבוֹ כָּלכֶם שָׁוִה:
22 Maar de woede van God ontbrandde, omdat hij ging; en de Engel van de Eeuwige stelde Zich in de weg, om hem tegen te houden; hij nu reed op zijn ezelin, en twee van zijn knechten waren bij hem.	כב וַיַּחֲרָאֵף אֱלֹהִים כִּי-הוֹלֵךְ הוּא וַיִּתְּיָצֵב מִלֶּאֱדָ יְהוָה בִּדְרֹךְ לְשַׁטֵּן לוֹ וְהוּא רָכַב עַל-אֶתְנֹו וּשְׁנֵי נְעָרָיו עִמּוֹ:
Maar de woede van God ontbrandde, omdat hij ging; en de Engel van de Eeuwige stelde Zich in de weg om hem tegen te houden; hij nu reed op zijn ezelin, en twee van zijn knechten waren bij hem.	תרגום נאופיטי ותקף רוגזה דיי ארום אזל הוא וא[ת]עתד מלאכה דיי בארחה למסטן לה והוא רכיב על אתנתיה ותרין עולימוי עמיה:
<i>Omdat hij ging, hij merkte dat de zaak kwaad was in de ogen van de Plaats, maar toch verlangde hij ernaar te gaan. Omdat hij ging ... hem tot een tegenpartij, dat was een engel van barmhartigheid,¹ die hem van zonde wilde weerhouden, zodat hij niet zou zondigen en ten onder zou gaan (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 8). En twee van zijn knechten waren bij hem, Hieruit valt te concluderen dat een belangrijk man die op reis gaat twee mannen met zich mee moet nemen om hem te dienen, zodat ze beurtelings elkaar kunnen bedienen (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 8). (Zie Rasjie Bresj. 22:3).</i>	רשי כי הולך הוא. רָאָה שֶׁהַדָּבָר רַע בְּעֵינֵי הַמָּקוֹם וְנִתְאַוָּה לֵילֵךְ: כִּי הוֹלֵךְ הוּא ... לְשַׁטֵּן לוֹ. מִלֶּאֱדָ שֶׁל רַחֲמִים הִיָּה, וְהִיָּה רוֹצֶה לְמַנְעוֹ מִלְּחַטָּא, שְׁלֹא יַחֲטִא וַיֵּאבֵד (שם): וּשְׁנֵי נְעָרָיו עִמּוֹ. מִכָּאן לְאָדָם חָשׁוּב הַיּוֹצֵא לְדֶרֶךְ יוֹלֵךְ עִמּוֹ שְׁנֵי אֲנָשִׁים לְשִׁמּוֹשׁ, וְחוֹזְרִים וּמְשַׁמְשִׁים זֶה אֶת זֶה (שם): וּשְׁנֵי נְעָרָיו עִמּוֹ
¹ Rasjie wijst erop dat hier in de Hebreeuwse tekst staat יְהוָה מִלֶּאֱדָ, en dat de Godsnaam naar God verwijst als een barmhartige God.	
23 De ezelin zag den Engel van de Eeuwige in de weg staan, met Zijn getrokken zwaard in Zijn hand; de ezelin week van de weg af, en ging het veld in. Toen sloeg Bilam de ezelin, om haar naar de weg terug te laten gaan.	כג וַתֵּרָא הָאֶתְנֹו אֶת-מִלְּאָךְ יְהוָה נֹצֵב בִּדְרֹךְ וַחֲרָבָו שְׁלֹפָה בְּיָדוֹ וַתֵּט אֶתְנֹו מִן-הַדֶּרֶךְ וַתֵּלֶךְ בְּשָׂדֶה וַיִּךְ בַּלַּעַם אֶת-הָאֶתְנֹו לְהַטִּתָּהּ הַדֶּרֶךְ:
De ezelin zag den Engel van de Eeuwige in de weg staan, met Zijn getrokken zwaard in Zijn hand; de ezelin week van de weg af, en ging het veld in. Toen sloeg Bilam de ezelin, om haar naar de weg terug te laten gaan.	תרגום נאופיטי וחמת אתנתה ית מלאכה דיי מעטד בארחה וחרבה שליפה בי>ד<יה וסטת אתנתה מן ארחה והלכת באפי ברא ומחת בלעם ית אתנתה למכוונה יתה באורחא:

<i>De ezelin zag, maar hij zag hem niet, want de Eeuwige, gezegend zij Hij, gaf aan het beest de gelegenheid om meer te zien, want juist omdat hij rede bezit zou zijn geest in de war raken wanneer hij demonen ziet. Met Zijn getrokken zwaard in Zijn hand; Hij zei: deze goddeloze heeft de hulpmiddelen van zijn vak terzijde gelaten, want het wapen van de volkeren van de wereld is het zwaard, en hij komt tegen hen met zijn mond, want dat is hun beroep; Ik zal dat wat van hem is wegnemen en Ik zal tegen hem optreden met zijn eigen vak, en zo was zijn einde (Bemidbar 31:8): En Bilam de zoon van Beor doodden ze met het zwaard (Midrasj Tanchoema 4:7:23).</i>	רשי ותרֹא האתֹן. והוא לא רֹאָה שְׁנֵתֵן הַקֶּבֶ"ה רְשֻׁת לְבִהֶמָּה לְרֹאוֹת יוֹתֵר מִן הָאָדָם, שְׁמֵתוֹדֵי שֵׁישׁ בּוֹ דַּעַת, וְתִסְרֵף דַּעַתוֹ כְּשִׁירָאָה מִזִּיקָיו: וְחִרְבוֹ שְׁלוֹפָה בִּידוֹ. אָמַר, רְשַׁע זֶה הִנִּיחַ כְּלֵי אֲמָנוֹתָי, שְׁכָלֵי זֵינוֹ שֶׁל אֲמוֹת הָעוֹלָם בְּחֶרֶב, וְהוּא בָּא עֲלֵיהֶם בְּפִיו שֶׁהוּא אֲמָנוֹת שְׁלָהֶם, אִף אֲנִי אֶתְפֹּשׂ אֶת שְׁלֹו וְאָבֵא עָלָיו בְּאֲמָנוֹתָי, וְכֵן סוֹפּוֹ — "וְאֵת בְּלָעִם בֶּן בַּעֲזֹר הָרְגוּ בְּחֶרֶב" (במדבר ל"א):
24 Maar de Engel van de Eeuwige stond in het pad van de wijngaarden, een muur aan de ene, en een muur aan de andere kant.	כד וַיַּעֲמֵד מִלֶּאֲדָּה יְהוָה בְּמִשְׁעוֹל הַכְּרָמִים גֹּדֵר מִזֶּה וְגֹדֵר מִזֶּה:
Maar de Engel van de Eeuwige stond hem tussen de muren van de wijngaarden, een muur aan de ene, en een muur aan de andere kant.	תרגום נאופיטי וקם ליה מלאכה דיי ביני סיגי כרמיה סיג מן הכה וסיג מן הכה:
<i>In het pad, als de Targoem¹ ervan: "in het pad," en zo ook (Mel. i 20:10): Als het stof van Samaria voldoende zal zijn voor de voetzolen, stof dat zich hecht aan de voetzolen van mensen wanneer ze lopen. En zo (Jesj. 40:12) Wie heeft het water gemeten met zijn voeten, met zijn voeten en door zijn lopen. Een muur aan de ene, en een muur aan de andere kant, גדר op zich is er een van stenen.</i>	רשי במשעול. כְּתִרְגוֹמוֹ "בְּשֶׁבִיל", וְכֵן אִם יִשְׁפֹּק עֶפֶר שְׁמֹרוֹן לְשַׁעֲלִים (מלכים א' כ') — עֶפֶר הַנִּדְבָּק בְּכַפּוֹת הָרְגָלִים בְּהִלּוּכָו, וְכֵן מִי מִדָּד בְּשַׁעֲלוֹ מִים (ישעיהו מ') — בְּרִגְלָיו וּבְהִלּוּכָו: בְּמִשְׁעוֹל, גֹּדֵר מִזֶּה וְגֹדֵר מִזֶּה. סֶתֶם גֹּדֵר שֶׁל אֲבָנִים הוּא:
¹ Rasjie verwijst hier (en elders) naar de Targoem Onkelos.	
25 Toen de ezelin de Engel van de Eeuwige zag, klemde zij zichzelf aan den wand, en klemde Bilams voet aan den wand; daarom ging hij door met haar te slaan.	כה וְתִרָא הָאֵתוֹן אֶת־מִלְאָדָּה יְהוָה וְתִלְחֹץ אֶל־הַקִּיר וְתִלְחֹץ אֶת־רִגְלָל בְּלָעִם אֶל־הַקִּיר וַיֹּסֶף לְהַפְתָּה:
Toen de ezelin de Engel van de Eeuwige zag, klemde zij zichzelf aan den wand, en klemde Bilams voet aan den wand; daarom ging hij door met haar te slaan.	תרגום נאופיטי וחמת אתנתה ית מלאכה דיי וחדחקת לכותלה ודחקת ית רגלה דבלעם לכותלה ואוסף לממחי יתה:
<i>zij klemde, zij deed dat zichzelf aan: een nifal-vorm, en de qal geeft aan: anderen, de voet van Bilam — beklemde zij.</i>	רשי ותלחץ. היא עֲצָמָה: וְתִלְחֹץ — וְתִלְחֹץ: אֶת אַחֲרִים — אֶת רִגְלָ בְּלָעִם: וְתִלְחֹץ.
26 Toen ging de Engel van de Eeuwige nog verder, en Hij stond op een smalle plek, waar geen weg was om naar rechts of naar links uit te wijken.	כו וַיֹּסֶף מִלֶּאֲדָּה יְהוָה עֲבוֹר וַיַּעֲמֵד בְּמָקוֹם צָר אֲשֶׁר אִין־דִּדְרָד לְנִטּוֹת יָמִין וּשְׁמָאוֹל:
Toen ging de Engel van de Eeuwige nog verder, en Hij stond voor hem op een smalle plek, waar geen weg was om uit te wijken, noch naar rechts noch naar links.	תרגום נאופיטי ואוסף מלאכה דיי למעבר וקם ליה באתר דחיק די לא הווה תמן אורח למסטי לא לימינה ולא לשמאלה:
<i>Toen ging de Engel van de Eeuwige noch verder, nog verder voor hem; hij ging tot hij voor hem was op een andere plaats. Vergelijkbaar is (Bresj. 33:3): En hij trok voor hen uit. Een haggadische verklaring in Tanchoema: Wat zag hij erin op drie plaatsen te gaan staan? Hij toonde hem symbolen van de aartsvaders (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 8).</i>	רשי ויוסף מלאך ה' עבֹור. לַעֲבֹר עוֹד לִפְנֵי — לְהִלָּךְ לְהִיטֵל לִפְנֵי בְּמָקוֹם אַחֵר, כְּמוֹ הוּא עֲבֹר לִפְנֵיהֶם (בראשית ל"ג); וּמִדְרַשׁ אֲגִידָה יֵשׁ בְּתַנְחוּמָא: מָה רָאָה לַעֲמֹד בְּשִׁלְשָׁה מְקוֹמוֹת? סִמְנֵי אֲבוֹת הָרָאָהוּ:
27 Toen de ezelin de Engel van de Eeuwige zag, ging zij onder Bilam liggen; en de woede van Bilam ontbrandde, en hij sloeg de ezelin met een stok.	כז וְתִרָא הָאֵתוֹן אֶת־מִלְאָדָּה יְהוָה וְתִרְבֹּץ תַּחַת בְּלָעִם וַיַּחֲרִיף אֶת־הָאֵתוֹן בְּמַקְלָו:
Toen de ezelin de Engel van de Eeuwige zag, ging zij onder Bilam liggen; en hij sloeg de ezelin met een stok.	תרגום נאופיטי וחמת אתנתה ית מלאכה דיי ורבעת לה תחות בלעם ומחת ית אתנתה

2 Avoda Zara 4b: אמרו ליה מאי טעמא לא רכבתא אסוסיא אמר להו ברטיבא שדאי ליה מיד ותאמר האתון הלא אנכי אתנך אמר לה לטעינא: 2 בעלמא אמרה ליה אשר רכבת עלי אמר לה אקראי בעלמא אמרה ליה מעודך ועד היום הזה ולא עוד אלא שאני עושה לך רכיבות ביום ואישות rijdt. Hij zei tot hen: Ik liet het in de weide. Dadelijk volgt: En de ezelin zei tot Bilam: Ben ik niet jouw ezelin. Hij antwoordde: voor vrachten alleen. Toen zei de ezelin: Op wie je gereden hebt, waarop hij zei: alleen maar zo nu en dan. Zij zei: Je hele leven tot op deze dag, en verder: ik laat je rijden overdag, en huwelijk (voor sex) gedurende de nacht. Er staat hier geschreven: heb ik ooit de gewoonte gehad (vormen van (סכן) jou zo te doen, en er staat geschreven (Mel. i :2): en wees een verzorgster (vorm van (סכן) voor hem.	
31 Toen opende de Eeuwige de ogen van Bilam, zodat hij de Engel van de Eeuwige zag, in den weg staande, en zijn getrokken zwaard in zijn hand; daarom neigde hij het hoofd en wierp hij zich neer op zijn aangezicht.	לֹא וַיִּגַּל יְהוָה אֶת־עֵינָיו בְּלֶעָם וַיֵּרָא אֶת־מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה נֹצֵב בְּדֶרֶךְ וְחִרְבוֹ שְׁלֹפָה בְּיָדוֹ וַיִּקְדּוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לָאָפִי:
Toen opende de Eeuwige de ogen van Bilam, zodat hij de Engel van de Eeuwige zag, in den weg staande, en zijn getrokken zwaard in zijn hand; daarom boog hij en knielde hij op zijn aangezicht.	תרגום נאופיטי וגל' יי ית עיינוי דבלעם וחמא ית מלאכה דיי קים מתעתד באורחה וחרביה שליפה בידה ועקד ואשתטח על אפוי:
32 Toen zeide de Engel van de Eeuwige tot hem: Waarom hebt jij je ezelin nu al driemaal geslagen? Zie, ik ben uitgegaan tot een tegenstander, omdat deze reis ten verderve voert naar mijn overtuiging.	לֵב וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה עַל־מָה הַבִּית אֶת־אֲתָנֶךָ זֶה שְׁלוֹשׁ רְגָלִים הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי יֹצֵאתִי לְשָׂטָן כִּי־יִרֶט הַדֶּרֶךְ לְנִגְדִי:
Toen zeide de Engel van de Eeuwige tot hem: Waarom hebt gij uw ezelin nu driemaal geslagen? Zie, ik ben uitgegaan om je in de weg te staan, omdat deze weg de verkeerde kant op voert naar mijn overtuiging.	תרגום נאופיטי ואמר ליה מלאכה דיי על מה מחית ית אתנתך דנה תלתא זמנין הא אנה נפקת למסטן לך ארום סטת ארחה מן כל קבלי:
<i>Omdat deze reis ten verderve voert naar mijn overtuiging</i>, onze rabbijnen, de wijzen van de Misjna (Shabbat 105a),¹ verklaren dit (ירט) als een notarikon: (י) zij was bang toen (ר) ze zag en (ט) ze ging opzij, omdat de weg tegen mij is, om zo te zeggen 'om mij boos te maken' en 'om me voor gek te zetten.' Maar de letterlijke betekenis is: de reis was voor mij angstaanjagend, een uitdrukking van (vgl. Jirm. 49:24) 'angst.' Ik zag de man die op weg was (Bilam), dat hij bang was en zich haastte over de weg om mij boos te maken en te verbitteren. Dit is een elliptische tekst, zoals (Sjem. ii 13:39): <i>en [de ziel van] Davied verlangde</i>. Een andere verklaring is dat ירט uitdrukt: 'welgevalen,' zoals (Ijov 16:11): <i>Door de handen van de goddelozen bedaat Hij mij</i>.² Hij maakt me rustig en troost mij door middel van de goddelozen, terwijl zij niets doen dan mij voor gek zetten (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 9).	רשי כי ירט הדרך לנגדי. רבובתינו חכמי המשנה דרשוהו נוטריקון — יראה, ראתה, נטתה בשביל שהדרך לנגדי (שבת ק"ה), כלומר לקנאתי ולהקניטני; ולפי משמעו כי חרד הדרך לנגדי, לשון רטט — כי ראיתי בעל הדרך שחרד ומהר הדרך שהוא לבעסי ולהמרותי, ומקרא קצר הוא, כמו ותכל דוד (שמואל ב י"ג); לישנא אחרינא ירט לשון רצון, וכן על ידי רשעים ירטני (איוב ט"ז) — מפסס ומנחם אותי על ידי רשעים שאינן אלא מקניטים:
¹ TB Sjabbat 105: דבי רבי נתן אמרי: יראה ראתה נטתה יראה, ראתה, נטתה בשביל שהדרך לנגדי. ² De vorm ירט, traditioneel vaak afgeleid van רטט, een wortel die dan alleen in Ijov 16:11 voorkomt, wordt tegenwoordig eerder van ירט afgeleid, dat we hier ook vinden; tegenwoordig in BeMidbar wel als 'schuin, hellend zijn' vertaald en in Ijov, met ירט, als 'in iemands handen stoten.'	
33 Maar de ezelin heeft Mij gezien, en zij is nu driemaal voor Mij uitgeweken; als zij voor Mij niet uitgeweken was, zou Ik u nu zeker ook gedood, en haar in leven behouden hebben.	לֹא וַתִּרְאֵנִי הָאֲתָוֹן וַתֵּט לִפְנֵי זֶה שְׁלֹשׁ רְגָלִים אוֹלִי נָטַתָּה מִפְּנֵי כִי עָתָה גַם־אֶתְּכָה הִרְגָתִי וְאוֹתָהּ הִחַיִּיתִי:
Maar de ezelin heeft Mij gezien, en zij is nu driemaal voor Mij uitgeweken; als zij voor Mij niet uitgeweken was, zou Ik u nu zeker gedood, en haar in stand gehouden hebben.	תרגום נאופיטי וחמת יתי אתנתה וסטת קדמי דנה תלתא זמנין אילו לא סטת מן קדמי ארום כדון יתך קטלת ויתה קיימת:
<i>Als zij voor Mij niet uitgeweken was</i>, אולי betekent hier hetzelfde als לולי; soms wordt אולי gebruikt met de betekenis van לולי. <i>Ik zou u nu zeker ook gedood hebben</i>, dit is een geval van omgekeerde woordvolgorde, en het heeft dezelfde functie als גם, om zo te zeggen: niet alleen zou dit uitstel er geweest	רשי אולי נסתה. כמו לולי, פעמים שאולי משמש בשלשון לולי: גם אתכה הרגתי. הרי זה מקרא מסרס והוא כמו גם הרגתי אותך, כלומר, לא העכבה בלבד קראתך על ידי, כי גם

zijn door jouw ontmoeting met mij, maar ook de dood. <i>En haar zou Ik in leven gehouden hebben</i> , en nu, omdat zij sprak en jou berispte, en jij kon niet overleefd blijven staan tegenover haar berisping, daar staat geschreven: <i>en hij zei: nee</i> , heb Ik haar gedood, zodat men niet zou kunnen zeggen, dat zij Bilam het zwijgen had opgelegd door haar berisping, waarop hij niet kon antwoorden, want de Plaats spaart graag de waardigheid van de schepselen. Zo (Wajjikra 20:16): <i>Men moet de vrouw doden evenals het dier</i> , en evenzo (Wajjikra 20:15): <i>het dier moeten jullie doden</i> (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 9).	הִרְיָגָה: גַּם אֶתְכָּה הִרְגֹתִי וְאוֹתָהּ הִחַיִּיתִי. וְעַתָּה מִפְּנֵי שֶׁדִּבְרָה וְהוֹכִיחָתְךָ, וְלֹא יָכַלְתָּ לַעֲמֹד בְּתוֹכָהּ — כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא — הִרְגֹתִיהָ, שֶׁלֹּא יֹאמְרוּ, זֶה הָיָא שֶׁסִּלְקָהּ בְּלִעָם בְּתוֹכָהּ וְלֹא יָכוֹל לְהָשִׁיב, שֶׁחָס הַמָּקוֹם עַל כְּבוֹד הַבְּרִיּוֹת, וְכֵן (וַיִּקְרָא כ') וְהִרְגֹתָ אֶת הָאִשָּׁה וְאֶת הַבְּהֵמָה, וְכֵן (שם) אֶת הַבְּהֵמָה תִּהְרָגוּ (תנחומא):
34 Toen zei Bilam tot de Engel van de Eeuwige: Ik heb gezondigd, want ik heb niet geweten, dat U tegenover mij op de weg stond; en wel, als het kwaad is in Uw ogen, dan zal ik terugkeren.	לֹד וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלִעָם אֶל־מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה חֲטֹאתִי כִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי כִי אַתָּה נֹצֵב לִקְרָאתִי בְּדֶרֶךְ וְעַתָּה אֲסִירֶנּוּ בְּעֵינֶיךָ אָשׁוּבָה לִי:
Toen zei Bilam tot de Engel van de Eeuwige: Ik heb gezondigd, want ik heb niet geweten, dat U tegenover mij op de weg stond; en wel, als het kwaad is naar Uw inzicht, dan zal ik terugkeren naar huis.	תרגום נאופיטי ואמר בלעם למלאכה דיי חטאת ארום לא ידעת ארום את קיים מתעתד לקדמותי באורחא וכדון אין ביש באפך אחזור לאתריה:
<i>Want ik wist niet</i> , dit was ook een schande voor hem, want ondanks zichzelf moest hij dit toegeven, terwijl hij zich er toch op beroemde dat hij de wetenschap van de Allerhoogste kende, maar moest zijn eigen mond verklaren: <i>ik wist het niet</i> (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 10). <i>Als het kwaad is in Uw ogen, dan zal ik terugkeren</i> , om zich tegenover de Plaats op te stellen was dit antwoord. Hij zei toch: Hijzelf heeft me bevolen om te gaan, en jij, Engel, verklaart Zijn woorden voor nietig. Hij is dat zo gewend, Hij zegt iets en een Engel herroept dat. Hij zei tot Avraham (Bresj. 22:2): <i>Neem toch je zoon</i> , maar middels een Engel nam Hij zijn woord terug. Zo doe ik ook: Als het kwaad is in je ogen, dan moet ik wel terugkeren (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 10).	רשי כי לא ידעתי. גַּם זֶה גִּנּוּתוֹ, וְעַל כֵּן חָרְחוּ הַיּוֹדֵה, שֶׁהוּא הָיָה מְשֻׁבָּח שִׁידַע דַּעַת עֲלִיּוֹן, וּפְיוֹ הָעִיד לֹא יָדַעְתִּי (שם): כִּי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אִם רַע בְּעֵינֶיךָ אָשׁוּבָה לִי. לְהִתְרִים נֶגֶד הַמָּקוֹם הָיָא תְּשׁוּבָה זֶה, אָמַר לוֹ הוּא בְּעֶצְמוֹ צִוִּי לָלֶכֶת וְאַתָּה מִלְאָךְ מְבַטֵּל אֶת דְּבָרִי, לְמוֹד הוּא בְּכֶךְ שֶׁאֹמֵר דָּבָר וּמִלְאָךְ מַחֲזִירוֹ, אָמַר לְאַבְרָהָם קַח נָא אֶת בְּנֶךָ וְגו' (בראשית כ"ב), וְעַל יְדֵי מִלְאָךְ בָּטַל אֶת דְּבָרִי, אַף אֲנִי אִם רַע בְּעֵינֶיךָ צָרִיד אֲנִי לְשׁוּב:
35 Maar de Engel van de Eeuwige zei tot Bilam: Ga met deze mannen mee; maar alleen het woord, dat Ik tot je spreken zal, dat zal je spreken. Dus ging Bilam met de vorsten van Balak mee.	לה וַיֹּאמֶר מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה אֶל־בְּלַעַם לֵךְ עִם־הָאֲנָשִׁים וְאַפְסֵם אֶת־הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר־אֲדַבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ אֹתוֹ תְּדַבֵּר וַיֵּלֶךְ בְּלַעַם עִם־שְׂרֵי בָלָק:
Maar de Engel van de Eeuwige zei tot Bilam: Ga met deze mannen mee; maar alleen het woord, dat Ik tot u spreken zal, dat zult u spreken. Dus ging Bilam met de edelen van Balak mee.	תרגום נאופיטי ואמר מלאכה דיי לבלעם אזל עם גברייה ולהוד ית פתגמא די אמלל עמך יתה תמלל ואזל בלעם עם רברבני בלק:
<i>Ga met de mannen mee</i> , op de weg die een mens wenst te gaan moet men hem laten gaan (Makkot 10b). ¹ <i>Ga met de mannen mee</i> , want jouw deel is met hen, en jouw einde is ten onder te gaan van de wereld. <i>Slechts</i> , tegen je wil, <i>het woord dat Ik zal spreken</i> . <i>Samen met de vorsten van Balak</i> , hij verheugde zich erop hen te vervloeken, net zoals zij (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 10).	רשי לך עם האנשים. בְּדֶרֶךְ שֶׁאֲדָם רוֹצֵה לֵילֵךְ בָּהּ, מוֹלִיכִין אוֹתוֹ (מכות י'): לֵךְ עִם הָאֲנָשִׁים. כִּי חִלְקֶךָ עִמָּהֶם וְסוּפָךָ לֹא־בֶד מִן הָעוֹלָם: וְאַפְסֵם. עַל כֵּן חִלְקֶךָ אֶת הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר אֲדַבֵּר וְגו': עִם שְׂרֵי בָלָק. שָׁמַח לְקַלֵּלם כְּמוֹתָם:
¹ TB Makkot 10b: מוליכין אותו מן התורה דכתיב לא תלך עמהם וכתיב קום לך אתם Uit Torah, Profeten en Geschriften blijkt: Op het pad dat iemand wenst te gaan leidt men hem. Uit Torah, want er staat eerst geschreven: Je mag niet met hen meegaan, en dan staat er geschreven Sta op, ga met hen mee.	
36 Toen Balak hoorde, dat Bilam eraan kwam, trok hij uit hem tegemoet, tot de stad van Moav, die bij de grens, de Arnon, ligt, die aan het uiteinde van het gebied is.	לו וַיִּשְׁמַע בָּלָק כִּי־בָא בְלַעַם וַיֵּצֵא לִקְרָאתוֹ אֶל־עֵיר מוֹאָב אֲשֶׁר עַל־גְּבוּל אֲרִזָּן אֲשֶׁר בְּקֶצֶה הַגְּבוּל:
Toen Balak hoorde, dat Bilam eraan kwam, trok hij uit hem tegemoet, tot het land van de Moaveten, dat tegen het gebied van de Arnon ligt, die aan het uiteinde van het gebied is.	תרגום נאופיטי ושמע בלק ארום אתה בלעם ונפק לקדמותיה לארעהון דמואביי דסמיד לגבול

	ארנונה די בסייפי תחומה:
<i>En Balak hoorde</i> , hij stuurde boodschappers om hem aante-kondigen. <i>Naar de stad van Moav</i> , naar zijn metropool, de aanzienlijkste stad die hij had, om zo te zeggen: Kijk eens wat zij zoeken te vernietigen (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 10).	רשי ושמע בלק . שֶׁלַח שְׁלוּחִים לְבַשְׂרוֹ: אל עיר מואב . אֶל מְטְרוֹפּוּלִין שְׁלוֹ, עִיר הַחֲשׂוּבָה שְׁלוֹ, לֹמַר רְאֵה מָה אֵלּוּ מְבַקְשִׁים לַעֲקֹר (תנחומא):
37 En Balak zei tot Bilam: Heb ik niet met aandrang tot u gezonden, om u te ontbieden? Waarom bent u niet naar mij toe gekomen? Ik ben toch zeker wel in staat u eer te verschaffen!	לוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר בִּלְק אֶל־בִּלְעָם הֲלֹא שְׁלַח שְׁלֹחָתִי אֵלָיִךְ לְקַרְא־לָךְ לָמָּה לֹא־הִלַּכְתָּ אֵלַי הָאֲמַנִּם לֹא אוֹכֵל כֶּבֶדְךָ:
En Balak zei tot Bilam: Heb ik niet met aandrang tot u gezonden, om u te ontbieden? Waarom bent u niet naar mij toe gekomen? Ik ben toch zeker wel in staat u eer te verschaffen!	תרגום נאופיטי ואמר בלק לבלעם הלא משלחת שלחת לוותך למיקרי לך למה כען לא אתית לוותי הא מן קושטה לית אנה יכיל למוקרה לך:
<i>Ik ben toch zeker wel in staat u eer te verschaffen</i> , hij profeteerde dat hij hem ten slotte in schande zou verlaten (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 10).	רשי האמנם לא אוכל כבודך . נִתְנַבֵּא שְׁסוּפּוֹ לְצִאת מַעֲמוֹ בְּקִלּוֹן (שם):
38 Toen zei Bilam tot Balak: Zie, ik ben naar u toe gekomen; zal ik nu echt in staat zijn iets te zeggen? Alleen het woord, dat God in mijn mond legt, dat zal ik spreken.	לח וַיֹּאמֶר בִּלְעָם אֶל־בִּלְק הִנֵּה־בָאתִי אֵלָיִךְ עִתָּהּ הִכָּל אוֹכֵל דִּבֶּר מֵאֻמָּה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר יֵשִׁים אֱלֹהִים בְּפִי אֲתוֹ אֲדַבֵּר:
Toen zei Bilam tot Balak: Zie, ik ben naar u toe gekomen; zal ik nu echt in staat zijn iets te zeggen? Alleen het woord, dat dde Eeuwige in mijn mond legt, dat zal ik spreken.	תרגום נאופיטי ואמר בלעם לבלק הא אתית לוותך כדון הא מיכל אכול למללה כל מן דעם פתגמה די ישוי יי בפמי יתה אמלל:
39 En Bilam ging met Balak mee, en zij kwamen te Kirjath-huzzoth.	[רביעי] [ששי כשהן מחוברין] לט וַיֵּלֶךְ בִּלְעָם עִם־בִּלְק וַיָּבֹאוּ קִרְיַת חֲצוֹת:
En Bilam ging met Balak mee, en zij gingen de koninklijke stad, dat is Maresja, ¹ binnen.	תרגום נאופיטי ואזל בלעם עם בלק ועלו לכרכה דמלכותה היא מרישה:
¹ Lees waarschijnlijk בירושא, als in Targoem Pseudo-Jonathan.	
<i>Kirjath-huzzoth</i> , Een stad vol van straten, volwassenen en kinderen in haar straten, als om te zeggen: Kijk, en heb medelijden, dat dezen niet vernietigd worden (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 11).	רשי קרית חצות . עִיר מְלֵאָה שְׁוֹקִים, אֲנָשִׁים וְטַף בְּחוֹצוֹתֶיהָ, לֹמַר רְאֵה וְרַחֵם שְׁלֹא יַעֲקְרוּ אֵלּוּ:
40 Toen slachtte Balak runderen en schapen; en hij zond aan Bilam, en aan de vorsten, die bij hem waren.	מ וַיִּזְבַּח בִּלְק בָּקָר וְצֹאן וַיִּשְׁלַח לְבִלְעָם וּלְשָׂרִים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ:
Toen slachtte Balak runderen en schapen; en hij zond aan Bilam, en aan de edelen, die bij hem waren.	תרגום נאופיטי ונכס בלק תורין וען ושלח לבלעם ולרברבנוי דעמיה:
<i>Een rund en een schaap</i> , een kleinigheid (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 11).	רשי בקר וצאן . דְּבָר מוֹעֵט:
41 En 's morgens nam Balak Bilam mee, en hij bracht hem op de hoogten van Baäl, en van daar zag hij het uiterste van het volk.	מא וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וַיִּקַּח בִּלְק אֶת־בִּלְעָם וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ בְּמֹת בָּעַל וַיֵּרֶא מִשָּׁם קֶצֶה הָעָם:
En 's morgens nam Balak Bilam mee, en hij bracht hem op de hoogten van Baäl, en van daar zag hij het uiterste van het volk.	תרגום נאופיטי והוה בצפרא ודבר בלק ית בלעם ואסק יתיה לבמתה דבעלה וחמא מן תמן מן קצת עמא:
<i>Bamot Baäl</i> , naar de Targoem ervan: de hoogte van zijn god, de naam van een afgod.	רשי במות בעל . כְּתַרְגוּמוֹ, "לְרִמַּת דְּחִלְתָּהּ", שֵׁם ע"ז:
פרק כג	

1 Toen zei Bilam tot Balak: Bouw hier voor mij zeven altaren, en maak voor mij hier zeven varren en zeven rammen gereed.	א וַיֹּאמֶר בִּלְעָם אֶל-בָּלָק בְּנֵה-לִי בָזָה שִׁבְעָה מִזְבְּחֹת וְהִכֵּן לִי בָזָה שִׁבְעָה פָּרִים וְשִׁבְעָה אֵילִים:
Toen zei Bilam tot Balak: Bouw hier voor mij zeven altaren, en maak voor mij hier zeven koeien en zeven rammen gereed.	תרגום נאופיטי ואמר בלעם לבלק בנה לי הכה שבעה מדבחין ותקן לי הכה שבעה תורין ושבעה דכרין:
2 Balak deed wat Bilam gezegd had; en Balak en Bilam offerden een var en een ram, op elk altaar.	ב וַיַּעַשׂ בָּלָק כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בִּלְעָם וַיַּעַל בָּלָק וּבִלְעָם פֶּר וְאֵיל בְּמִזְבֵּחַ:
Balak deed wat Bilam gezegd had; en Balak en Bilam offerden een var en een ram, op elk altaar.	תרגום נאופיטי ועבד בלק היך מה דמלל בלעם וקרב בלק ובלעם תור ודכר על כל מדבח:
3 Toen zei Bilam tot Balak: Blijf staan bij uw brandoffer, maar ik ga weg; misschien zal de Eeuwige mij tegemoet komen; en wat Hij mij zal laten zien, dat zal ik u bekend maken. Toen ging hij een heuvel op.	ג וַיֹּאמֶר בִּלְעָם לְבָלָק הֲתִיצֵב עַל-עֹלֹתֶיךָ וְאֶלְכָה אוֹלֵי יַקָּרָה יְהוָה לְקִרְאָתִי וְדִבֶּר מִה־יִּרְאֵנִי וְהִגִּדְתִּי לְךָ וַיֵּלֶךְ שָׁפִי:
Toen zei Bilam tot Balak: Blijf staan bij uw brandoffer, maar ik ga weg; misschien zal het Woord van de Eeuwige mij tegemoet komen; en wat Hij mij zal laten zien, dat zal ik u bekend maken. Toen ging Bilam weg met een eenvoudig, aangenaam ¹ hart om Jisrael te vervloeken.	תרגום נאופיטי ואמר בלעם לבלק אתעתד על עלתך ואזל מה דלמא יזדמן מימריה דיי לקדמותי ופתגמא די יחווי יי אתני לך ואזל בלעם בלב יחידי שפי ¹ למילוט ית ישראל:
¹ שפי in het Hebreeuws o.a. een 'kale heuvel,' in het Aramees: 'eenvoudig, aangenaam'; Targoem Neofiti vertaalt het woord twee maal, eerst als 'eenvoudig,' dan als 'aangenaam.'	
<i>Misschien zal de Eeuwige mij tegemoet komen</i> , hij is niet gewoon met mij overdag te spreken. <i>En hij ging</i> שפי, als zijn Targoem 'eenvoudig, alleen,' een uitdrukking die gemak en rust beschrijft, namelijk dat er niets bij hem was dan alleen stilte.	רשי אולי יקרה ה' לקראתי. אינו רגיל לדבר עמי ביום: וילך שפי. פתרגומו יחידי, לשון שפי ושקט, שאין עמו אלא שתִיקה:
4 En God ontmoette Bilam, die tot Hem zei: De zeven altaren heb ik opgericht, en ik heb een var en een ram op elk altaar geofferd.	ד וַיִּקְרַ אֱלֹהִים אֶל-בִּלְעָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֶת-שִׁבְעַת הַמִּזְבְּחֹת עָרַכְתִּי וָאָעַל פֶּר וְאֵיל בְּמִזְבֵּחַ:
En het Woord van God ontmoette Bilam, die tot Hem zei: De zeven altaren heb ik opgericht, en ik heb een var en een ram op elk altaar geofferd.	תרגום נאופיטי ואזדמן מימרה דיי על בלעם ואמר ליה ית שבעתי מדבחיה סדרת וקרבת תור ודכר על כל מדבח:
<i>En Hij ontmoette hem toevallig</i> , een uitdrukking die toeval aangeeft, in negatieve zin, een uitdrukking voor een onzuivere ontmoeting, om zo te zeggen: met tegenzin en schande. Hij toonde zich niet overdag aan hem, dan alleen om de genegenheid voor Jisrael te laten zien (cf. Bresj. Rabbah 52:5; Rasjie ad Wajjiqra 1:1). <i>De zeven altaren</i> , er staat niet: Ik heb zeven altaren opgericht, maar <i>de zeven altaren</i> . Hij zei Hem: de voorouders van deze lieden bouwden voor U zeven altaren, en ik heb er in overeenkomst met al dezen opgericht — Avraham bouwde er vier (Bresj. 12:7): <i>En hij bouwde daar een altaar voor de Eeuwige die aan hem verschenen was</i> ; (Bresj. 12:8): <i>en hij brak vandaar op</i> (... <i>en bouwde daar een altaar</i>); (Bresj. 13:18): <i>En Avraham sloeg zijn ent op</i> (... <i>en bouwde daar een altaar</i>); en één op de berg Moria (Bresj. 22:9). En Jitschak bouwde er één (Bresj. 26:25): <i>en hij bouwde daar een altaar</i> . En Jaäkov bouwde er twee, één in Sjechem, en één in Bethel (Bresj 33:20, BeMidb. 25:7). <i>En ik heb een var en een ram op elk altaar geofferd</i> , terwijl Avraham slechts een enkele ram offerde (cf. Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 11, Midrasj Tanchoema, Tzav 1).	רשי ויקר. לשון עראי, לשון גנאי, לשון טמאת קרי, כלומר בקשי ובבזיון, ולא היה נגלה אליו ביום אלא בשביל להראות חבתן של ישראל (בראשית רבה נ"ב): את שבעת המזבחות . שבעה מזבחות ערכתי אין כתיב כאן, אלא את שבעת המזבחות , אמר לפניו אבותיהם של אלו בנו לפניך שבעה מזבחות ואני ערכתי כנגד כלן, אברהם בנה ארבעה — ויכן שם מזבח לה' הנראה אליו (בראשית י"ב), ויעתק משם ההרה וגו' (שם) , ויעלה אברהם וגו' (שם י"ג) , ואחד בהר המזריה; ויעתק בנה אחד — ויכן שם מזבח וגו' (שם כ') , ויעקב בנה שתים, אחד בשכם ואחד בבית אל: ואעל פר ואיל במזבח . ואברהם לא העלה אלא איל אחד (תנחומא צו):
5 Toen legde de Eeuwige het woord in de mond van Bilam, en Hij zei: Keer terug naar Balak, en zo moet je spreken:	ה וַיִּשֶׂם יְהוָה דָּבָר בְּפִי בִלְעָם וַיֹּאמֶר שׁוּב אֶל-בָּלָק וְכֹה תִדְבֹּר:

Toen legde het Woord van de Eeuwige het woord in de mond van Bilam, en Hij zei: Keer terug naar Balak, en zo moet je spreken:	תרגום נאופיטי ושווי מימרה דיי פתגם בפומיה דבלעם ואמר חזור לזות בלק וכדן תמלל:
6 Toen hij tot hem terugkeerde, ziet, zo stond hij bij zijn brandoffer, hij en al de vorsten der Moavieten.	ו וישב אליו והנה נצב על-עלתו הוא וכל-שרי מואב:
Toen hij tot hem terugkeerde, ziet, zo stond hij bij zijn brandoffer, hij en al de edelen der Moavieten.	תרגום נאופיטי וחזר לוותיה והא אתעתד על עלתה הוא וכל רברבני מואבי:
7 Toen hief hij zijn spreuk aan, en hij zei: uit Aram liet mij halen Balak, de koning der Moavieten uit het gebergte in het oosten: Kom, vervloek mij Jaäkov, en kom, verwens Jisrael!	ז וישא משלו ויאמר מן-אֲרָם יִנְחֵנִי בַלָּק מֶלֶךְ-מוֹאָב מִהַרְרֵי-קֹדֶם לָכָה אֶרֶה-לִּי יַעֲקֹב וּלְכָה זַעֲמָה יִשְׂרָאֵל:
Toen hief hij zijn profetische spreuk aan: uit Aram liet mij halen Balak, de koning der Moavieten uit het gebergte in het oosten: Kom, vervloek mij Jaäkov, kom maak het huis van Jisrael klein voor mij.	תרגום נאופיטי ונטל במתל נבותה מן ארם דבר יתי בלק מלכיהון דמואביי מטורי מדינתה ¹ אתא לוט לי יעקב ואתא זעיר לי דבית ישראל:
¹ lees מדינתה pro מדינתה.	
<i>Vervloek mij Jaäkov, en kom, verwens Jisrael</i> , hij zei hem hen te vervloeken bij hun beide namen, want misschien was één niet duidelijk genoeg.	רשי ארה לי יעקב ולכה זעמה ישראל. בשני שמוזיתיהם אמר לו לקללם שמא אחד מהם אינו מבקש:
8 Hoe kan ik vloeken, die God niet vloekt; en hoe kan ik verwensen, terwijl de Eeuwige niet verwenst?	ח מה אקב לא קבה אל ומה אזעם לא זעם יהוה:
Hoe kan ik vloeken, terwijl het Woord van God hen vermeerderd; en hoe kan ik verwensen, terwijl het Woord van de Eeuwige hen vermeerderd?	תרגום נאופיטי מה אנה לייט וממריה דיי מסגי ¹ יתהון מה אנה מזער יתהון וממריה דיי מסגי יתהון:
¹ Een streepje bij dit woord van de hand van de schrijver toont dat dit woord niet bedoeld was.	
<i>Hoe kan ik vloeken, die God niet vloekt</i> ; zelfs als ze het verdienen vervloekt te worden, kunnen ze niet vervloekt worden. Toen hun voorvader hun overtreding vermeldde (Bresj. 49:6): <i>Want in hun woede sloegen ze een man dood</i> , vervloekte hij alleen hun woede, want er is gezegd (Bresj. 49:7): <i>vervloekt zij hun woede</i> . Toen hun voorvader met bedrog zijn vader benaderde verdiende hij het vervloekt e worden, maar wat is er gezegd (Bresj. 27:33) ? <i>Hij zal zeker gezegend zijn</i> . Bij hen die zegenen staat (Dev. 27:12): <i>Dezen zullen er staan om het volk te zegenen</i> , maar bij hen die vervloeken staat niet: <i>Dezen zullen er staan om het volk te vloeken</i> , maar (Dev. 27:13): <i>Dezen zullen staan bij de vloek</i> , omdat Hij niet over hen de vloek wilde uitspreken (Midrasj Tanchoema, Vayechi 1; Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 12). <i>De Eeuwige verwenst niet</i> , ik heb alleen maar de kracht dat ik weet vast te stellen het moment dat de Heilige, gezegend zij Hij, boos is, en Hij is niet boos geweest alle dagen dat ik onderweg was naar U. En dit is de betekenis van wat er gezegd is (Michah 6:5): <i>Mijn volk, denk er toch aan wat hij (Balak) plande en wat Bilam hem antwoordde, ... zodat er kennis is van de rechtvaardige daden van de Eeuwige</i> (Sanhedrin 105b).	רשי מה אקב לא קבה אל. כשהיו ראויים להתקלל לא נתקללו — כשהזכיר אביהם את עונם כי באפם הרגו איש, לא קלל אלא אפם, שנאמר "ארור אפם" (בראשית מ"ט); כשנכנס אביהם במרמה אצל אביו היה ראוי להתקלל, מה נאמר שם? גם ברוד יהיה (שם כ"ז), במברכים נאמר אלה יעמדו לברך את העם, במקללים לא נאמר ואלה יעמדו לקלל את העם אלא ואלה יעמדו על הקללה (דברים כ"ז) — לא רצה להזכיר עליהם שם קללה (תנחומא): לא זעם ה'. אני אין פחי אלא שאני יודע לכונן השעה שהקב"ה כועס בזה, והוא לא כעס כל הימים הללו שבאתי אליך, וזהו שנאמר (מיכה ו') עמי זכר נא מה יעז וגו' ומה ענה אותו בלעם וגו' "למען דעת צדקות ה'" (סנהדרין ק"ה):
9 Want van boven van de rotsen zie ik het, en van de heuvelen aanschouw ik het; ziet, dat volk zal alleen wonen, en het zal onder de heidenen niet gerekend worden.	ט כִּי־מֵרָאשׁ צִרִים אֶרְאֶנּוּ וּמִגְבְּעוֹת אֲשׁוּרֵנּוּ הֵן־עַם לְבִדְדָּד יִשְׁכֹּן וּבְגוֹיִם לֹא יִתְחַשֵּׁב:
Want ik zie dit volk dat geleid wordt en komt vanwege de verdienste van de rechtvaardige vaderen, die te vergelijken zijn met bergen: Avraham, Jitschak en Jaäkov, en vanwege de	תרגום נאופיטי ארום חמי אנה עמא האליין מדברין ואתיין בזכות אבהתה צדיקיה: דמתילין בטווריה אברהם יצחק ויעק' ובזכות אמהתה

verdiensde van de rechtvaardige moeders, die te vergelijken zijn met heuvels: Sara, Rivka, Rachel en Lea. ¹ Let op: dit volk woont op zichzelf en ze vermengen zich niet met de wetgeving van de volkeren.	צדיקתה דמתילן בגלמתה שרה רבקה רחל ולאח הא עמא האליין שריין לבלחודיהון ובנימוס אומיה לא מתערבין:
¹ Vgl. ook BeMidbar Rabbah 20:19.	
<i>Want van boven van de rotsen zie ik het</i> , ik overdenk hun oorsprong en het begin van hun wortels, ¹ en ik zie dat zij stevig gevestigd zijn als die rotsen en heuvels vanwege hun voorvaders en moeders (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 12). <i>Ziet, dat volk zal alleen wonen</i> , dit is wat hun voorvaders voor hen als privilege verworven hebben: om alleen te wonen, als zijn targoem. <i>En het zal onder de heidenen niet gerekend worden</i> , als zijn targoem. Zij zullen niet uitgeroeid worden met de rest van de volkeren, zoals er gezegd is (Jirm. 30:11): <i>want Ik zal vernietiging brengen over alle volkeren</i> , etc., maar zij zullen niet gerekend worden met de rest; een andere verklaring: als zij verheugd zijn is er geen ander volk blij met hen (Dev. 32:12): de Eeuwige alleen zal hen leiden. En wanneer de volkeren het goed hebben, en zij eten met elk van hen samen, dan zal dat hen niet aangerekend worden en dat is het wat <i>en het zal onder de heidenen niet gerekend worden</i> betekent (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 12).	רשי כי מראש צרים אראנו. אני מסתכל בראשיתם ובתחלת שרשיהם ואני רואה אותם מוסדים וחזקים בצורים וגבעות הללו על ידי אבות ואמהות (תנחומא): הן עם לבדד ישכון. הוא אשר זכו לו אבותיו — לשכון בדרך, כתרגומו: ובגוים לא יתחשב. כתרגומו, לא יהיו נעשין כלה עם שאר האמות, שנאמר (ירמיהו ל') כי אעשה כלה בכל הגוים וגו' , אינן נמנין עם השאר. ד"א — כשהן שמחין אין אמה שמחה עמם, שנאמר ה' בדרך ינחנו (דברים ל"ב), וכשהאמות בטובה הן אוכלין עם כל אחד ואחד ואין עולה להם מן החשבון, וזהו ובגוים לא יתחשב (תנחומא):
¹ Rasjie kiest voor de betekenis 'vanaf het begin,' voor מראש.	
10 Wie zal het stof van Jaakov tellen, en het getal, ja, het vierde deel van Israël? Laat mijn persoon de dood van de oprechten sterven, en laat mijn uiteinde gelijk aan het zijne.	י מי מנה עפר יעקב ומספר אתרבע ישראל תמת נפשי מות ישרים ותהי אחריתי כמהו:
Wie kan de jongemannen van het huis van Jaakov tellen, van wie het gezegd is dat zij gezegend zijn als het stof van de aarde; of wie kan tellen één van de vier gelederen van het kamp vande kinderen van Jisrael, van wie er gezegd is: zij zullen talrijk zijn als de sterren van de hemel. En Bilam sprak in een profetische metafoor: als Jisrael hem zou doden met het zwaard, dan verklaart Bilam zelf dat hij geen deel heeft aan de komende wereld, maar als Bilam de dood van de rechtvaardigen zou sterven, och dat zijn einde, zijn allerlaatste moment zou zijn als dat van de minste onder hen.	תרגום נאופיטי מן יכיל למימני עולימיהון דבית יעקב דאיתאמר עליהון די הוון מברכין כעפרא דארעא או מן יכיל מסכום חדה מן ארבעתי טכסי משריתה דבני ישראל דאתאמר עליהון יהוון מסגין ככוכבי שמיא אמר בלעם במתל נבותה אן קטלין יתיה ישראל בחרבה מבשר הוא בלעם דלית ליה חולק לעלמא דאתי ברם אן מיית בלעם מותין קשיטין לוויי תיהוי סופיה אלווי תיהוי אחריתה בזעירה דבהון:
<i>Wie zal het stof van Jaakov tellen</i> , als de Targoem ervan: de kinderen van het huis van Jaakov, van het vierde deel, van de vier slagorden. Een andere verklaring: het stof van Jaakov: ontelbaar zijn de geboden die zij in acht nemen met betrekking tot stof (Dev. 22:10): <i>Je mag niet ploegen met een os en een ezel</i> , (Wajjikra 19:19): <i>Je mag een veld niet inzaaien met twee soorten zaad</i> . Verder heb je de as van de rode koe en het stof in verband met de ontrouwe vrouw, en wat daar verder uit volgt (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 12). <i>Het getal, het vierde deel van Jisrael</i> , dat slaat op hun geslachtsgemeenschap, het nageslacht dat voorkomt uit hun contacten (zie Nidda 31a, en Rasjie ad BeMidbar 24:3). <i>Laat mijn persoon de dood van de oprechten sterven</i> , d.w.z. onder hen.	רשי מי מנה עפר יעקב וגו'. כתרגומו דעדקא דבית יעקב, מארבע משריתא — מארבעה דגלים; ד"א, עפר יעקב , אין חשבון במצות שהם מקימין בעפר, לא תחרש בשור ובחמר (דברים כ"ב), לא תזרע פלאים (ויקרא י"ט), אפר פרה ועפר סוטה וכיוצא בהם (תנחומא): ומספר את רבע ישראל. רביעותיהון, זרע היוצא מן התשמיש שלהם (עי' נדה ל"א): תמת נפשי מות ישרים. שבהם:
11 Toen zei Balak tot Bilam: Wat hebt u mij aangedaan? Om mijn vijanden te vervloeken heb ik u laten halen, en kijk nu, u hebt hen alleen maar gezegend!	יא ויאמר בלק אלבלעם מה עשית לי לקב איבי לקחתיד והנה ברכתך ברוך:
Toen zei Balak tot Bilam: Wat hebt u mij aangedaan? Om mijn vijanden te vervloeken heb ik u laten halen, en kijk nu, u hebt hen alleen maar gezegend!	תרגום נאופיטי ואמר בלק לבלעם מה עבדת לי למלוט בעלי דבבי דברת יתך והא מברכה ברכת

	יתהון:
12 Hij antwoordde en zei: Moet ik niet in acht nemen te zeggen, wat de Eeuwige in mijn mond gelegd heeft?	יב וַיֹּעַן וַיֹּאמֶר הֲלֹא אֵת אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה בְּפִי אֶתּוֹ אֲשַׁמֵּר לְדַבֵּר:
Hij antwoordde en zei: Moet ik niet in acht nemen te zeggen, wat het Woord in mijn mond gelegd heeft?	תרגום נאופיטי וענה ואמר הלא מה די ישווי מימריה בפמי יתיה אטר למללה:
13 Toen zei Balak tot hem: Kom toch met mij naar een andere plaats, van waar u het zult zien; u zult niet dan zijn einde zien, en het geheel niet zien; en vervloek het mij van daar!	[חמישי] יג וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בָּלָק לֵךְ-נָא אִתִּי אֶל-מָקוֹם אֲחֵר אֲשֶׁר תֵּרְאֶנּוּ מִשָּׁם אֶפְסָה קִצְהוּ תִרְאֶה וְכָלוּ לֹא תִרְאֶה וְקִבְנֹ-לִי מִשָּׁם:
Toen zei Balak tot hem: Kom toch met mij naar een andere plaats, van waar u hen zult zien; u zult dan slechts een deel van het volk zien, en u zult hen niet allemaal zien; en vervloek hen mij van daar!	תרגום נאופיטי ואמר ליה בלק אתא כען עמי לאתר אוחרן די תחמי יתהון מן תמן להוד מן קצת עמה תחמי וכולהון לא תחמי ותלוט יתהון לי מן תמן:
<i>Vervloek voor mij</i> , de uitdrukking van een gebiedende wijs: vervloek voor mij (zie v. 27).	רשי וקבנו לי. לשון צווי, קללהו לי:
14 Hij nam hem mee naar het veld van de wachters, op de top van Pisga; en hij bouwde zeven altaren, en hij offerde een var en een ram op elk altaar.	יד וַיִּקְחֵהוּ שָׂדֵה צִפִּים אֶל-רֹאשׁ הַפְּסֻגָה וַיָּבֶן שִׁבְעָה מִזְבְּחֹת וַיַּעַל פָּר וְאַיִל בְּמִזְבֵּחַ:
Hij nam hem mee naar het veld van de wachters, naar de top van de hoogte; en hij bouwde zeven altaren, en hij offerde een var en een ram op elk altaar.	תרגום נאופיטי ודבר יתיה לחקל סכייה ריש רמתה ובנה שבעה מדבחין וקרב תור ודכר על כל מדבח:
<i>Het veld van de wachters</i> , er was een hoge plaats, waar de uitkijk stond om te waken of er niet een leger op de stad afkwam. <i>De top van Pisga</i> , Bilam was niet zo'n goede waarzegger als Balak. Balak voorzag op zekerogenblik in de toekomst er van daaruit een breuk zoiu ontstaan in Jisrael — want daar stierf Mosje — en zo meende hij dat daar de vloek succes zou hebben, dit is namelijk de breuk die ik zie (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 13).	רשי שדה צפים. מקום גבוה היה ששם הצופה עומד לשמר אם יבא חיל על העיר: ראש הפסגה. בלעם לא היה קוסם כבלק, ראה בלק שעתידה פרצה להפרץ בישראל משם, ששם מת משה, כסבור ששם תחול עליהם הקללה זו היא הפרצה שאני רואה (תנחומא):
15 Toen zei hij tot Balak: Blijf hier staan bij uw brandoffer, terwijl ik daar contact zal krijgen.	טו וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-בָּלָק הִתְיַצֵּב כֹּה עַל-עֹלֹתֶיךָ וְאֵנֹכִי אֶקְרָה כֹּה:
Toen zei hij tot Balak: Blijf hier staan bij uw brandoffer, terwijl ik daar contact zal krijgen.	תרגום נאופיטי ואמר לבלק אתעתד הכה על עלתך ואנה אזדמן הכה:
<i>Ik zal daar ontmoet worden</i> , namelijk door de Heilige, gezegend zij Hij, want אקרה heeft een passieve functie.	רשי אקרה כה. מאת הקב"ה, אקרה — לשון אתפעל:
16 En de Eeuwige ontmoette Bilam, en Hij legde een woord in zijn mond, en Hij zei: Ga terug naar Balak en zo moet je spreken.	טז וַיִּקְרַ יְהוָה אֶל-בִּלְעָם וַיִּשֶׁם דָּבָר בְּפִיו וַיֹּאמֶר שׁוּב אֶל-בָּלָק וְכֹה תִדְבָּר:
En het Woord van de Eeuwige ontmoette Bilam, en Hij legde een woord in zijn mond, en Hij zei: Ga terug naar Balak en zo moet je spreken.	תרגום נאופיטי ואזדמן מימריה דיי על בלעם ושוי פתגם בפמיה ואמר חור לוות בלק וכדן תמלל:
<i>Hij legde een woord in zijn mond</i> , en wat is dit 'leggen'? Wat zou er ontbreken in de Schrift wanneer die zou zeggen: 'Keer terug naar Balak en spreek aldus'? Maar, zodra hij hoorde dat het hem niet toegestaan was te vervloeken, zei hij: Waarom zou ik terugkeren naar Balak, om hem ergernis te bezorgen? Daar plaatste de Heilige, gezegend zij Hij, een teugel en een vishaak in zijn mond, als een mens die een beest prikt met een steekwapen om het te laten gaan naar waar hij wil. Hij zei hem: Ook al wil je	רשי וישם דבר בפיו. ומה היא השימה הזאת? ומה חסר המקרא באמרו "שוב אל בלק וכה תדבר"? אלא כשהיה שומע שאינו נרשה לקלל אמר מה אני חוזר אצל בלק לצער? ונתן לו הקב"ה רסן וחכה בפיו, כאדם הפוקס בהמה בחכה להוליכה אל אשר ירצה, אמר לו על

niet, je moet terugkeren naar Balak (cf. Sanhedrin 105b; Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 13).	כְּרַחֵךְ תָּשׁוּב אֶל בָּלַק (שם):
17 Toen hij bij hem kwam, ziet, daar stond hij bij zijn brandoffer, en de vorsten der Moavieten bij hem. Balak zei tot hem: Wat heeft de Eeuwige gesproken?	ז וַיָּבֹא אֵלָיו וְהָיוּ נֹצֵב עַל-עֹלֹתוֹ וְשָׂרֵי מוֹאָב אִתּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ בָּלַק מַה-דָּבָר יְהוָה:
Toen hij bij hem kwam, ziet, daar stond hij bij zijn brandoffer, en de edelen der Moavieten bij hem. Balak zei tot hem: Wat is er gesproken van de kant van de Eeuwige?	תרגום נאופיטי ואתא לוותיה והא הוא מתעתד על עלתה ורברבני מואביי עימיה ואמר ליה בלק מן אתמלל מן קדם יי:
<i>En vorsten der Moavieten</i> , maar boven (v. 6) zegt de Schrift: <i>en alle prinsen van Moav!</i> zodra ze begrepen dat er in hem geen hoop was ging een deel van hen weg, en er bleef alleen maar een deel over (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 13). <i>Wat heeft de Eeuwige gesproken?</i> Dit is een spottende uitdrukking, als, om zo te zeggen, je hebt geen eigen wil (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 13).	רשי ושרי מואב אתו. ולמעלה הוא אומר וכל שרי מואב, כיון שראו שאין בו תקוה הלכו להם מקצתם ולא נשארו אלא מקצתם: ושרי מואב עמו מה דבר ה'. לשון צחוק הוא זה, כלומר אינך ברשותך (שם):
18 Toen hief hij zijn spreuk aan, en zei: Sta op, Balak, en hoor! Neig uw oren tot mij, zoon van Tsippor!	יח וַיֵּשָׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר קוּם בָּלַק וּשְׁמָע הָאֲזִינָה עָדִי בְנוֹ צִפּוֹר:
Toen hief hij zijn profetische spreuk aan, en zei: Sta op, Balak, en hoor! Neig uw oren tot mijn woorden, zoon van Tsippor!	תרגום נאופיטי ונטל במתל נבוחה ואמר קום בלק ושמע אצת כען למלי ברה דצפור:
<i>Sta op, Balak</i> , toen hij merkte dat hij hem voor gek zette, maakte hij zich op om hem teleurtestellen: ga op je voeten staan, jer hebt het recht niet om te zitten, terwijl ik naar jou gestuurd ben vanwege een zending van de Plaats (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 13). <i>Zoon van Tsippor</i> , dit is een gebruikelijke vorm in de Schrift, zoals (Teh. 50:10): חִיתוֹ יָעַר; (Bresj. 1:24): וְחִיתוֹ אָרָץ; (Teh. 114:8): לְמַעַנּוֹ מִים.	רשי קום בלק. כיון שראהו מצחק בו, נתכונן לצערו — "עמד על רגליך, אינך רשאי לישיב, ואני שלוח אליך בשליחותו של מקום" (שם). בנו צפר . לשון מקרא הוא זה, כמו חִיתוֹ יָעַר (תהלים נ') וְחִיתוֹ אָרָץ (בראשית א'), לְמַעַנּוֹ מִים (תהלים ק"ד):
19 God is geen man, dat Hij liegen zou, noch eens mensen kind, dat het Hem berouwen zou; zou Hij het zeggen, en niet doen, of spreken, en niet bestendig maken?	יט לֹא אִישׁ אֵל וַיִּכְזֹּב וּבִן-אָדָם וַיִּתְנַחֵם הֵהוּא אָמַר וְלֹא יַעֲשֶׂה וְדָבָר וְלֹא יְקִימֶנָה:
Het Woord van de Eeuwige is niet is het woord van de mensen, en de werken van de Eeuwige zijn niet als de werken van de mensen; mensen zeggen iets maar doen het niet, zij besluiten maar voeren niet uit, zij komen erop terug en ontkennen hun woorden, maar God spreekt en Hij doet het, Hij besluit en voert uit, en Zijn profetische woorden staan voor altijd vast.	תרגום נאופיטי לא כמימר בני אנשא מימריה דיי ולא כעובדהון דבני אנשא עובדוי דיי בני אנשא אמרין ולא עבדין גזרין ולא מקיימין וחזרין וכפרין במליהון ברם אלהה אמר ועבד גזר ומקיים ופתגמי נבואתה קיימין לעלם:
<i>Hij is geen mens</i> etc., Hij heeft al aan hen gezworen hen te brengen en het land van de zeven volkeren in bezit te geven, en jij meent hen te kunnen doden in de wildernis? (cf. Midrasj Tanchoema, Vayera 13). <i>Zou Hij spreken</i> , vragenderwijs, en de Targoem: terugkerend en ervan afziend, om ervan af te zien.	רשי לא איש וגו'. כבר נשבע להם להביאם ולהורישם ארץ שבעה אמות ואתה סבור להמיתם במדבר: ההוא אמר וגו'. בלשון תמה, ויתגמו ויתגבין ומתמלכין — חוזרים ונמלכין לחזור בהם:
20 Zie, ik heb ontvangen te zegenen; Hij heeft gezegend, dat kan ik het niet omkeren.	כ הִנֵּה בָרַךְ לְקַחְתִּי וּבָרַךְ וְלֹא אֲשִׁיבָנָה:
Zie, ik ben gebracht om te zegenen, ik zal Jisrael zegenen en de zegen kan ik niet van hen weghouden.	תרגום נאופיטי הא למברכה אדברית מברך אנה ית ישראל וברכה לית אנה מענ מנהון:
<i>Zie, ik heb ontvangen te zegenen</i> , u vraagt mij (v. 17): wat heeft de Eeuwige gesproken? Ik heb van Hem verkregen hen te zegenen. <i>Hij heeft gezegend, dat kan ik het niet omkeren</i> , Hij heeft hen gezegend en ik kan Zijn zegen niet omkeren. <i>Hij heeft gezegend</i> , alsof er staat וּבָרַךְ. Dit is de regel met de letter resj, zoals in (Teh. 74:18): <i>de vijand heeft gehoord</i> (חָרַף voor חָרַף), en ook (Teh. 10:3): [נאץ ה'] רבצע בך, hij die de rover prijst en zegent,	רשי הנה ברך לקחתי. אתה שואלני "מה דבר ה'?", קבלתי ממנו לברך אותם: וברך ולא אשיבנה. הוא ברך אותם ואני לא אשיב את ברכתו: וברך. כמו וברך, וכן היא גזרת רי"ש, כמו (תהלים ע"ד) אויב חרף כמו חרף, וכן (שם י')

en zegt: 'wees niet bang want je wordt niet gestraft, vrede zal er voor je zijn,' maakt de Heilige, gezegend zij Hij, boos. Er valt niet te zeggen dat בָּרַךְ een naamwoord is, want als dat zo was, dan zou er een "kleine patach"¹ staan, met de klemtoon op de eerste syllabe, maar omdat het een pi'el vorm is bestaat de vocalisatie uit "kleine kamats" met de klemtoon op de laatste syllabe.	וּבִצְעַ בְּרָךְ, המהלל ומברך את הגזל ואומר אל תירא כי לא תענש, שלום יהיה לך, מרגיז הוא להקב"ה; ואין לומר ברך שם דבר, שאם כן היה נקוד בפת"ח קטן וטעמו למעלה, אבל לפי שהוא לשון פעל, הוא נקוד קמץ קטן וטעמו למטה:
¹ De "kleine patach" is een oude term voor de segol, terwijl met "kleine	kamats" de tsere wordt bedoeld.
21 Hij ziet geen ongerechtigheid in Jaäkov; ook merkt Hij geen boosheid op in Israël. De Eeuwige, zijn God, is met hem, en het gejubel van de Koning is bij hem.	כא לא־הָבִיט אֶן בִּיעָקֵב וְלֹא־רָאָה עֲמָל בִּישְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו עִמּוֹ וּתְרוּעַת מֶלֶךְ בּוֹ:
Ik zie geen leugendienaren in het huis van Jaäkov, nog dienaren van vreemde godsdienst in het huis van Jisrael. Het Woord van de Eeuwige, hun God, is met hen, en het trompetgeluid van de Glorie van hun Koning is een Schild boven hen.	תרגום נאופיטי לית אנה חמי עבדי שקר בדבית יעקב ולא עבדי פלחן נכריי בדבית ישראל מימר יי אלההון עמהון ויבבות זיו איקר מלכיהון מגן עליהון:
<i>Hij ziet geen ongerechtigheid in Jaäkov</i>, etc. als zijn Targoem.¹ Een andere verklaring: naar de letterlijke betekenis kan het mooi uitgelegd worden: <i>Hij</i>, de Heilige, gezegend zij Hij, <i>ziet geen onge rechtigheid</i>, die in Jaäkov is; wanneer zij Zijn woorden overtreden dan is Hij niet precies met hen om hun overtredingen te bekijken en hun inspanning waarmee ze Zijn wet overtreden (vgl. Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 14). <i>Inspanning</i> עמל kan ook overtreding betekenen, als (Teh. 7:15): <i>hij is zwanger van overtreding</i>, en (Teh. 10:14): <i>want U ziet narigheid en woede</i>, dit omdat overtreding narigheid is voor de Plaats. <i>De Eeuwige zijn God is met hem</i>, zelfs als ze Hem boos maken en weerspanning zijn ten opzichte van Hem, dan gaat hij niet weg uit hun midden. <i>Het gejubel van de Koning is bij hem</i>, gejubel is een uitdrukking van liefde en vriendschap, zoals (Sjem. ii 15:37): <i>de vriend van Davied</i>; (Sjof. 15:6): <i>En hij gaf haar aan zijn vriend</i>,² en zo geeft Onkelos het ook weer: en de Sjechiena van hun Koning is onder hen.	רשי לא הביט און ביעקב וגו'. פתרגומו¹; דבר אחר אחרי פשוטו הוא נדרש מדרש נאה, לא הביט. הקב"ה און שביעקב — כשהן עוברין על דבריו אינו מדקדק אחריהם להתבונן באוניות שלהם ועמלן שהן עוברין על דתו: עמל. לשון עברה, כמו והרה עמל (תהלים ז'), פי אתה עמל וכעס תביט (שם י'), לפי שהעברה היא עמל לפני המקום: ה' אלהיו עמו. אפלו מכעיסין וממרים לפניו, אינו זז מתוכן: ותרועת מלך בו. לשון חבה ורעות, כמו (שמואל ב ט"ו) רעה דוד — אוהב דוד, (שופטים ט"ו) ויתנה למרעהו, וכן תרגם אנקלוס 'ושכינת מלכהון ביניהון':
¹ Targoem Onkelos begint de vertaling van dit vers met de woorden: <i>geen aanbidders van afgoden zijn in het huis van Jisrael</i>.	Ik heb gezien dat er
² Rasjie vat deze zin dus op als: en de vriendschap van hun Koning is nog bij hen.	
22 God heeft hen uit Egypte uitgevoerd; zijn krachten zijn als van een reëem.	כב אֵל מוֹצִיאֵם מִמִּצְרַיִם כְּתוּעַפֹת רָאֵם לוֹ:
God heeft hen uit het land Egypte uitgevoerd; aan Hem is de kracht, de lof, en de majesteit.	תרגום נאופיטי אלהא דאפיק יתהון מן ארעא דמצרים די תוקפא ותושבחתה ורוממותה דידה אינון:
<i>God heeft hen uit Egypte uitgevoerd</i>, U hebt gezegd (22:5) <i>Zie, er is een volk uit Egypte getrokken</i>, het kwam niet uit zichzelf, maar God bracht hen (Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 14). <i>In overeenstemming met Zijn krachten als van een reëem</i>, naar Zijn macht, hoogheid en majesteit, zoals (Ijov 22:25): <i>en krachtig</i> zilver, een uitdrukking van kracht is het in beide gevallen. En ik zeg dat het net zo is als (Bersj. 1:20): <i>een vogel die vliegt</i>, dat is: die hoger en hoger opvliegt, en dat vereist veel kracht. Dus <i>תועפות</i> ראם betekent een vlucht in de hoogte. Een andere verklaring van <i>תועפות</i> ראם: de kracht van Reëmiem, en onze rabbijnen zeggen dat dat demonen zijn (vgl. Gittin 68b).¹	רשי אל מוציאם ממצרים. אתה אמרת הנה עם יצא ממצרים (כ"ב), לא יצא מעצמו, אלא האלהים הוציאם: כתועפות ראם לו. כתקף רום וגבה שלו, וכן וכסף תועפות (איוב כ"ב) לשון מעוז המה, ואומר אני שהוא לשון ועוף ועופף (בראשית א'), המעופף ברום וגבה, תקף רב הוא זה, ותועפות ראם עפפת גבה; ד"א, תועפות ראם תקף ראמים, ואמרו רבותינו אלו השדים (ע"י גטין ס"ח):
¹ TB Gittin 68b: <i>והוא אמר ליה ליה כתיב כתועפות ראם לו ואמרינן כתועפות אלו מלאכי</i>	תרחיה גביה עד דבנייה לבית המקדש יומא חד הוה קאי לחודיה אמר ליה ליה כתיב כתועפות ראם לו ואמרינן כתועפות אלו מלאכי

24:8), en de wijzen zeggen: als de hoge hoorns dat wijst op de dienstengelen, en de wilde os dat zijn de demonen.	
23 Want er is geen toverij in Jaäkov noch waarzeggerij in Israël. Op tijd zal van Jaäkov gezegd worden, en van Israël, wat God gewrocht heeft.	כג כִּי לֹא־נִחַשׁ בִּיעֲקֹב וְלֹא־קָסַם בִּישְׂרָאֵל כָּעֵת יֹאמַר לִיעֲקֹב וְלִישְׂרָאֵל מֶה־פָּעַל אֵל:
Want ik zie niemand die omina schouwt onder het huis van Jaäkov, en niemand die waarzeggerij beoefend in het huis van Jisrael. Op dit moment worden de goede dingen en de vertroosting, die over jullie en het huis van Jisrael komen zullen gezegd tot het huis van Jaäkov. Bilam sprak in zijn profeetische spreuk: Jullie gelukkigen, rechtvaardigen, wat een goede beloning is er voor jullie bij de Eeuwige gereed gemaakt, voor de komende wereld.	תרגום נאופיטי ארום לית אנה חמי נטורי נחשין בדבית יעקב ולא קסמי קסמין בדבית ישראל בעדנא הדין יתאמר לבית יעקב טבתה וניחמתה דעתיד מייתייה עליכון ודבית ישראל אמר בלעם במתל נבותה טוביכון צדיקיה מה אגר טב מתקן לכון קדם יי לעלמא דאתי:
<i>Want er is geen toverij in Jaäkov</i> , zij zijn een zegen waardig, omdat er onder hen geen tovenaars en geen waarzeggers zijn. <i>Op tijd zal van Jaäkov gezegd worden</i> etc., dan zal er weer een tijd zijn als deze tijd, wanneer de liefde voor hen zichtbaar zal worden voor het oog van eenieder, want dan zitten zij voor Hem en leren ze Tora uit Zijn mond en hun plaats zal zijn voor de dienstengelen, en dezen zullen hen vragen stellen: <i>wat heeft God gedaan?</i> Dit is het wat er gezegd is (Jesj. 30:20): <i>Je ogen zien je Leermeester</i> . Een andere verklaring: <i>Er wordt van Jaäkov gezegd</i> , dat slaat niet op de toekomst, maar het heden. Zij hebben geen tovenaar of waarzegger nodig, want elke keer dat aan Jaäkov en aan Jisrael verteld zou moeten worden wat de Heilige, gezegend zij Hij, heeft gedaan, en wat zijn besluiten zijn in de hoge, doen ze niet aan tovenarij of waarzeggeerij, maar dan wordt het hun verteld bij monde van de profeten wat het besluit van de Plaats is, of de Oeriem en Toemmiem maken het hun bekend (Tanchoema). Maar Onkelos vertaalde het zo niet.	רשי כִּי לֹא נִחַשׁ בִּיעֲקֹב. כִּי רְאוּיִים הֵם לְבָרְכָה, שְׂאִין בָּהֶם מְנַחְשִׁים וְקוֹסְמִים: כַּעֵת יֹאמַר לִיעֲקֹב וְגו'. עוֹד עֲתִיד לִהְיוֹת עֵת כָּעֵת הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר תִּגְלֶה חֲבֶתָן לְעֵין כָּל, שֶׁהֵן יוֹשְׁבֵין לְפָנָיו וּלְמַדִּים תּוֹרָה מִפִּיו וּמַחֲצֶתָן לְפָנִים מִמְּלֶאכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת וְהֵם יִשְׁאַלּוּ לָהֶם מֶה פָּעַל אֵל? וְזֶהוּ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (ישעיהו ל') וְהָיוּ עֵינֶיךָ רְאוּת אֶת מוֹרִיד. ד"א — יֹאמַר לִיעֲקֹב אֵינִי לְשׁוֹן עֲתִיד אֶלָּא לְשׁוֹן הָוָה, אֵינִי צְרִיכִין לְמַנְחֵשׁ וְקוֹסֵם, כִּי בְּכָל עֵת שֶׁצָּרִיךְ לְהֶאֱמַר לִיעֲקֹב וְלִישְׂרָאֵל מֶה פָּעַל הַקֶּב"ה וְמֶה גִּזְרוּתָיו בְּמָרוֹם, אֵינִי מְנַחֵשׁ וְקוֹסְמִים אֶלָּא נֶאֱמַר לָהֶם עַל פִּי נְבִיאֵיהֶם מֶה הִיא גִּזְרַת הַמָּקוֹם, אוֹ אוּרִים וְתַמִּים מְגִידִים לָהֶם (תנחומא); וְאַנְקְלוֹס לֹא תִּרגַם כֵּן:
24 Zie, het volk zal opstaan als een leeuw, en het zal zich verheffen als een leeuw; het zal zich niet neerleggen, totdat het den roef gegeten, en het bloed der verslagenen gedronken zal hebben!	כד הֵן־עַם כְּלָבִיא יָקוּם וּכְאֲרִי יִתְנַשֵּׂא לֹא יִשְׁכַּב עַד־יֹאכַל טֶרֶף וְדַם־חַלְלִים יִשְׁתֶּה:
Kijk, het volk is als een leeuw, ze liggen terneer, en als de leeuw staan ze op, want zoals de leeuw niet rust of slaapt tot het moment dat hij het verscheurde gegeten heeft, en bloed gedronken heeft, zo dit volk, ze rusten niet, ze kalmeren niet, tot ze hun vijanden gedood hebben en het bloed van de verslagenen hebben uitgegoten als water.	תרגום נאופיטי הא עמא כארייה שריין וכאריוותה מתנטלין ארום היך מה דאריה לא ניח ולא דמדך עד זמן דאכיל פשוט ושתי ארום ¹ כדן עמא האליין לא ניחין ולא שכדין עד דקטלין בעלי [ד]בביכון וישפכון אדם קטוליהון כמיא:
¹ אדם waarschijnlijk een verschrijving voor ארום.	
<i>Zie, het volk zal opstaan als een leeuw</i> , als ze 's morgens opstaan uit de slaap, dan tonen ze zich als leeuw en leeuwijn door de geboden aan te grijpen, door zich te bekleden met talliet, het Sjema te reciteren, en tefillien te leggen (cf. Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 14). <i>Hij zal zich niet neerleggen</i> 's nachts op zijn bed tot hij opgegeten en vernietigd heeft iedere schadelijke zaak die komt om hem te verscheuren. Hoe dit? Hij reciteert het Sjema op zijn bed, en beveelt zijn geeft in de macht van de Plaats (cf. Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 14). Als er een heel legerkamp of een troep komt om hem te verwonden, dan beschermt de Heilige, gezegend zij Hij, hen, Hij voert namelijk hun oorlogen en velt hen, verslagen. Een andere verklaring. <i>Zie, het volk zal opstaan als een leeuw</i> , als zijn Targoem. <i>Het zal zich niet neerleggen</i> , ... en het bloed der verslagenen gedronken zal hebben! Hij profeteerde dat Mosje niet	רשי הֵן עַם כְּלָבִיא יָקוּם וְגו'. כְּשֶׁהֵן עוֹמְדִין מִשְׁנָתָם שְׁחֲרִית, הֵן מִתְגַּבְּרִין כְּלָבִיא וּכְאֲרִי לַחֲטֹף אֶת הַמִּצּוֹת, לְלַבֵּשׁ טָלִית, לְקַרֵּא אֶת שְׁמַע וּלְהַנִּיחַ תְּפִלִּין: הֵן עַם כְּלָבִיא יָקוּם וְגו' לֹא יִשְׁכַּב. בְּלִילָה עַל מִטָּתוֹ עַד שֶׁהוּא אוֹכֵל וּמַחְבֵּל כָּל מִזִּיק הַבָּא לְטָרְפוֹ, בִּיצֵד? קוֹרֵא אֶת שְׁמַע עַל מִטָּתוֹ וּמַפְקִיד רוּחוֹ בְּיַד הַמָּקוֹם, בָּא מַחְנֶה וְגִיס לְהַזִּיקָם, הַקֶּב"ה שׁוֹמְרָם וְנֹלָחַם מִלַּחְמוֹתָם וּמַפְּלִים חַלְלִים (שם); ד"א — הֵן עַם כְּלָבִיא יָקוּם וְגו', כְּתִרְגוּמוֹ: לֹא יִשְׁכַּב ... וְדַם חַלְלִים יִשְׁתֶּה. נִתְנַבֵּא שְׂאִין מִשֶּׁה מֵת עַד שֶׁיִּפֹּל מַלְכֵי מִדְּיָן

zou sterven totdat hij de koningen van Midian geveeld zou hebben, en hij zou met hen gedood worden zoals er gezegd is: <i>En Bilam de zoon van Beor, de waarzegger, hebben de Jisraelieten gedood met het zwaard met hun verslagenen</i> (cf. Midrasj Tanchoema, Balak 14).	חֲלָלִים וַיְהִיג הוּא עִמָּהֶם, שְׁנֵאֶמֶר (יהושע י"ג) וְאֵת בְּלָעַם בֶּן בְּעוֹר הַקּוֹסֵס הָרְגוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּחֶרֶב אֶל חֲלָלֵיהֶם (עי' תנחומא):
¹¹ Onkelos geeft: יִרְת: עִמָּמָא יְרִת: Kijk, het volk zal wonen als een leeuw, en als een leeuw zal het opstaan; het zal niet wonen in zijn land tot het afgeslacht heeft, want dan zal het erven de rijkdom van de volkeren.	
25 Toen zei Balak tot Bilam: Als je het dan helemaal niet wil vervloeken, dan moet het toch zeker niet zegenen.	כה וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק אֶל-בְּלָעַם גַּם-קֵב לֹא תִקְבְּנוּ גַם-בִּרְךְ לֹא תִבְרַכְנוּ:
Toen zei Balak tot Bilam: Als je hen dan helemaal niet wil vervloeken, dan moet hen toch zeker niet zegenen.	תרגום נאופיטי ואמר בלק לבלעם ל>ה>וד מלוט לא תילוט יתהון ולהוד מברכה לא תברך יתהון:
<i>Als je het dan helemaal niet wil vervloeken</i> ; het eerste גַם voegt iets toe aan het tweede גַם en het tweede גַם iets aan het eerste גַם. Vergelijk (Mel. i 3:26): <i>het zal noch van mij noch van jou zijn</i> ; en ook (Dev. 32:25): ook jongemannen en ook meisjes, d.i. <i>Zowel jongemannen en meisjes</i> .	רשי גַם קב לא תקבנו. גַם ראשון מוסיף על גַם השני וגם השני על גַם ראשון, וכן גַם לי גַם לך לא יהיה (מלכים א ג'), וכן גַם בחור גַם בתולה (דברים ל"ב):
26 Maar Bilam antwoordde en zei tot Balak: Heb ik niet tot u gesproken: Al wat de Eeuwige spreken zal, dat zal ik doen?	כו וַיַּעַן בְּלָעַם וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-בָּלָק הֲלֹא דִבַּרְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר כֹּל אֲשֶׁר-יִדְבֹּר יְהוָה אֲתוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה:
Maar Bilam antwoordde en zei tot Balak: Heb ik niet tot u gesproken: Al wat de Eeuwige spreken zal, dat zal ik doen?	תרגום נאופיטי וענה בלעם ואמר לבלק הלא מלילית עמד למימר כל מה די ימלל יי יתה אעבד:
27 Toen zei Balak tot Bilam: Kom toch, ik zal u naar een andere plaats meenemen; misschien zal het recht zijn in de ogen van God, dat je het mij van daar vervloekt.	[ששי] [שביעי כשהן מחוברין] כז וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק אֶל-בְּלָעַם לְכֹה-נָא אֶקְחֶךָ אֶל-מָקוֹם אַחֵר אוֹלִי יִישַׁר בְּעֵינֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וְקִבְּתוּ לִי מַשָּׁם:
Toen zei Balak tot Bilam: Kom toch, ik zal u naar een andere plaats meenemen; misschien zal er genoeg zijn van voor de Eeuwige dat je het mij van daar vervloekt.	תרגום נאופיטי ואמר בלק לבלעם אתה כען אדבר יתך לאתר אחרן מה דילמה דיהווי רעווה מן קדם יי ותלוט יתהון לי מן תמן:
<i>Jij ervloekt voor mij</i> , dit is geen gebiedende wijs zoals (v. 13) וקבנו, maar het is toekomstige tijd: misschien zal het recht zijn in Zijn ogen, dat je het mij van daar vervloekt; mal diras in de vokstaal.	רשי וקבתו לי. אין זה לשון צווי כמו וקבנו, אלא לשון עתיד, אוֹלִי יִישַׁר בְּעֵינֵי וְקִבְּתוּ לִי מַשָּׁם, מלד"רש בלעז:
28 Toen nam Balak Bilam mee tot de top van Peor, dat uitziет over de woestijn.	כח וַיִּקַּח בָּלָק אֶת-בְּלָעַם רֹאשׁ הַפְּעוֹר הַנִּשְׁקָף עַל-פְּנֵי הַיַּשִּׁמּוֹן:
Toen nam Balak Bilam mee tot de hoogte van de afgoden van Peor, dat uitziет over Beth Jesimon.	תרגום נאופיטי ודבר בלק ית בלעם ריש טעוותה פעור דמצפיה מן על קבל בית הישימון:
<i>De top van Peor</i> , Balak was een groot waarzegger en hij voorzag dat zij gestraft zouden worden vanwege Peor, maar hij wist niet waarmee. Hij zei: misschien kan de vloek van dat punt op hen vallen. zo ook alle astrologen: ze zien iets maar ze weten niet wat ze zien (cf. Sotah 12b).	רשי ראש הפעור. קוסם גדול היה בלק וראה שהן עתידין ללקות על ידי פעור, ולא היה יודע במה, אמר שמה הקללה תחול עליהם משם וכן כל החוזים בפוכבים רואים ואינם יודעים מה רואים (סוטה י"ב):
29 En Bilam zei tot Balak: Bouw hier zeven altaren voor mij, en bereid mij hier zeven varren en zeven rammen.	כט וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלָעַם אֶל-בָּלָק בְּנֵה-לִּי זֶבֶחַ שִׁבְעָה מִזְבְּחֹת וְהִכֵּן לִי זֶבֶחַ שִׁבְעָה פָרִים וְשִׁבְעָה אֵילִם:
En Bilam zei tot Balak: Bouw hier zeven altaren voor mij, en bereid mij hier zeven stieren en zeven rammen.	תרגום נאופיטי ואמר בלעם לבלק בנה לי הכה שבעה מדבחין ואתקן לי הכה שבעה תורין ושבעה דכרין:

THE JPS TORAH COMMENTARY

NUMBERS **במדבר**

The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation
Commentary by JACOB MILGROM



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BALAK

²Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.

³Moab was alarmed because that people was so numerous. Moab dreaded the Israelites, ⁴and Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this horde will lick clean all that is about us as an ox licks up the grass of the field."

Balak son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time,

בלק

² וַיֵּרָא בָלָק בֶּן־צִפּוֹר אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה
יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאֹמִרִי: ³ וַיִּגַּד מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי הָעָם מְאֹד כִּי
רַב־הוּא וַיִּקְרָא מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: ⁴ וַיֹּאמֶר
מוֹאָב אֶל־זִקְנֵי מִדְיָן עֲתָה יִלְחֲכוּ הַקָּהָל אֶת־כָּל־
סָבִיבֵינוּ בְּלֶחֶד הַשּׁוֹר אֶת־יֶרֶק הַשָּׂדֶה וּבָלָק
בֶּן־צִפּוֹר מֶלֶךְ לְמוֹאָב בָּעֵת הַהוּא: ⁵ וַיִּשְׁלַח

Balaam (22:2–24:25)*Balak*

Rabbinic tradition calls these chapters the "Section of Balaam,"¹ a designation that accords with the view that the Torah was compiled from disparate scrolls.² Clearly the rabbis believed that the Balaam story was composed independently and only later inserted into the Pentateuchal corpus. Indeed, these chapters are totally distinct from the larger context: Neither the personalities nor the events in them appear in the adjoining chapters. There is only one connecting link: As in chapters 21 and 25, the Israelites are encamped on the borders of Moab. In fact, the juxtaposition of these chapters to chapter 25 reflects the tradition found in 31:16 that it was Balaam who advised the Midianites to seduce Israel at Shittim.

The action moves swiftly. Balak, king of Moab, hires the renowned seer Balaam to curse Israel. Balaam consents only when he receives the Lord's permission and, further, warns Balak that he will speak only as the Lord directs him. On these occasions, involving a sacrificial ritual and change of site, Balaam blesses the Israelites instead of cursing them. And in a fourth oracle he predicts the eventual doom of Moab at the hands of Israel: Balak's curse, intended for Israel, will instead be inflicted by Israel on Moab. The unity of these chapters is discussed in Excursus 56, the episode of the ass in Excursus 57, the character of Balaam in Excursus 58, the profession of Balaam in Excursus 59, and the Balaam inscription in Excursus 60.

CHAPTER 22

THE HIRING OF BALAAM (vv. 2–21)

Israel is encamped at the borders of Moab. Balak, the king of Moab, sends emissaries to the renowned seer Balaam to engage his services to curse the Israelites and thereby weaken them so that Moab can defeat them in battle. Balaam seeks the permission of the Lord in a dream, but it is denied. Balak then sends a more prominent delegation, and this time the Lord grants permission.

2. As Abravanel has noted, there is an abrupt change of subject from Balak to Moab in verses 2 and 3, with the identification of the connection between the two postponed to verse 4b. The problem can be resolved by regarding verse 2 as an editorial link that ties the following Balaam story with the preceding narrative on the conquest of the Amorites.³ That a personified Moab speaks in verse 4a rather than Balak indicates that the latter has not yet been introduced.

Amorites The kingdom of Sihon, who is mentioned in 21:21, 25–26, 31–32.⁴

3. This is the true beginning of the Balaam story. The repetition of the subject and the use of synonymous verbs and objects, a characteristic of Hebrew poetry, may actually be due to a poetic substratum underlying the text. See the next verse.

dreaded Hebrew *va-yakots . . . mi-penei*. For the idiom, see Exodus 1:12 and Isaiah 7:16.⁵

4. *elders of Midian* Midian was a confederation of peoples (see the Comment to 10:29), and part of its people may have been ruled by the Moabite king.⁶ The fact that Midianites lived on Moabite soil is attested by Genesis 36:35. That the Midianite rulers are called "elders" rather than "royal officials" indicates that Midian was not a monarchy at this time as was Moab (see the Comments to v. 8 and 25:15).

⁵sent messengers to Balaam son of Beor in Pethor, which is by the Euphrates, in the land of his kinsfolk, to invite him, saying, "There is a people that came out of Egypt; it hides the earth from view, and it is settled next to me. ⁶Come then, put a curse upon this people for me, since they are too numerous for me; perhaps I can thus defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that he whom you bless is blessed indeed, and he whom you curse is cursed."

מִלְאָכִים אֶל־בָּלְעָם בֶּן־בְּעוֹר פְּתוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר עַל־
הַנָּהָר אֲרָץ בְּנֵי־עַמּוֹ לְקֹרְאָלָו לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה עַם
יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם הִנֵּה כָסָה אֶת־עֵינֵי הָאָרֶץ וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב
מִמְלִי: ⁶ וְעַתָּה לְכֵה־נָא אַרְה־לִּי אֶת־הָעַם הַזֶּה
כִּי־עַצוֹם הוּא מִמֶּנִּי אוֹלִי אוֹכֵל נֶכֶד־בּוֹ וְאֶגְרֹשְׁנוּ
מִדְּהָאָרֶץ כִּי יִדְעֹתִי אֵת אֲשֶׁר־תִּבְרָךְ מִבְרָךְ
וְאֲשֶׁר תִּאָּר יוֹאָר: ⁷ וַיִּלְכוּ זִקְנֵי מוֹאָב וְזִקְנֵי מִדְיָן

According to tradition, the two nations formed an alliance against the Israelite menace: "It is like the case of two dogs that were fighting with one another. A wolf attacked one of them. The other thought: If I do not come to his aid the wolf will kill him today and tomorrow he will attack me. For a similar reason Moab joined with Midian."⁷ Another interpretation maintains that Balak himself was a Midianite and that Moab and Midian formed a united kingdom.⁸

"(Now) *this (horde)*" The ancient versions (LXX, Sam., Pesh.) add "this" (Heb. *ha-zeh*), which is essential since the speaker is a non-Israelite and has to distinguish Israel from his own people. The speech, composed of metaphor and simile befitting a pastoral scene, may again be a vestige of an original poetic substratum.

*lick . . . licks up*⁹

*Balak*¹⁰

5. *sent* The absence of a subject makes it necessary to begin the sentence with the previous clause, "Balak . . ." (v. 4).

*Balaam son of Beor*¹¹ The animosity of the tradition toward Balaam is revealed by the many explanations proposed for his name: (1) a mad people;¹² (2) he went out of his mind because of the immensity of his knowledge;¹³ (3) he who swallows up the people;¹⁴ (4) corrupter of the people;¹⁵ (5) his son is a beast.¹⁶ The Deir 'Alla inscription features a seer by the same name, Bil'am the son of Beor (see Excursus 60).¹⁷

Pethor Identified with Pitru on the Sajur River, a tributary of the Euphrates, some 20 kilometers (12 mi.) south of Carchemish. Targum Onkelos identifies the region as Aram, and this is confirmed by an Egyptian text that designates the area up to the Euphrates as Aram.¹⁸ Furthermore, the annals of Shalmaneser III indicate that in the tenth or the first half of the ninth century B.C.E. Pitru was in Aramean hands.¹⁹ If the identification is correct, then the journey from Pethor to Moab, a distance of about 640 kilometers (400 mi.) would have taken at least twenty days. And since the text records four such journeys, three months would have been occupied in traveling.

Early midrash understands Pethor as "dream interpreter," from the root *p-t-r*.²⁰

Euphrates Literally, the River, as in Genesis 31:21, Exodus 23:31, and Joshua 24:2.

his kinsfolk Hebrew *benei 'ammo* (see 24:14); so Ramban. Alternatively, the following interpretations have been offered: (1) Balak's kinsfolk;²¹ (2) Ammon, reading *'ammon* for *'ammo*.²² Ammon is located in Transjordan, close to Moab, which would explain how Balaam could travel by ass, an animal that could only negotiate short distances; (3) rendering "(land of) 'Amau," a proper name possibly mentioned in Egyptian and Akkadian inscriptions,²³ but the reading is disputed.²⁴

it hides the earth from view Literally, "it hides the eye of the earth"; by extension, "eye" can mean "appearance, view," as in Numbers 11:7 and Leviticus 13:55. Israel is clearly compared with a locust plague, a common simile for an invading army (cf. Judg. 6:5; 7:12).²⁵

6. *Come then* Hebrew *ve-'attah*, literally "and now," used when the main point of the discourse is reached.²⁶

*I can thus defeat them*²⁷ Balaam's curse is expected to weaken the Israelites so that Moab can defeat them in battle and expel them from its land. This is made explicit in Joshua 24:9-10 (see Excursus 58).

⁷The elders of Moab and the elders of Midian, versed in divination, set out. They came to Balaam and gave him Balak's message. ⁸He said to them, "Spend the night here, and I shall reply to you as the LORD may instruct me." So the Moabite dignitaries stayed with Balaam.

⁹God came to Balaam and said, "What do these people want of you?" ¹⁰Balaam said to God, "Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, sent me this message: ¹¹Here is a people that came out from Egypt and hides the earth from view. Come now and curse them for me; perhaps I can engage them in battle and drive them off." ¹²But God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them. You must not curse that people, for they are blessed."

וְקִסְמִים בְּיָדָם וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-בָּלָעַם וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֵלָיו
דִּבְרֵי בָלָק: ⁸וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם לֵינוּ פֹה הַלַּיְלָה
וְהַשְׁכַּמְתִּי אֶתְכֶם דָּבָר בְּאָשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלַי
וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שְׁרֵי-מוֹאָב עִם-בָּלָעַם: ⁹וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים אֶל-
בָּלָעַם וַיֹּאמֶר מִי הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה עִמָּךְ: ¹⁰וַיֹּאמֶר
בָּלָעַם אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים בָּלָק בֶּן-זִפּוֹר מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב
שָׁלַח אֵלַי: ¹¹הִנֵּה הָעָם הֵיכָּא מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיִּבְס
אֶת-עֵינַי הָאָרֶץ עֲתָה לִכְהֵן קָבָה-לִי אֶתֹּו אֹוֹלִי
אוֹכֵל לֶחֶלֶם בֹּו וְגִרְשָׁתִּיו: ¹²וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים
אֶל-בָּלָעַם לֹא תֵלֵךְ עִמָּהֶם לֹא תֵאָדָר אֶת-הָעָם
כִּי בְרוּךְ הוּא: שְׁנֵי [חֲמִישִׁי כִשְׁהוֹן
מִחוּבֹוֹת] ¹³וַיִּקָּם בָּלָעַם בִּבְקָר וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-

7. versed in divination Hebrew *u-kesamim be-yadam*, literally "with divination in their hands"; that is, they themselves were diviners (see Ezra 7:25) and might, therefore, prevent him from backing out on the pretext that the time was unpropitious.²⁸ More likely, his colleagues were present for the purpose of honoring him.²⁹ Alternatively, the phrase has been translated (1) "possessing [the means of] divination" (see Ezek. 21:27)³⁰ (but that Balaam would have need of his colleagues' divinatory methods is hardly likely)³¹ and (2) "possessing [the fees for] divination."³² However, Balaam is to be rewarded only after the job is done (22:18,37; 24:11).

The mention of divination is not to be taken as a reproof of Balaam. Although divination is elsewhere condemned in Scripture, as in Deuteronomy 17:10,14 (also 1 Sam. 15:23; 28:8; 2 Kings 17:17), in certain quarters its practice was considered both efficacious and legitimate.³³ Balaam's oracles serve to clarify that Israel has no need of it in order to determine God's will. This text is the first of many to emphasize that Balaam is a diviner, one who predicts the future, not a sorcerer, one who can alter the future (through cursing and blessing), as Balak makes him out to be. (For details, see Excursus 59.)

8. Spend the night So that Balaam might receive a divine message in a dream (see v. 20), as dreams are a legitimate means in Israel for divine communication (see the Comment to 12:6). The prophets, however, regarded them as an inferior medium, as noted in Numbers 12:6 and Jeremiah 23:28. Dreams should not be confused with incubation, the ancient custom of sleeping in the temple of a god or goddess in order to obtain a message from him or her.³⁴

the Moabite dignitaries Hebrew *sarei mo'av*, called "Moabite elders," *ziknei mo'av*, in the previous verse. The terminological change may reflect Moab's transition from a tribal to a monarchical government, the clan elders being replaced by royal bureaucrats. For this phenomenon in Israel, see Judges 8:6,14,16.³⁵

9. What do (these people) want God uses this rhetorical question (of course He knows) to open a conversation (as in Gen. 3:9; 4:9).³⁶ From Balaam's answer in verses 10–11, it becomes clear that God questions the emissaries' business not their names.³⁷

10. sent me this message Hebrew *shalah 'elai*. The Septuagint adds "saying." However, *shalah* frequently occurs followed directly by the quote, as, for example, in 20:14 (also Gen. 27:45; 2 Kings 11:4).

11. a people that came out³⁸

12. On verse 9 Ibn Ezra asks why God did not allow Balaam to curse Israel and thereby provide a greater miracle by turning the curse into blessing. He answers that if Balaam had been allowed to curse Israel, then the entire world would have attributed the plague of Baal-peor (25:9) to the power of Balaam's curse.

Do not go Three times in the Bible God appears to non-Israelites in order to warn them not to carry out their intentions; the other occasions are Genesis 31:24 (Laban) and Genesis 20:3 (Abimelech).

¹³Balaam arose in the morning and said to Balak's dignitaries, "Go back to your own country, for the LORD will not let me go with you." ¹⁴The Moabite dignitaries left, and they came to Balak and said, "Balaam refused to come with us."

¹⁵Then Balak sent other dignitaries, more numerous and distinguished than the first. ¹⁶They came to Balaam and said to him, "Thus says Balak son of Zippor: Please do not refuse to come to me. ¹⁷I will reward you richly and I will do anything you ask of me. Only come and damn this people for me." ¹⁸Balaam replied to Balak's officials, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, big or little, contrary to the

שְׁרִי בָלָק לָכוּ אֶל־אֲרָצְכֶם בִּי מֵאֵן יְהוָה לְתַתִּי
לְהֵלֶךְ עִמָּכֶם: ¹⁴ וַיָּקוּמוּ שְׂרָי מוֹאָב וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־
בָּלָק וַיֹּאמְרוּ מֵאֵן בָּלָעַם הֵלֶךְ עִמָּנוּ: ¹⁵ וַיִּסָּף עוֹד
בָּלָק שְׁלַח שָׂרִים רַבִּים וְנִכְבְּדִים מֵאֵלָּה:
¹⁶ וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־בָּלָעַם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ כֹּה אָמַר בָּלָק
בֶּן־צִפּוֹר אֶל־נָא תִמְנַע מִהֵלֶךְ אֵלָּי: ¹⁷ כִּי־כַבֵּד
אֶכְבְּדְּךָ מְאֹד וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמַר אֵלַי אֶעֱשֶׂה
וְלִכְה־נָּא קִבְּה־לִּי אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה: ¹⁸ וַיַּעַן בָּלָעַם
וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־עַבְדֵּי בָלָק אִם־יִתְּנֶלֶי בָלָק מֵלֶא
בֵּיתוֹ בָּסָף וְזָהָב לֹא אוֹכַל לַעֲבֹד אֶת־פִּי יְהוָה

they are blessed That is, they are already blessed from the time of the patriarchs, and the blessing cannot be reversed by a curse.³⁹ This is based on Genesis 27:33.

13. Balaam arose in the morning Proof that God appeared to him in the night. The identical sentence appears in the Balaam inscription of Deir 'Alla (1:3; see Excursus 60).

the LORD will not let me go Balaam omits the full reason—that cursing Israel is an exercise in futility—not because he hoped later to change God's mind but because it would have brought the story to an end had the emissaries reported this reason to Balak.

the LORD The fact that a heathen invokes the name of Israel's God is not unprecedented (Abimelech the Philistine does this in Gen. 26:28).

with you The midrash seizes upon these words to denigrate Balaam's intentions: "Shall I go with you? I will only go with greater men than you."⁴⁰

14. Balaam refused to come with us Again, an incomplete quotation. The emissaries omit mentioning that the Lord is the author of Balaam's refusal. It may be the narrator's way of indicating that the Moabites were so sure of Balaam's inherent power to curse Israel that they regarded Balaam's reliance upon the Lord as an excuse to back out.

15. More numerous Hebrew *rabbim*. Rather, "more powerful," as in Psalms 48:3 and Esther 1:8.⁴¹

16. refuse⁴²

17. I will reward you richly Literally, "I will honor you greatly," a euphemism for monetary rewards, as the next verse makes explicit.⁴³

18. officials Hebrew *'avdei*, literally "servants." Perhaps the narrator's switch from *sarim*, "dignitaries," in verses 8,14,15 to "servants" here can be explained by Balaam's comment: He is not Balak's servant but the Lord's, and he will hearken solely to His command.⁴⁴

I could not do anything Hebrew *lo' 'ukhal*, denoting a moral impossibility (cf. 22:38; 23:12,26; 24:13).

big or little A literary merism for "anything" (see 1 Sam. 20:2; 22:15; 25:36).

contrary to Hebrew *la-'avor*, literally "to transgress, step across the boundary," as in the idiom *la'avor berit*, "violate the covenant," in Joshua 7:11.

The LORD my God This affirmation perhaps underscores the reason Moab sought Balaam even though he lived so far away (see the Comment to v. 5). Since he professed allegiance to and intimacy with Israel's God he would have had a better chance of convincing Him to curse His people Israel.⁴⁵

command of the LORD my God. ¹⁹So you, too, stay here overnight, and let me find out what else the LORD may say to me.” ²⁰That night God came to Balaam and said to him, “If these men have come to invite you, you may go with them. But whatever I command you, that you shall do.”

²¹When he arose in the morning, Balaam saddled his ass and departed with the Moabite dignitaries. ²²But God was incensed at his going; so an angel of the LORD placed himself in his way as an adversary.

He was riding on his she-ass, with his two servants alongside, ²³when the ass caught sight of the angel of the LORD

אֱלֹהֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת קִטְנָה אֹי גְדוֹלָה: ¹⁹ וְעַתָּה שְׁבוּ
נָא בָּזֶה גַם־אַתֶּם הַלֵּילָה וְאִדְעָה מִה־יִּסְף יְהוָה
דִּבֶּר עִמִּי: ²⁰ וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים אֶל־בָּלָעַם לֵילָה
וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִם־לִקְרָא לָךְ בָּאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים קוּם לָךְ
אֲתָם וְאִדְ אֶת־הַדִּבָּר אֲשֶׁר־אָדַבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ אֲתוֹ
תַעֲשֶׂה: שְׁלִישִׁי ²¹ וַיָּקָם בָּלָעַם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ
אֶת־אַתָּנוּ וַיֵּלֶךְ עִם־שְׁרֵי מוֹאָב: ²² וַיַּחֲרֹאֲף
אֱלֹהִים בְּיִהוּדָה הוּא וַיִּתְּיָעַב מִלֵּאדָּה יְהוָה בְּהִרְדּוּ
לְשַׁטֵּן לוֹ וְהוּא רָכַב עַל־אַתָּנוּ וּשְׁנֵי נַעֲרָיו עִמּוֹ:

19. *here*⁴⁶

what else Perhaps the Lord will change His mind. Such indeed is the unspoken premise behind all forms of divination. The same ritual procedures are repeated until a favorable omen is received. Repeated omen taking is best attested among the ancient Greeks. Xenophon, for example, sacrifices three times on each of two or three consecutive days, based on this hope: “It may be that the victims will turn out favorable to us.”⁴⁷ Also the Hittite “Ritual against Impotence” is performed for three consecutive days, three times daily,⁴⁸ probably for the same reason (see Excursus 59). There exists a pre-Islamic Arabian tale of a female soothsayer who enabled her client to avoid fulfilling his vow to sacrifice his son by continuing to throw the arrow-oracle before the god until the god pointed (via the arrows) at a surrogate (ten camels) instead of at the son.⁴⁹ So Balaam will have the king repeat the same sacrificial ritual, albeit in different places, in order to effect the desired result.

Even in dream interpretation, a single dream is not decisive, as in the case of Pharaoh in Genesis 41:5. Similarly, in Mesopotamia, Gilgamesh and Gudea must dream the same dream twice. Thus Balaam can sincerely hope that in his second dream he will learn that the Lord has changed His mind. This basically pagan view is reflected in the midrash that Balaam was privy to the split second when God waxes angry against Israel each day.⁵⁰ The difference between Balaam and Israel’s prophets contrasts sharply on this matter. Both hope that God will change His mind. But the prophets assume His constancy even while attempting to change His mind, whereas Balaam assumes that God is fickle, and he attempts to exploit that by divination. This premise will be categorically denied in this story. The universe is neither mechanical nor predictable; God’s will is neither capricious nor determinable (see the Comment to 23:19).

20. That night God came to Balaam That is, in a dream (see the Comment to v. 8). The same language is used for divine manifestations to non-Israelites, as in the case of Abimelech in Genesis 20:3 and of Laban in Genesis 31:24. It is never used with Israel’s prophets, an indication that Balaam is the recipient of an inferior theophany. Strikingly, the identical language is used of Balaam’s vision in the Deir ‘Alla inscription: “the gods came to him at night” (1.1); see Excursus 60.

Why indeed did God change His mind and allow Balaam to go? A realistic answer might be that without the change we would have neither the tale nor the oracle.⁵¹ The rabbis, however, see in this tale the source of the doctrine of human responsibility and free will: “From this you learn that a man is led in the way he desires to go”;⁵² “If one comes to defile himself, he is given an opening,” that is, he is given the opportunity.⁵³

BALAAM AND THE ASS (vv. 22–35)

God is angered that Balaam is going to Balak. He interposes a sword-bearing angel on the road. Balaam’s ass sees the angel and veers aside. Balaam, who does not see the angel, beats his ass. This happens three times until the ass speaks and rebukes its master. The angel, now visible to Balaam,

standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. The ass swerved from the road and went into the fields; and Balaam beat the ass to turn her back onto the road. ²⁴The angel of the LORD then stationed himself in a lane between the vineyards, with a fence on either side. ²⁵The ass, seeing

23 וַתֵּרָא הָאֱתוֹן אֶת־מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה נֹצֵב בַּדֶּרֶךְ
וַחֲרָבוֹ שְׁלֹפָה בְּיָדוֹ וַתֵּט אֶת־הָאֱתוֹן מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ וַתֵּלֶךְ
בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיֵּךְ בָּלַעַם אֶת־הָאֱתוֹן לְהַשְׁתָּהּ הַדֶּרֶךְ׃
24 וַיַּעֲמֹד מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה בְּמִשְׁעוֹל הַכְּרָמִים גֶּדֶר
מִזֶּה וּגְדֵר מִזֶּה׃ 25 וַתֵּרָא הָאֱתוֹן אֶת־מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה

rebukes him for beating his ass, which saved his life. Balaam, recognizing that his mission is displeasing to God, volunteers to return home. But the angel permits him to continue on condition that he speak only as directed by God.

The inner cohesion of this episode is revealed by its carefully constructed plot, which is built around three scenes in which the same actions reoccur: The angel stands in the way three times and is seen three times by the ass, which turns aside three times and is beaten three times by Balaam. The ass speaks only twice; in the third and climactic instance it is replaced by the angel, who reproves Balaam in its stead.⁵⁴ The three scenes are interlocked by the following stylistic and thematic links: (1) The sword of the angel (v. 23) is wishfully in Balaam's hand (v. 24). (2) God's anger at Balaam (v. 22) corresponds with Balaam's anger at his ass (v. 27). (3) As the path continues to narrow, the ass veers first to the field, then to the roadside fence, and finally it comes to a halt. All the while Balaam's anger mounts, and he strikes the ass, first to get it back on the road (v. 23), then because it squeezed Balaam's foot against the wall (v. 25), and finally, when it lay down under Balaam, he beat it with a stick (v. 27), which is a surrogate for a sword (v. 29).⁵⁵

The angel acts as the Lord's agent and never initiates any action on his own (for the seeming exception, see the Comment to v. 35). The Lord Himself intrudes upon the scene twice but in each case only when a miracle is called for: to give the ass speech (v. 28) and Balaam sight (v. 31).⁵⁶

22. But God was incensed According to tradition, Balaam's acquiescence indicates his eagerness to curse Israel, thereby arousing the anger of God.⁵⁷

*God*⁵⁸

*at his going*⁵⁹

as an adversary Later the term *satan* is personified as Satan (see 1 Chron. 21:1). Here it is used attributively, as in 1 Samuel 29:4.

two servants Balak's officials (v. 21) have disappeared. Abraham is accompanied by two servants on a three-day journey (Gen. 22:3), as is Saul on his day trip to En-dor (1 Sam. 28:8). This mode of travel, the master riding and the servant walking, suggests that Balaam was close by (see Excursus 57). The theme of two servants is a literary stereotype: "This is the proper way; that is, that when a man [of eminence] goes out on a journey, two people should attend on him."⁶⁰

23. sword For the motif of an angel with a sword, see Genesis 3:24, Joshua 5:15, and 1 Chronicles 21:16.

into the fields Implying that the fields had no fences along the road.

Balaam beat the ass "This villain went to curse an entire nation which had not sinned against him, yet he had to strike his ass to prevent it from going into a field";⁶¹ that is, his word is ineffectual even with his ass. Furthermore, as a Mesopotamian diviner, Balaam should have recognized that his animal's bizarre actions may have held a divine portent.⁶² For other ironies picked up by the midrash, see Excursus 57.

onto the road Hebrew *ha-derekh*. The definite article can have the force of a preposition.⁶³

24. a lane Hebrew *mish'ol*, the only occurrence of this word in Scripture.⁶⁴ Since *sha'al* means "hollow hand, handful," *mish'al* may be a hollowed-out furrow serving as a path.⁶⁵

vineyards The scenery is not of the Syrian desert (see Excursus 57).

fence Hebrew *gader*, that is, of heaped stones.

the angel of the LORD, pressed herself against the wall and squeezed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he beat her again. ²⁶Once more the angel of the LORD moved forward and stationed himself on a spot so narrow that there was no room to swerve right or left. ²⁷When the ass now saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam; and Balaam was furious and beat the ass with his stick.

²⁸Then the LORD opened the ass's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you that you have beaten me these three times?" ²⁹Balaam said to the ass, "You have made a mockery of me! If I had a sword with me, I'd kill you." ³⁰The ass said to Balaam, "Look, I am the ass that you have been riding all along until this day! Have I been in the habit of doing thus to you?" And he answered, "No."

וּתְלַחֵץ אֶל־הַקִּיר וּתְלַחֵץ אֶת־רֶגְלָא בְלָעָם אֶל־
הַקִּיר וַיִּסֹּף לְהַכֹּתָהּ: ²⁶ וַיִּסֹּף מִלְּאֶדְיָהוּהָ עָבֹר
וַיַּעֲמֹד בַּמָּקוֹם צָר אֲשֶׁר אֵין־דֶּרֶךְ לְנִטּוֹת יָמִין
וּשְׂמֹאל: ²⁷ וַתֵּרָא הָאֲתוֹן אֶת־מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה
וַתִּרְבֹּץ תַּחַת בְּלָעָם וַיַּחֲרֹאֲף בְּלָעָם וַיִּךְ אֶת־
הָאֲתוֹן בַּמִּקֵּל: ²⁸ וַיִּפְתַּח יְהוָה אֶת־פִּי הָאֲתוֹן
וַתֹּאמֶר לְבָלָעָם מָה־עָשִׂיתִי לָךְ כִּי הִכִּיתַנִּי זֶה
שִׁלְשׁ רְגָלִים: ²⁹ וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלָעָם לְאֲתוֹן כִּי
הִתְעַלְלָתְ בִּי לוֹ יִשְׁחָרֵב בְּיָדִי כִּי עָתָה הִרְגֵתִיךָ:
³⁰ וַתֹּאמֶר הָאֲתוֹן אֶל־בְּלָעָם הֲלוֹא אֲנִכִּי אֲתִנֶּךָ
אֲשֶׁר־רָכַבְתָּ עָלַי מֵעוֹדֶךָ עַד־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הֲהִסְכֵּן
הִסְכַּנְתִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת לָךְ כֹּה וַיֹּאמֶר לָא: ³¹ וַיִּגַּל

25. *pressed herself*⁶⁶

wall Hebrew *kir*, that is, the surface of the stony fence; see *kir homah*, "the outer side of the wall" (Josh. 2:15; cf. the Comment to Num. 35:4).

beat her again The first time was for a purpose—to get the ass back on the road. The lack of purpose here serves to indicate that Balaam struck his ass in sheer anger (see v. 27).

26. *moved forward* Hebrew 'avor. For this usage, see Genesis 33:3.

27. *When the ass now saw* For the third time, in contrast to Balaam's persistent blindness (see Excursus 57).

with his stick An index of his mounting anger; perhaps previously he struck with his hand or a strap.⁶⁷ Again, a lampoon: Balaam is more of a brute than his ass (see Excursus 57).

28. *The LORD opened the ass's mouth* That is, He gave the ass the power of speech (see Ezekiel 3:27 and 33:22). These words are a satiric play on Balaam's reputed prophetic gifts, for the Lord also uses Balaam's mouth as the vehicle for His message (22:38; 23:5,12,16).

Maimonides, the rationalist, understood the entire scene to be a prophetic vision. Earlier, the rabbis tried to reduce the miraculous element by declaring that the speaking ass was ordained by God on the eve of the first Sabbath⁶⁸—that is, as part of Creation—and therefore did not constitute an interruption of the natural order.

*these*⁶⁹

times Hebrew *regalim*. The term occurs only once again outside this section (Exod. 23:14), also with the number three. Possibly, it was only used with three.⁷⁰ It is a synonym of *pe'amim* (Exod. 34:23); both words originally meant "foot" (Pss. 58:11; 85:14; and Ugar.).

29. *made a mockery*⁷¹

If I had a sword "[The Moabite officials] said: This fool [boasts] that he can destroy nations with his words; how can he not destroy his ass except with a sword?"⁷² The irony rests in the fact that the sword Balaam seeks is close at hand with the angel, whom he, the seer, cannot see.

30. *all along*⁷³

*Have I been in the habit*⁷⁴ The burlesque continues. Balaam's impetuous rage is answered by the measured and justifiable argument of the ass: "Here was this ass, the most stupid of all beasts, and there was the wisest of all wise men, yet as soon as she opened her mouth he could not stand his ground against her."⁷⁵

³¹Then the LORD uncovered Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, his drawn sword in his hand; thereupon he bowed right down to the ground.

³²The angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you beaten your ass these three times? It is I who came out as an adversary, for the errand is obnoxious to me. ³³And when the ass saw me, she shied away because of me those three times. If she had not shied away from me, you are the one I should have killed, while sparing her." ³⁴Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, "I erred because I did not know that you were standing in my way. If you still disapprove, I will turn back." ³⁵But the angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men. But you must say nothing except what I tell you." So Balaam went on with Balak's dignitaries.

³⁶When Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went out to meet him at Ir-moab, which is on the Arnon border, at its farthest point. ³⁷Balak said to Balaam, "When I first

יהוה את-עיני בלעם וירא את-מלאך יהוה נצב בדרך וחרכו שלפה בידו ויקד וישתחו לאפיו: ³² ויאמר אליו מלאך יהוה על-מה הכית את-אתנך זה שלוש רגלים הנה אנכי יצאתי לשטן פי-יכרם הדרך לנגדי: ³³ ותראני האתון והת לפני זה שלוש רגלים אולי נטתה מפני כי עתה גם-אתכה הרגתי ואותה החייתי: ³⁴ ויאמר בלעם אל-מלאך יהוה חטאתי כי לא ידעתי כי אתה נצב לקראתי בדרך ועתה אסרע בעיניך אשובה לי: ³⁵ ויאמר מלאך יהוה אל-בלעם לך עם-האנשים ואפס את-הדבר אשר-אדבר אליך אתו תדבר וילך בלעם עם-שרי בלק: ³⁶ וישמע בלק כי בא בלעם ויצא לקראתו אל-עיר מואב אשר על-גבול ארנן אשר בקצה הגבול: ³⁷ ויאמר בלק אל-בלעם הלא שלח

31. the LORD uncovered Balaam's eyes The wording is deliberate, a sardonic contradiction of Balaam's claim that his "eyes are opened" to God's revelation (24:4,16). In both the ass episode here and the poetry, Balaam's eyes are opened in the third scene, an indication that the poetry and the prose belong together (see Excursus 56).

The Lord intervenes directly only twice in this story, both times to effect a miracle: to give the ass speech (v. 28) and to give Balaam revelatory sight (v. 31); the rest of the action is delegated to the angel.⁷⁶

32. for the errand is obnoxious to me⁷⁷

33. because of me⁷⁸

those three times This expression is repeated by the angel (see v. 32) in order to mock Balaam: The dumb ass shied away from me three times but you, the all-wise seer, did not shy away from me even once.⁷⁹

If . . . not⁸⁰

you are the one Hebrew *gam* can be taken as an adversative particle, to be rendered as "rather"; that is, in contrast to the ass, which would have lived, you would have died—the opposite of what Balaam intended (v. 29). For examples of this usage, see Job 2:10 and 18:5.⁸¹ Alternatively, *gam* can be an emphatic particle, hence, untranslatable (e.g., Gen. 44:10; 1 Kings 14:14).⁸²

I should have killed Rather, "I would have killed."

34. I did not know In contradiction to Balaam's claim that he "obtains knowledge from the Most High" (24:16).

I will turn back⁸³

35. Balaam's two servants (v. 32) have disappeared, replaced by Balak's dignitaries.⁸⁴

nothing except⁸⁵

what I tell you The angel, here identified with the "I" of the Lord, thus speaks or acts as the Lord's surrogate. This identification is made clear at the end of a narrative.⁸⁶

sent to invite you, why didn't you come to me? Am I really unable to reward you?" ³⁸But Balaam said to Balak, "And now that I have come to you, have I the power to speak freely? I can utter only the word that God puts into my mouth."

³⁹Balaam went with Balak and they came to Kiriath-huzoth. ⁴⁰Balak sacrificed oxen and sheep, and had them served to Balaam and the dignitaries with him. ⁴¹In the morning Balak took Balaam up to Bamoth-baal. From there he could see a portion of the people.

שְׁלַחְתִּי אֵלַיִךְ לְקַרְאֲלֶךָ לְמָה לֹא הִלַּכְתָּ אֵלַי
הָאִמְנֹם לֹא אוֹכַל בְּבִדְךָ: ³⁸ וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלָעַם אֶל-
בָּלָק הִנֵּה-בִאתִי אֵלֶיךָ עֲתָה הִיכוֹל אוֹכַל דְּבַר
מֵאִמְנָה הַדִּבָּר אֲשֶׁר יֵשִׁים אֱלֹהִים בְּפִי אֶתֹ
אֲדַבֵּר: רַבִּיעִי [שְׂשִׁי כִשְׁהֵן מַחֲבֹרֹת]
³⁹ וַיֵּלֶךְ בְּלָעַם עִם-בָּלָק וַיָּבֹאוּ קִרְיַת הַחֻצוֹת:
⁴⁰ וַיַּזְבֵּחַ בָּלָק בָּקָר וְצֹאן וַיִּשְׁלַח לְבָלָעַם
וְלִשְׂרָיִם אֲשֶׁר אֵתָּו: ⁴¹ וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וַיִּקַּח בָּלָק
אֶת-בְּלָעַם וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ בְּמֹת בָּעַל וַיֵּרָא מִשָּׁם קְצֵה
הָעָם:

THE MEETING OF BALAK AND BALAAM (22:36–23:6)

Here, in the continuation of verse 21, Balak greets Balaam at the border of his territory and upbraids him for not returning with the first delegation. Balaam responds, as he did to the delegation, that he will only do the Lord's bidding. Balak arranges a grand feast for Balaam and his company and on the morrow takes Balaam to a height where he might see a portion of Israel's encampment. Balaam first instructs Balak to try to dispose the Lord to their favor through a specified sacrificial ritual; he thereupon sets out in search of omens to interpret for Balak. Instead, the Lord dictates to Balaam a specific message of blessing.

36. Ir-moab Probably identical with Ar of Moab (21:15,28) on the southern shore of the upper Arnon. Alternatively, it is identified with El Medeiym on the Wadi es Sfei, a tributary of the Arnon in the northeast.

Arnon border That is, the northern border of Moab as noted in 21:26, which presumes that Balaam came from the north, a fact that fits an Aramean provenience for Balaam. It also agrees with chapter 21 that the Arnon was Moab's northern border at the time of the Israelite incursion.

at its farthest point Balak paid Balaam the maximum respect by meeting him at the point at which Balaam crossed into Moabite territory (see Gen. 29:13; 46:29; Exod. 18:7).

37. When I first sent Hebrew *shaloah shalahṭi*. The root *sh-l-h* is repeated for the sake of emphasis: Balak stresses his extraordinary exertions to send a proper delegation to Balaam.

38. Balaam dismisses Balak's question, his answer implying: Never mind your question; I am here. For *'attah* introducing the main point, see the Comment to verse 6.

freely Literally, "anything."

God Hebrew *'elohim*. An exception to the rule that Balaam refers to God only by the Tetragrammaton.

39. Kiriath-huzoth Unidentified; the site is probably close to Bamoth-baal in verse 41.

40. Sacrificed Hebrew *va-yizbah*; that is, Balak sacrificed a *zeval shelamim*, a well-being offering, the meat of which is eaten by the worshiper and his guests, as is clear from Exodus 18:12 and 1 Samuel 9:23–24.

41. In the morning Sacrificial ritual implies entering into a state of sanctification, a preliminary requirement for a divine encounter.

Bamoth-baal The Septuagint reads the singular *bamat ba'al*, "the cultic platform of Baal," probably a shrine⁸⁷ (see the Comment to 21:20)

he could see a portion of the people The object must be within sight for a curse against it to be effective. The power of the "evil eye" is captured by Democritus: "From the eyes issue images which are neither without sensation nor without volition, and are filled with the wickedness and malice of those from whom they proceed: imprinting themselves firmly upon the person to be

23 Balaam said to Balak, "Build me seven altars here and have seven bulls and seven rams ready here for me."² Balak did as Balaam directed; and Balak and Balaam offered up a bull and a ram on each altar.³ Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stay here beside your offerings while I am gone. Perhaps the LORD will grant me a manifestation, and whatever He reveals to me I will tell you." And he went off alone.

כ"ג וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָעַם אֶל-בָּלָק בְּנֵה-לִּי בָזֶה שִׁבְעָה מִזְבְּחֹת וְהִבֵּן לִּי בָזֶה שִׁבְעָה פָּרִים וְשִׁבְעָה אֵילִים: ² וַיַּעַשׂ בָּלָק כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בָּלָעַם וַיַּעַל בָּלָק וּבָלָעַם פָּר וְאַיִל בְּמִזְבֵּחַ: ³ וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָעַם לְבָלָק הִתְיַצֵּב עַל-עֹלְתֶךָ וְאַלֶּכָּה אִתִּי יִקְרָה יְהוָה לְקִרְאָתִי וּדְבַר מִה-יִרְאֵנִי וְהִגַּדְתִּי לְךָ וְלֹךְ שָׁפִי: ⁴ וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶל-בָּלָעַם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו

enchanted, they become part of him, and disturb and injure both his body and mind."⁸⁸ Balak, however, fears that the sight of too many Israelites may nullify and even reverse the curse (see the Comment to 23:13); hence, he allows Balaam to see only a portion of the Israelites.⁸⁹

CHAPTER 23

1. seven altars . . . seven bulls and seven rams Ibn Ezra points to the frequency of the number seven in the cultic calendar: the seventh day (Sabbath), the seventh week (Shavuot), the seventh month (Tishrei), the seventh year (the Sabbatical for land and remission of debts), seven burnt offering lambs (on festivals, twice seven on Sukkot), seven sprinklings (in the Temple on Yom Kippur and for the purification of the leper). He also points to the sacrificial requirement of seven bulls and seven rams for Job's friends (Job 42:8) and the astrological significance of seven. The magical use of seven is attested in the Bible: leprous Naaman bathes seven times in the Jordan (2 Kings 5:10,14); Elijah orders his servant to scan the skies seven times for signs of rain (1 Kings 18:43); Joshua's army circuits Jericho seven times on the seventh day (Josh. 6:4,10). In the Talmud, a medical prescription requires seven twigs from seven trees, seven nails from seven bridges, and so on.¹

The use of multiple altars for a single ritual is unattested anywhere else in Scripture. Hence it must derive from a pagan practice, each altar most likely being dedicated to a different deity, for example: "At dawn, in the presence of Ea, Shamash, and Marduk, you shall erect seven altars, you shall set seven censers of cypress, you shall pour the blood of seven sheep."²

Midrashic tradition attributes the seven altars to the need to recall the altars erected previously by seven righteous men: Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses.³ *Sefer ha-Mivhar*, in seeking an astrological explanation (i.e., seven altars for the seven planets), is close to the mark—it was part of Balaam's divinatory technique.

have . . . ready Hebrew *hakhen*, that is, prepare for sacrifice (see Zeph. 1:7).

2. a bull and a ram These are the most expensive (hence, efficacious) animals in the sacrificial system (cf. Job 42:7; 1 Chron. 15:26; 2 Chron. 29:21).

on each altar Hebrew *ba-mizbeah*. The definite article can be distributive.⁴

3. Stay They worked in tandem: Balak had to stand at his sacrifice while the diviner sought his omens (see also vv. 6,15,17). Its equivalent in Mesopotamia is the *āpīlu* offering his prophecy "while (the king's representative) was standing at the sacrificial (omen) entrails."⁵ In the Greek world, Xenophon claims that he was able to check on Silanus, the diviner, because "he was always present at the sacrifices."⁶

In Judaism too, the people were present at all the public sacrifices by means of their proxy, known as the *ma'amad* (from *'amad*, "stand"), which the Qumran sect refers to by the verb used here, *hityatstev*.⁷ And the Mishnah asks: "How can a man's sacrifice be offered while he does not stand by it?"⁸

here Not in the text, but see the Comment to verse 15.

your offerings Hebrew *'olatekha*, literally "your burnt offering," the specific sacrifice required. In ancient Mesopotamia, the offerer prayed by his offerings while the diviner did his work.⁹ However, Mesopotamia did not know the *'olah*, the burnt offering.¹⁰ In that culture, food was laid out for the god on a sacrificial table, but it was not consumed by fire.¹¹ Thus, Balaam was not a Mesopotamian or he adapted his practice to that of the cult of Moab (see Excursus 58).

⁴God manifested Himself to Balaam, who said to Him, "I have set up the seven altars and offered up a bull and a ram on each altar." ⁵And the LORD put a word in Balaam's mouth and said, "Return to Balak and speak thus."

⁶So he returned to him and found him standing beside his offerings, and all the Moabite dignitaries with him. ⁷He took up his theme, and said:

From Aram has Balak brought me,
Moab's king from the hills of the East:
Come, curse me Jacob,
Come, tell Israel's doom!

אֶת־שִׁבְעַת הַמִּזְבְּחֹת עָרַכְתִּי וָאָעַל פָּר וְאֵיל
בְּמִזְבֵּחַ: ⁵ וַיִּשֶׁם יְהוָה דְּבַר בְּפִי בִלְעָם וַיֹּאמֶר
שׁוּב אֶל־בָּלָק וְכֵה תַדְבֵּר: ⁶ וַיָּשָׁב אֵלָיו וַהֲגִה
נֶאֱבַר עַל־עֲלֹתָיו הוּא וְכָל־שָׂרֵי מוֹאָב: ⁷ וַיִּשָּׂא
מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר

מִן־אַרָם יָבִיֵנִי בָלָק
מֶלֶךְ־מוֹאָב מִהַר־רֵי־קָדִם
לֵכֵה אֲדַהֲלֵי נַעֲלֵב
וּלְכֵה זַעֲמָה יִשְׂרָאֵל:

while I am gone Hebrew *ve-'elekha*, which perhaps should be translated "while I go there," adding *koh* (see v. 15), which may have accidentally fallen out because the consonants *kh* appear twice in succession (haplography).

grant me a manifestation Literally, "may chance to appear [to me]."¹²

reveals to me Literally, "shows me," that is, via omens.

I will tell you That is, interpret for you.

alone If this rendering of Hebrew *shefi* (occurring only once again, perhaps, in Job 33:21) is correct,¹³ then either Balaam withdraws to practice his divination in private or the God of Israel does not wish to reveal Himself in the presence of heathens, as we find in Exodus 9:29,33, regarding Pharaoh's court.¹⁴ This word has also been rendered "bare height," taken as the singular of *shefayim*, used in Isaiah 41:18 and Jeremiah 3:2,21.¹⁵ But if that were correct, then the verb *va-ya'al*, "ascend," would be expected, not *va-yelekh*, "go."

4. manifested Himself Literally, "chanced to appear"¹⁶ (v. 3). According to the midrash, this characterizes the difference between Balaam and Moses: "Two men once knocked on a magistrate's door requesting alms, the one a friend, the other a leprous beggar. The magistrate said, 'Let my friend enter, but I shall bring the beggar's alms to the door that he may not enter and pollute my palace.' God called Moses to Him in His Tabernacle, whereas He betook Himself to Balaam."¹⁷

offered up The subject must be Balak, not Balaam. Hence, the possibility must be considered that verse 4b belongs to the speech of Balak and should follow verse 2. Balaam is informed that his instructions have been followed.¹⁸ In this case, verse 4a would continue with 5a, just as in verse 16. Two other factors also support this. Balaam implies that God has required the altars,¹⁹ but no such request is recorded; and Balaam addresses God first and not, as one would expect, in response.

5. the LORD put a word in Balaam's mouth That is, the Lord told him the exact words.²⁰ This expression indicates a divine manifestation to a prophet, as occurs with Aaron in Exodus 4:15; with Israel, a prophet-nation, in Isaiah 49:2, 58:16, and 59:21; and with Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:9 (and so with every prophet, as stated in Deut. 18:18). However, Balaam's revelation here and a second time in verse 16 stand in contrast to the third occasion: Then, he is overwhelmed by the divine spirit (24:2).

LORD If verse 5a follows immediately after verse 4a, as proposed above, then the subject here is self-understood, and "Lord" becomes unnecessary. This would, then, eliminate an obstacle to the theory that Lord, YHVH, was used only in Balaam's speech.²¹

6. offerings Hebrew *'olato*, literally "burnt offering," the specific sacrifice required by the ritual (v. 3). The singular stands for the collective as in verse 17.

⁸How can I damn whom God has not damned,
How doom when the LORD has not doomed?
⁹As I see them from the mountain tops,
Gaze on them from the heights,
There is a people that dwells apart,
Not reckoned among the nations,

8 מִה אֶקְבֵּל לֹא קִבֵּל אֱל
וּמִה אֲדֹעַם לֹא וְעַם יְהוָה:
9 כִּי־מֵרָאשׁ צִרִים אֶרְאֶנּוּ
וּמִגְבְּעוֹת אֲשׁוּרֵנּוּ
הֵן־עַם לְבָדָד יֹשֵׁב
וּבְגוֹיִם לֹא יִתְחַשֵּׁב:

BALAAM'S FIRST ORACLE (vv. 7–10)

The oracle recounts the events: Balak brought Balaam from Aram to curse Israel, but when Balaam spied Israel from the heights he realized from their strength and numbers that God had no intention of cursing them. Consequently he, Balaam, would be happy to share their fate. The blessing, as Balak formulates it in verse 11, is subdued. Israel's present state is described. Their potential is obvious (v. 10), and the theme is expanded upon in the following oracles. The poetry is inextricably linked to the preceding narrative by the common themes: Balak and Aram (22:5); curse (22:6,17); view of Israel from heights (22:41); Israel's teeming numbers (22:5). (See Excursus 56.)

7. *took up*²²

his theme Hebrew *meshalo* (see the Comment to 21:27). There is no precise rendering for this term, which applies to many kinds of discourses: apothegms (1 Sam. 10:12; 24:14); proverbs (Ezek. 12:22; 18:23; cf. Deut. 28:37); lamentations (Isa. 14:4; Mic. 2:4; see the Comment to 21:27). It is, however, never used for the discourses of Israel's prophets, a clear indication that the "Book of Balaam" never intended Balaam's oracle to be reckoned as prophecy.

Aram This may possibly fit the Mesopotamian provenience of Balaam (see the Comment to 22:5; Hos. 12:13). Aram occurs as a place-name as early as the twenty-third century B.C.E. in an inscription of Naram-Sin of Akkad, referring to a region on the upper Euphrates. The people called Arameans are not attested until the end of the twelfth century.²³

hills of the East Hebrew *harerei kedem*. Rather, "hills of Qedem." From the Egyptian story of Sinuhe,²⁴ Qedem seems to designate a specific territory in the Syrian desert (east of the Phoenician coast). This accords with its designation here as being synonymous with Aram. Furthermore, an Egyptian geographical list contains the name *qdm* along with other place-names in the area of Syro-Palestine.²⁵ Genesis 29:1 actually identifies Qedem as the region from which the patriarchs stemmed. Elsewhere in Scripture, Qedem applies to the entire desert fringe, beginning in the north at the middle Euphrates and running south to the eastern border of present-day Syria and Jordan (cf. Gen. 25:5–6; 29:1; Judg. 6:3,33). However, the second term "hills" is hardly appropriate since the specific territory of northern Aram/Qedem is not conspicuously mountainous.²⁶

Jacob The poet chooses the name *Ya'akov* deliberately: The syllable *kov* appears three times in verses 7b, 8a to balance the thrice-repeated verb *za'am*.²⁷ The word pair "Jacob/Israel" appears more than fifty times in the Bible and six times in the Balaam poems; it even appears once in a verbal form (Hos. 12:4).²⁸

tell Israel's doom The Hebrew verb *za'am* means "be indignant" (as in Ps. 7:12; Zech. 1:12; Dan. 11:30) and by extension "curse" (as in Prov. 24:24).

8. *God* Hebrew *'el*, used again in 23:19 and 24:4,8,16,23—the name of the God of the patriarchs (e.g., Gen. 46:1–2)—was worshiped by Canaanite workers in the mines of Serabit el Khadem in the Sinai Peninsula in the fifteenth century B.C.E. Inscriptions there contain the name "the Eternal El" (see Gen. 21:33).

*mountain tops*²⁹

9. *heights* Literally, "hills." The pair "mountains/hills" includes all heights, just as the pair "day/night" (e.g., Job 3:3) embraces all time and "silver/gold" (e.g., Job 3:15) includes everything of value.³⁰

¹⁰Who can count the dust of Jacob,
Number the dust-cloud of Israel?
May I die the death of the upright,
May my fate be like theirs!

מִי מִנֵּה עֲפָר יַעֲקֹב ¹⁰
וּמִסָּפָר אֶת־רֶבֶעַ יִשְׂרָאֵל
תָּמַת נַפְשִׁי מוֹת יֹשְׁרִים
וְתִהְיֶה אַחֲרֵיתִי כְמֹהוּ:

¹¹Then Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? Here I brought you to damn my enemies, and instead you have blessed them!" ¹²He replied, "I can only repeat

וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק אֶל־בִּלְעָם מָה עָשִׂיתָ לִּי לָקַח ¹¹
אֵיבִי לְקַחְתִּידָּ וְהִנֵּה בִּרְכָתָ בְּרָךְ: ¹² וַיַּעַן וַיֹּאמֶר
הֲלֹא אֵת אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁים יְהוָה בְּפִי אֲתוֹ אֲשַׁמֵּר

apart That is, apart in strength and security. This figure of speech is used of God in Deuteronomy 32:12 and of Israel in Deuteronomy 33:28, Jeremiah 49:31, and Psalms 4:9. All are synonyms of *betah*, "security."

reckoned Israel will not share the fate of other nations.³¹ Other ancient versions suggest that the laws of Israel differ from those of other nations.³²

nations Hebrew *goyim*, a political designation, in distinction to *'am*, "people," an ethnic designation. However, the usually attested word pair "people/nations" (see Deut. 33:21; 2 Sam. 22:44; Isa. 11:10) is here altered in meaning so that "nations" refers to non-Israelites and "people," the more intimate term, refers to Israel.³³

10. count the dust A reflection of the patriarchal promise of Genesis 13:16; the latter contains the same expression, "count the dust," which it relates to "seed." It has also been suggested that this expression bears magical significance. Mesopotamian sorcerers would hex the dust collected from the victim's feet,³⁴ leaving the sense here as "who can bewitch Israel?"³⁵ However, the synonymous "dust-cloud" indicates that Israel's military strength is being lauded.

Number³⁶

the dust-cloud Hebrew *'et rova'*. Since *'et* does not occur in ancient poetry, read *turba'* at³⁷ or preferably, *turba'*,³⁸ meaning "dust-cloud."³⁹ The image here is of the dust raised by Israel's marching hosts, an image found in the Bible in Ezekiel 26:10 and Nahum 1:4 and also in Akkadian literature.⁴⁰ Hebrew *rova'* is otherwise rendered as "one-fourth";⁴¹ that is, who can number even a small fraction of the Israelites (see Gen. 13:16). Saadia and Rashi render "seed," from the root *r-b-*, "copulate" (see Lev. 18:23), and Ramban suggests "encampment" from the root *r-b-ts*.⁴²

my fate Hebrew *'ahariti*, paralleled by "death." Balaam's wish illustrates the blessing that every nation and person will desire to receive from God—to share the fate of Israel. This is expressed in Genesis 12:3, 22:18, and 28:14.

BALAK'S REACTION AND SECOND ATTEMPT (vv. 11–17)

Balak is shocked and hurt by Balaam's praise of Israel, but Balaam disclaims any responsibility for his words since he was only the mouthpiece of the Lord. Balak then takes him to another site on the assumption (1) that it will provoke a change of God's mind, and (2) as a further precaution, that it will allow Balaam to work his curse on an even smaller portion of Israel. The same sacrificial and omen-taking procedure is followed.

11. I brought you Rather, "I summoned you," as in 23:20, 24:10, and Judges 11:5.

you have blessed them Hebrew *berakhta barekh*. Rather, "you have done nothing but bless," the force of the infinitive absolute.⁴³ Ostensibly there is no blessing in Balaam's first oracle, only praise. But the blessing resides in Israel's potential, and it will be articulated in the following oracles (see Excursus 56).

12. repeat faithfully Literally, "be punctilious to speak."

faithfully what the LORD puts in my mouth.”¹³ Then Balak said to him, “Come with me to another place from which you can see them—you will see only a portion of them; you will not see all of them—and damn them for me from there.”¹⁴ With that, he took him to Sedehzophim, on the summit of Pisgah. He built seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.¹⁵ And [Balaam] said to Balak, “Stay here beside your offerings, while I seek a manifestation yonder.”

¹⁶The LORD manifested Himself to Balaam and put a word in his mouth, saying, “Return to Balak and speak thus.”¹⁷ He went to him and found him standing beside his offerings, and the Moabite dignitaries with him. Balak asked him, “What did the LORD say?”¹⁸ And he took up his theme, and said:

לְדַבֵּר: חֲמִישִׁי ¹³ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בָּלָק לְדַבֵּר--נָא
אֵתִי אֶל־מָקוֹם אֲחֵר אֲשֶׁר תִּרְאֶנּוּ מִשָּׁם אֶפֶס
קָצֵהוּ תִרְאֶה וְכָלוּ לֹא תִרְאֶה וְקִבְנוּ־לִי מִשָּׁם:
¹⁴ וַיִּקְחֵהוּ שָׂדֶה צִפִּים אֶל־דָּאֵשׁ הַפִּסְגָּה וַיְבִן
שִׁבְעָה מִזְבְּחֹת וַיַּעַל פָּר וְאַיִל בְּמִזְבֵּחַ: ¹⁵ וַיֹּאמֶר
אֶל־בָּלָק הִתְיַצֵּב כֹּה עַל־עֹלֹתֶיךָ וְאַנְכִי אֲקָרָה כֹּה:
¹⁶ וַיִּקָּר יְהוָה אֶל־בָּלָעָם וַיִּשְׂם דְּבָר בְּפִיו וַיֹּאמֶר
שׁוּב אֶל־בָּלָק וְכֹה תִדְבֹּר: ¹⁷ וַיָּבֹא אֵלָיו וְהָיוּ
נֹצֵב עַל־עֹלֹתוֹ וְשָׂרֵי מוֹאָב אִתּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ בָּלָק
מַה־דְּבָר יְהוָה: ¹⁸ וַיִּשָּׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר

חֲסֵד ה' v. 13.

13. another place Balaam will continue to try the same oracular procedure to effect a favorable omen (see the Comment to 22:19). This time, however, it will be at another place, on the principle “change of place means change of luck.”⁴⁴

only a portion Hebrew *’efes katsehu*, literally “the end of its edge.” For *’efes* meaning “end,” see the Comment to 22:35. The sense then is that Balak was showing Balaam an even smaller segment of the Israelite camp than before⁴⁵ out of fear that the sight of too many Israelites would once again turn his curse into a blessing.

14. Sedeh-zophim Literally, “mountain of the watchmen,” that is,⁴⁶ “lookout post” for astronomical observation or for observing the flight of birds (see Excursus 59). The Phoenicians called the astrologer by the same root, *tsofe shamem*, “watcher of the skies.”⁴⁷

Pisgah See the Comment to 21:20.

He That is, Balak (see the Comment to vv. 3, 15).

15. here . . . yonder Hebrew *koh . . . koh*. For this idiom, see 11:31, Exodus 2:12, and Genesis 22:5 (*poh . . . koh*).

while I seek a manifestation Literally, “that I may be encountered” by God (see the Comment to v. 3).⁴⁸ The technique of manifestation was well understood by the Jewish Hellenist Philo: “(Balak) sent him (Balaam) away to seek good omens through birds or voices.”⁴⁹

16. LORD Perhaps “God” (*’elohim*) should be read (with nine manuscripts and the Septuagint) in accordance with the principle that the narrative uses the name “God” exclusively (see the introductory Comment to 22:22–35).

manifested Himself Hebrew *va-yikkar*, a Nifal reflexive. Alternatively, the Nifal is used to stress the element of chance; that is, Balaam could not coerce the Lord to appear, but the Lord “allowed Himself to be encountered” (see the Comment to v. 3).

put a word in his mouth That this phrase is stressed in connection with the first two oracles (22:38; 23:5, 12, 16) contrasts conspicuously with its total absence in connection with the last two oracles (23:25–24:25), when Balaam is visited by God’s spirit (24:2).

17. “What did the LORD say?” This is the first time Balak recognizes that Israel’s God and He alone determines Israel’s fate (see the Comments to 23:27; 24:11).

Up, Balak, attend,
 Give ear unto me, son of Zippor!
 19 God is not man to be capricious,
 Or mortal to change His mind.
 Would He speak and not act,
 Promise and not fulfill?
 20 My message was to bless:
 When He blesses, I cannot reverse it.
 21 No harm is in sight for Jacob,
 No woe in view for Israel.
 The LORD their God is with them,
 And their King's acclaim in their midst.

קום בלק ושמע
 האזינה עדי בְנוֹ צִפּוֹר:
 19 לֹא אִישׁ אֵל ויִכְזֹב
 ויִבְנֶה אָדָם ויִתְנַחֵם
 הֲהוּא אָמַר וְלֹא יַעֲשֶׂה
 ודִּבֶּר וְלֹא יִקְמֹנֶה:
 20 הֲנִנֵּה בְרַךְ לְקַחְתִּי
 ויִבְרַךְ וְלֹא אֲשִׁיבָנָה:
 21 לֹא-הָבִיט אֵינֹן בִּיעֲלֹב
 וְלֹא-רָאָה עֲמָל בִּישָׁרָאֵל
 יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי עַמּוֹ
 ויתְרוֹעַת מֶלֶךְ בּוֹ:

THE SECOND ORACLE (vv. 18–24)

By changing the venue of the sacrificial ritual, Balak had hoped to change God's disposition. In answer, God—through Balaam—instructs Balak that He is not capricious: He does not alter His purpose. God not only intends to bless Israel but reveals His intentions through prophecy, thus dispensing with the need to pry loose divine secrets by divination. With the Lord as King, Israel is invincible.

18. *Up* Hebrew *kum*, that is, listen, attention! (see 22:20).⁵⁰

Balak The fact that Balak's name appears in the poetry is further evidence that the prose and poetry are thoroughly integrated.

unto me Hebrew *'adai*.⁵¹

*son of*⁵²

19. *man* Hebrew *ben 'adam*, literally "son of man." *Ben*, "son of," also denotes a member of a class, as in *benei yisra'el*, "Israelites," or *ben navi*, "prophet's disciple" (Amos 7:14).⁵³

be capricious Hebrew *vi-yekhazzev*. The usual meaning of this verb is "lie, deceive" (Ps. 78:36), but it also describes a failing spring, in Isaiah 58:11, and an unfulfilled oracle, in Habakkuk 2:3.

*change His mind*⁵⁴ The constancy of God's intention and action contrasts with the gods' caprice, which can be appealed to by man. This is illustrated by a Mesopotamian incantation: "the evil of the *induhallatu*-lizard which fell upon me, the portent of the evil which I saw—Ea, Shamash and Marduk turn it to a portent of good, an oracle of good for me."⁵⁵ In 1 Samuel 15:29,35, one finds the notion that God's standards are not capricious as are those of man—but not that He is not capable of changing His mind. For example, He may change His mind to punish man as a result of prophetic intercession (Exod. 32:9–14) or man's repentance (Jon. 3:10).⁵⁶

speaking . . . Promise God's blessing is implied; see verse 20.

*fulfill*⁵⁷

20. *My message was*⁵⁸

*When He blesses*⁵⁹

reverse it Hebrew *'ashivennah*. For this meaning, see Isaiah 43:13 and Amos 1:3,6.

21. *harm . . . woe* Hebrew *'aven . . . 'amal*. For this connotation of both nouns, see Habakkuk 1:3 and Psalms 90:10. And although inapplicable here, they can also connote moral evil, iniquity, and are so explained in the tradition.⁶⁰

²²God who freed them from Egypt
Is for them like the horns of the wild ox.

²³Lo, there is no augury in Jacob,
No divining in Israel:

Jacob is told at once,

Yea Israel, what God has planned.

²⁴Lo, a people that rises like a lion,

Leaps up like the king of beasts,

Rests not till it has feasted on prey

And drunk the blood of the slain.

22 אֵל מוֹצִיאֵם מִמִּצְרַיִם

כְּתוֹעַפֶּת רֹאשׁ לוֹ:

23 כִּי לֹא-נִחֵשׁ בִּיַּעֲקֹב

וְלֹא-קָסַם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל

בְּעֵת יֵאמֹר לִיעֲקֹב

וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל מַה-פֶּעַל אֵל:

24 הֵן-עָם בִּלְבִיא יָקוֹם

וּכְאֶרִי יִתְנַשֵּׂא

לֹא יִשְׁכַּב עַד-יֵאכַל טָרֶף

וְדָם-חֲלָלִים יִשְׁתֶּה:

*is in sight . . . in view*⁶¹

*their King's*⁶²

acclaim Hebrew *teru'ah* is the military alarm sounded by the trumpet (10:5-6) and the shofar (Amos 2:2). But it is also used as a shout of joy in 1 Samuel 4:5-6 and, with particular relevance to this passage, for the acclamation of God as king of Israel by voice, song, and shofar in Psalms 47 and 98:6. It should be understood as an objective genitive, that is, "(Israel's) acclaim of their king." Saadia and Rashi, however, would derive it from the root *r-ḥ*, "be friendly" (Judg. 15:6; 2 Sam. 15:37), leading to the rendering "they have their King's friendship."⁶³

22. freed them⁶⁴ The Hebrew word *motsi'am* represents the Exodus as still in progress,⁶⁵ in contrast to Balak's claim that "a people *came* out of Egypt" (22:5);⁶⁶ it emphasizes that the Lord is the true source of their freedom. Here Balaam subtly corrects Balak's assertion that Israel was "a people come out of Egypt" (22:5), as if it came out without divine help.⁶⁷

horns Hebrew *to'afot*. The meaning of this word is obscure. In Psalms 95:4 it refers to the tops of the mountains. Are the horns of the wild ox its peaks? Elsewhere—Deuteronomy 33:17, Psalms 22:22 and 92:11—the wild ox is celebrated for its horns.⁶⁸

wild ox Hebrew *re'em*; Akkadian *rimu*. The metaphor can refer either to God⁶⁹ or to Israel. However, since the subject of the entire oracle is the blessedness of Israel, it probably refers to Israel's divinely endowed power (see Ps. 92:11), in which case the line should be rendered: "They are like the horns of the wild ox" (so too 24:8).⁷⁰ King Hammurabi of Babylon proclaims himself as "the fiery wild ox who gores the foe." In the ancient Near East, gods were depicted with horns or wearing horned crowns. On a bas-relief from Ugarit, Baal is pictured wearing the horns of a wild ox.⁷¹

23. augury Hebrew *naḥash*. This refers to observing omens, for example, the flight of birds (so the Septuagint) or the play of light in water as in Genesis 44:5,15 (see Excursus 59).

*in Jacob . . . in Israel*⁷²

divining Hebrew *kesem*. A synonym of *naḥash*, "augury"; but in Scripture it is attested mainly as the casting of lots—for example, with arrows, as in Ezekiel 21:2b. Here is a tacit admission that magic works but that Israel has no need for it.

planned Hebrew *pa'al*. For this meaning, see Isaiah 5:12. This is the central point of the entire "Book of Balaam": Because God has provided Israel with prophets, it has no need to resort to magical arts to determine His will. This point is expanded in Deuteronomy 18:8-15. The identical idiom occurs in the Deir 'Alla Balaam inscription 1.5 (Excursus 60).

24. like a lion This simile referring to Israel occurs frequently, as in Genesis 49:9, Deuteronomy 33:20, and Micah 5:7.

²⁵Thereupon Balak said to Balaam, "Don't curse them and don't bless them!" ²⁶In reply, Balaam said to Balak, "But I told you: Whatever the LORD says, that I must do." ²⁷Then Balak said to Balaam, "Come now, I will take you to another place. Perhaps God will deem it right that you damn them for me there." ²⁸Balak took Balaam to the peak of Peor, which overlooks the wasteland. ²⁹Balaam said to

25 וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק אֶל-בִּלְעָם גִּם-קֹב לֹא תִקְבְּנוּ גִם-
פֶּרֶךְ לֹא תִבְרַכְנִי: 26 וַיַּעַן בִּלְעָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-
בָּלָק הֲלֹא דִבַּרְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר כָּל אֲשֶׁר-יִדְבֵּר
יְהוָה אֵתוֹ אֲעֲשֶׂה: שְׂשִׁי [שְׂבִיעִי כִשְׁהוֹן
מִחוּבְרוֹת] 27 וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק אֶל-בִּלְעָם לְכֵה-נָא
אֶקְחֶךָ אֶל-מָקוֹם אֲחֵר אוֹלִי יִשָּׂר בְּעֵינֵי הָאֱלֹהִים
וְקִבַּלְתָּ לִּי מִשָּׁם: 28 וַיִּקַּח בָּלָק אֶת-בִּלְעָם רֹאשׁ
הַפְּעוֹר הַנִּשְׁקָף עַל-פְּנֵי הַיְּשִׁימֹן: 29 וַיֹּאמֶר בִּלְעָם

THE THIRD ORACLE (23:25–24:9)

Balak is very upset by Balaam's second oracle, and he blurts out that Balaam—if he cannot curse—should refrain from blessing. Balaam again responds that he is only doing God's bidding. Again at a new height, Balak prepares for a third trial of the ritual and divination. But this time Balaam does not even look for omens. Realizing that the Lord wants him to bless Israel, he moves forward without fear so that he can view the entire Israelite encampment.

25. *Don't curse . . . don't bless* This is not a dismissal of Balaam. The negative *lo* can have the force of *'al*; that is, better don't curse them and (thereby) don't bless them.⁷³

27. *Perhaps God will deem it right that you damn them* A submissive, almost plaintive tone, acknowledging the power of God. Compare it with Balak's earlier order in verse 13: "Damn them." The brusque imperative has changed to an uncertain imploration. The transformation in Balak is now clear: He must reckon with the power of Israel's God (see the Comment to v. 17).

will deem it right Literally, "be straight in the eyes of," that is, be to his liking (Judg. 14:17; 1 Sam. 18:20,26).

28. *Peor* In 21:20, Pishgah replaces Peor. It is probably the name of one of the peaks in the Abarim range (21:11) that overlooks Israel's encampment. The site is as yet unidentified. It contains a sanctuary dedicated to the god Baal (Num. 25:3; Hos. 9:10) and is the subject of chapter 25. Targum Neofiti reads here "idols of Peor" with this juxtaposition in mind.

wasteland Hebrew *yeshimon* (see the Comment to 21:20), equivalent to *ha-midbar*, "the wilderness" (24:1).

CHAPTER 24

1. *pleased*¹

the LORD As in the remainder of the narrative (24:11,13), although previously in the narrative *Elohim*, "God," had predominated (see chap. 22, n. 56). Perhaps the change reflects a subtle indication by the author that henceforth Balaam will receive direct revelation from Israel's personal God, the Lord.

to bless Israel As he had learned from God in his previous oracle (23:20), again confirming the tight links between the prose and poetry.

*as on previous occasions*²

in search of omens Balaam has learned from God in the previous oracle (23:23) that His will can be ascertained directly without resort to omens—again, a linkage between the prose and the poetry. Here the purpose of having separated himself from Balak on the previous two occasions is clarified: While Balak attended to the sacrifices, Balaam went off by himself to search for portents of the future. Perhaps, for example, he would render in poetic form his observation of the flight of birds or of clouds, while fixing his gaze on a portion of the Israelite camp (see Excursus 59).

turned his face Rather, "he set out," in consonance with the preceding Hebrew verb *halakh*, "go" (see Gen. 31:21; 2 Kings 12:18).³

Balak, "Build me here seven altars, and have seven bulls and seven rams ready for me here." ³⁰Balak did as Balaam said: he offered up a bull and a ram on each altar.

אֶל־בָּלָק בְּנֵה־לִי בָזָה שִׁבְעָה מִזְבְּחֹת וְהִנֵּן לִי
בָזָה שִׁבְעָה פָּרִים וְשִׁבְעָה אֵילִים: ³⁰ וַיַּעַשׂ בָּלָק
כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר בָּלָעַם וַיַּעַל פָּר וְאֵיל בְּמִזְבֵּחַ:

24 Now Balaam, seeing that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, did not, as on previous occasions, go in search of omens, but turned his face toward the wilderness. ²As Balaam looked up and saw Israel encamped tribe by tribe, the spirit of God came upon him. ³Taking up his theme, he said:

כ"ד וַיֵּרָא בָלָעַם כִּי טוֹב בְּעֵינָי יְהוָה לְבָרֵךְ
אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא־הָלַךְ בְּפָעַם־בְּפָעַם לִקְרֹאת
נִחְשִׁים וַיֵּשֶׁת אֶל־הַמִּדְבָּר פָּנָיו: ² וַיֵּשֶׂא בָלָעַם
אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁכֵּן לְשִׁבְטָיו וְתִתִּי
עָלָיו רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים: ³ וַיֵּשֶׂא מְשָלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר

toward the wilderness Hebrew *’el ha-midbar*, synonymous with *yeshimon* (23:28) and the steppes of Moab (22:1), where Israel was encamped (v. 2). Note also that Beth-jeshimoth (33:49) is in the Jordan plain. The meaning here is clear: Rather than timorously catching a glimpse of the edge of the Israelite camp, Balaam now boldly steps forward so that he can see all of Israel.

The midrash associates *midbar*, "wilderness," with Sinai, meaning that evil Balaam perniciously recalled Israel's apostasy of the golden calf (see the Targums and Excursus 56).

2. encamped tribe by tribe Once Balaam is convinced that God intends only blessing for Israel (23:20), he no longer needs to follow Balak's precaution that he see only a portion of Israel (v. 1) lest the curse be ineffectual (see the Comment to 22:40). He can now view the entire Israelite encampment with impunity. Tradition interprets the fact that Balak's sacrifices are repeated to mean that they are not magical in purpose but are for predisposing the deity to the wishes of the petitioner.⁴

the spirit of God came upon him The assumption here is that instead of seeking God in a dream (22:9,20) or having God's words "put into his mouth" (23:5,16), Balaam is now invested with the divine spirit and falls into an ecstatic state (vv. 3–4),⁵ the mark of a prophet (11:25–29). "Spirit of God" should be understood as "divine spirit," as in Exodus 31:3 and 35:31, since in the narrative of this chapter only the Tetragrammaton is used for the name of God.

3–9. Balaam introduces himself—now that he is invested with the divine spirit—as one who is privy to God's direct revelation. He compares Israel with well-watered trees and gardens, whose king is mightier than Amalek's Agag and whose divinely endowed leonine strength will crush all its enemies and deter future aggressors. Indeed, not only is Israel blessed and not cursed but the blessing and curse of others will be empowered to redound to those who utter them.⁶ In the opening and closing phrases of this third oracle, Balaam addresses Israel directly for the first time (vv. 3aa,b), a fitting frame for the oracle. The mention of the Amalekite king (v. 7; see 1 Sam. 15:8; 2 Sam. 8:12) and the crushing of Israel's enemies (v. 8; see 2 Sam. 12:31; 1 Chron. 20:13; Ps. 18:38–43) apparently refer to the time of Kings Saul and David. This oracle is the climactic one: In the first, only God determines blessing and curse (23:8); in the second, God's blessing cannot be revoked (23:20); in this, the third, those who bless or curse Israel will themselves be blessed or cursed.

3. Word of Balaam Hebrew *ne'um bil'am*. A self-introduction would have been expected at the beginning of a poem, not in its third stanza (e.g., 2 Sam. 23:1). However, in contrast to the prior oracles, God does not this time "put words in his mouth" (see 23:5,16). Thus, Balaam can say that these are truly his words; God has inspired the message, but it is he, Balaam, who has put it into words.⁷ The divine origin of his message is made explicit in the next verse. Similarly, King David, after opening his poem with the same formula of self-introduction (*ne'um*), also immediately identifies its divine origin: "The word of David son of Jesse, the word of the man whom God raised up⁸ . . . the Spirit of the LORD has spoken through me, His message is on my tongue" (2 Sam. 23:1–2). Indeed, the choice of *ne'um* for "word" is probably deliberate; it nearly always indicates a divine utterance.

son of Hebrew *beno*; see the Comment to 23:18.

Word of Balaam son of Beor,
 Word of the man whose eye is true,
⁴Word of him who hears God's speech,
 Who beholds visions from the Almighty,
 Prostrate, but with eyes unveiled:
⁵How fair are your tents, O Jacob,
 Your dwellings, O Israel!
⁶Like palm-groves that stretch out,
 Like gardens beside a river,
 Like aloes planted by the LORD,
 Like cedars beside the water;

נֶאֱמַר בְּלַעַם בֶּן־בְּעוֹר
 וְנֶאֱמַר הַגִּבֹּר שְׁתֵּם הָעֵינַי:
 4 נֶאֱמַר שָׁמַע אֱמֹרֵי־אֱלֹהִים
 אֲשֶׁר מַחֲזִה שְׂדֵי יְיָ
 נִפֹּל וְגִלִּי עֵינָיו:
 5 מִה־טָבוֹ אֶהְיֶה יַעֲקֹב
 מִשְׁבֹּתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל:
 6 כְּנַחְלִים נָטְיוֹ
 כְּגִנֹּת עַל־יְדֵי
 כְּאֶלֶּיִם נִטָּע יְהוָה
 כְּאַרְזִים עַל־יְמִיִּם:

whose eye is true Hebrew *shetum ha-‘ayin*.⁹ Two other renderings have been suggested: (1) “Whose eye is open,” the root *sh-t-m* in rabbinic Hebrew meaning “be open,”¹⁰ supported by the parallelism with “eyes unveiled” (v. 4) and by a medical text from Nimrud: “If someone falls to the ground with his eyes wide open, he has been possessed by a *gallu*-demon.” (2) “Whose eye is closed” (see Lam. 3:8), where *shatam* is equivalent to *satam*, “close”¹¹; that is, Balaam was heretofore blind to God’s revelation or he was actually physically blind, which would account for God’s having to open his eyes to see the angel.¹² However, this latter interpretation faces the objection that in 22:41 and 23:13, Balaam had to see the Israelites in order to curse them, a fact that he confirms in his oracles in 23:9.

4. speech Perhaps the Hebrew words *ve-yodea‘ da‘at ‘elyon*, “who obtains knowledge from the Most High” (see v. 16aβ), should be inserted here (as in one manuscript) in order to balance the verse.

beholds visions Hebrew *maḥazeh . . . yehezeh*. The visions are really auditions, judging by the frequent association of the root *h-z-h* with *davar*, “word,” as in Isaiah 2:1 and Amos 1:1 (also Mic. 1:1; cf. Hab. 1:1).

Almighty Hebrew *shaddai* (so rendered in the Septuagint), an ancient name for Israel’s God. In Genesis 49:25 it is in parallelism with *‘el*; and according to a biblical tradition in Exodus 6:4, the patriarchs knew Him only by this name. Its etymology is unknown. It may derive from Akkadian *šadû*, which has two meanings: (1) “mountain” (the gods Asshur and Bel are called *šadû rabû*, “great mountain,” i.e., almighty)¹³ and, most likely, (2) “steppe” (analogous to Heb. *sadeh*, “field,” which in 14-cent. Ugarit was pronounced *šd*). The god of the Amurru in upper Mesopotamia (the homeland of the patriarchs) was called *bēl šadē*, “the Lord of the (Syrian) Steppe.”¹⁴ However, like the parallel form *‘el*, “God,” it may not even be a proper name but a generic name for deity, god. Elsewhere too *shaddai* is parallel with *‘el/‘eloah*, “deity” (Job 5:17; 6:4; 8:3,5; 9:7, etc.). In the Deir ‘Alla inscription (1.6; see Excursus 60), *shaddai*, indeed, occurs in the plural, meaning “gods” (so also Job 19:29).

Prostrate An act of acknowledgment of and homage to the presence of God, as in Genesis 17:3 and Joshua 5:14.¹⁵ Balaam remains in full possession of his faculties and testifies that he has seen and heard; there is therefore no need to posit that he fell into a trance.¹⁶

but with eyes unveiled His eyes were either literally “opened” or, more likely, he was figuratively “enlightened”; that is, he saw with his inner eye.¹⁷

5. fair Hebrew *toru*, that is, “pleasing” as in Genesis 3:6, 24:16, and Song of Songs 4:10.¹⁸

dwellings Hebrew *mishkenotekha*, plural of *mishkan*, “Tabernacle.” The term designates a temporary structure, as indicated by its parallel, “tents.” Tradition refers “dwellings” to the Tabernacle and “tents” to the tent of the patriarch Jacob (Gen. 25:27)—the tent in which he prayed.¹⁹ The midrash sees in this verse the ideal of the Jew in his home and synagogue, and for this reason it was placed at the opening of the daily morning service.

⁷Their boughs drip with moisture,
 Their roots have abundant water.
 Their king shall rise above Agag,
 Their kingdom shall be exalted.
⁸God who freed them from Egypt

7 יִגְלִימוּ מִדְּלִי
 וְרָעוּ בְּמֵי־רִבִּים
 וְרָם מֵאַגַּג מֶלֶכוֹ
 וְתִשָּׂא מַלְכוּתוֹ
 8 אֱלֹהֵי מוֹצִיָאֻם מִמִּצְרַיִם

6. *Like palm-groves* Its meaning in Arabic. Others render “canyons, wadis,” but then the lush greenery intended by this verse would be missing.

that stretch out Hebrew *nittayu*. So Israel’s tents appeared from the heights from which Balaam beheld them. It has also been suggested that this word should be read *natah y(h)w*, “that the Lord stretched out,” which would complement the next line in structure and rhythm.²⁰ The name *yhw* for the Tetragrammaton appears on an eighth-century B.C.E. stone bowl found at Kuntilet ‘Ajrud, 50 kilometers (30 mi.) south of Kadesh-barnea.

gardens beside a river A reminder of the Garden of Eden as described in Genesis 2:10.

aloes Hebrew *’ahalim*. A word play with *’oholim*, “tents” (v. 5). A sweet-smelling tree whose sap is used as a perfume.²¹ It is an exotic plant not found in Israel and, hence, imported.

cedars beside the waters Since cedars grow on mountains and not by waters, the suggestion has been made to transpose aloes and cedars, yielding: “Like cedars planted by the Lord,” exactly as in Psalms 104:16. But it is possible that *’erez* is generic for a variety of evergreens that do not bear fruit. Such appears to be the case in Psalms 148:9. In rabbinic Hebrew a number of coniferous trees are subsumed under this term.²²

7. *Their boughs* Hebrew *dalyav*. The usual form of the plural is *daliyotav*, as in Jeremiah 19:13 and Ezekiel 17:7. Ibn Ezra and Shadal explain the image as that of trees (mentioned in the previous verse) so drenched that their boughs drip water; that is, the vegetation will be watered from above and below (see Gen. 49:25). Rashi says that the form of the word is dual and can mean “buckets.” The image would be of “Israel’s prosperity under the figure of a man returning from his abundant springs with water dripping over the two full buckets carried over his shoulders.”²³ In support, Akkadian *dalû* means “irrigate with water drawn from a well.”

drip Hebrew *yizzal*. The singular is used, although “water” is a plural, as in 19:13. Water is a common metaphor for prosperity.²⁴

Their roots Hebrew *ve-zar’o*. This word can be interpreted in two ways. It may be a reference to posterity (see the translation) or taken literally as “roots.” The image tells us that “it was beautiful in its . . . branches [*daliyotav*], because its stock stood by abundant waters” (Ezek. 31:7). Since the antecedent is the coniferous tree of verse 6, the possibility also exists that “seed” could refer to the cones borne by the branches, which, like its boughs, will also be drenched with water.²⁵

Their king Thrice promised by God to the patriarchs (Gen. 17:6,16; 35:11).

Agag The king of Amalek in the time of Saul (see 1 Sam. 15:8).²⁶ Amalek was Israel’s most dreaded enemy during the time of Moses (e.g., Exod. 17:8–16; Deut. 25:17–18). Agag may remind the poet of *gag*, “roof,” hence his wording “rise above Agag.”²⁷ The Septuagint and Samaritan read “Gog,” the legendary future antagonist of Israel mentioned in Ezekiel 38–39, thereby giving the oracle an eschatological thrust.

Their kingdom shall be exalted Rashi says that this description applies to David rather than to Saul, as the latter’s kingdom was under incessant Philistine harassment and domination. Indeed, Targum Onkelos and Targum Jonathan render “taken away,” referring to the transfer of the kingdom from Saul to David. Other versions give this line a messianic interpretation.²⁸

8. *freed them*²⁹

Is for them That is, Israel; see the Comment to 23:22.

Is for them like the horns of the wild ox.
 They shall devour enemy nations,
 Crush their bones,
 And smash their arrows.
⁹They crouch, they lie down like a lion,
 Like the king of beasts; who dare rouse them?
 Blessed are they who bless you,
 Accursed they who curse you!

בְּתוֹעֲפֹת רְאִים לוֹ
 יֹאכֵל גּוֹיִם עָרְיוֹ
 וְעֲצָמֵיהֶם יִגְרֵם
 וְחִצָּיו יִמְחֶץ:
 9 כָּרַע שֹׁכֵב כְּאַרְיֵה
 וְכֹלֵבִיא מִי יְקִימֵנוּ
 מְבֹרָכֵיךָ בְּרוּךְ
 וְאַרְכֵיךָ אָרוּר:

¹⁰Enraged at Balaam, Balak struck his hands together. "I called you," Balak said to Balaam, "to damn my enemies, and instead you have blessed them these three times! ¹¹Back with you at once to your own place! I was going to reward

10 וַיַּחֲרֹאֶף בָּלָק אֶל־בְּלָעַם וַיִּסְפֹּק אֶת־כַּפָּיו
 וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק אֶל־בְּלָעַם לֵקֵב אֶנְבִּי קִרְאָתִיךָ וְהִנֵּה
 בִּרְכֵיתָ בְּרֹד זֶה שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים: 11 וְעַתָּה בְּרַח־לֶךָ
 אֶל־מְקוֹמְךָ אֲמַרְתִּי בְּבֹד אֲכַבְּדֶךָ וְהִנֵּה מִנְעָךָ

devour Hebrew *yo'khal*, an image of military conquest, as in Numbers 13:32, Isaiah 9:11, and Jeremiah 10:25.

*smash their arrows*³⁰

9. The images in verse 9b are taken from Isaac's blessing to Jacob in Genesis 27:29 and in verse 9a, from Jacob's blessing for Judah in Genesis 49:9.

crouch Hebrew *shakhav*. Rather, "couch, rest." In the previous oracle, the lion rises and does not rest (*shakhav*) until it eats its prey (23:24). Here the sated lion now lies down to rest: Even when it is in a state of repose, who would dare rouse it?³¹

Blessed . . . bless . . . Accursed . . . curse The active participles are in the plural, and the passive participles are in the singular (also in Gen. 27:29), a construction known as the distributive singular,³² meaning, "Those who bless you, blessed be every one of them." Also implied is that everyone will bless you in order to be blessed and will desist from cursing you for fear of being cursed.³³ Perhaps there is a hint that Balak's very intention to curse Israel will now boomerang on his own kingdom (see v. 17). Also implied is that Balaam, who has blessed Israel, will himself be blessed,³⁴ supporting the thesis that the "Book of Balaam," with the exception of the ass episode (22:22–34), depicts Balaam as a saint and not as a sinner (see Excursus 58). In any event, a climax is reached by the final words of this oracle: The promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 22:18), to Jacob (Gen. 27:29), and to the Israelites (Exod. 23:22) is now fulfilled by Balaam.

THE FOURTH ORACLE (vv. 10–19)

Balak fires Balaam in a fit of anger. Balaam again spurns Balak's material temptations and persists in his initial claim that he is but the spokesman of the Lord. Still imbued with prophetic inspiration, he now turns his attention to the future of Balak's country, Moab.

10. *Enraged at Balaam* Note the progression: (1) Balak mildly rebukes Balaam (23:11); (2) his anger surfaces (23:25); (3) his anger bursts forth in words and gestures.

struck his hands together A sign of derision, as in Job 27:23 and Lamentations 2:15.

called you Rather, "summoned you" (see the Comment to 23:11).

blessed them Hebrew *berakhta barekh*. The doubling of the verb implies "you have done nothing but bless" (see 23:11).

11. *Back with you* Literally, "flee at once," as in Genesis 27:43 and Amos 7:12.

you richly, but the LORD has denied you the reward.”
¹²Balaam replied to Balak, “But I even told the messengers you sent to me, ¹³“Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not of my own accord do anything good or bad contrary to the LORD’s command. What the LORD says, that I must say.” ¹⁴And now, as I go back to my people, let me inform you of what this people will do to your people in days to come.” ¹⁵He took up his theme, and said:

Word of Balaam son of Beor,
 Word of the man whose eye is true,

יְהוָה מִכְּבוֹד: ¹² וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלָעַם אֶל־בָּלָק הֲלֹא גַם
 אֶל־מַלְאֲכָיו אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַחְתִּי אֵלָי הִבֵּרְתִּי לֵאמֹר:
¹³ אִם־יִתֶּן־לִי בָלָק מָלֵא בֵּיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא
 אוֹכֵל לַעֲבֹד אֶת־פִּי יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת טוֹבָה אוֹ רָעָה
 מִלִּבִּי אֲשֶׁר־יִדְבֹּר יְהוָה אֹתוֹ אֲדַבֵּר: שְׂבִיעִי
¹⁴ וְעַתָּה הִנְנִי הוֹלֵךְ לְעַמִּי לְכָה אֵינְעֲצֹךָ אֲשֶׁר
 יַעֲשֶׂה הָעָם הַזֶּה לְעַמְּךָ בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים:
¹⁵ וַיֵּשֶׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר
 נֹאֵם בְּלָעַם בְּנוֹ בְּעֹר
 וְנֹאֵם הַגִּבֹּר שְׁתֵּם הָעֵינִי:

your own place Hebrew *mekomekha*. The choice of this word is motivated by an ironic purpose: Previously, Balaam had been taken to Balak’s “place” (23:13,27).³⁵

the LORD This term is used here and in verse 13 instead of *Elohim*, “God.” For the significance, see the Comment to verse 1. In addition, this verse should be juxtaposed to 23:12; that is, since Balaam has consistently used the name of the Lord, Balak now utters it with ironic intent: The same Lord—Balaam’s God—has now denied Balaam any reward.

12. *The messengers*³⁶

13. *of my own accord* Balaam, like Moses (see 16:28), acts only on God’s instructions.³⁷

good or bad A merism for any kind of behavior (e.g., Gen. 24:50; 31:24,29). In 22:18 we find “big or little.” Perhaps the change in merism is intentional, to intimate the “bad” tidings in store for Moab (v. 17)³⁸ or to refer to the oracles, which blessed Israel instead of cursing her.³⁹

14. *my people* Hebrew *‘ammi*, a reference to 22:5, both verses framing an inclusion to the narrative portion of the “Book of Balaam.”

inform you Hebrew *’iy’atsekha*, that is, of God’s plan (see Isa. 14:24,26). The same root (*y-’-ts*) is used in Arabic *wa’iṣ*, the “augurer,” consulted by sheikhs before embarking on a military campaign.⁴⁰ Thus Balaam’s “information” was prophetic.

The Masoretic accentuation is disjunctive, indicating that the information itself was omitted.⁴¹ Rabbinic tradition, in the light of 31:16, supplied Balaam’s information: “Prepare inns and employ seductive women to sell food and drink at lowered prices. And these people [Israel] will come eat, drink, and have sexual intercourse with them; and they will reject their God. And they will be delivered into your hand shortly, and many of them will fall.”⁴² Other midrashim develop this theme into a total abandonment of Jewish life.⁴³

what this people will do to your people Implying that the oracle will deal only with Moab.⁴⁴

in days to come Hebrew *be-’aharit ha-yamim* is not the “end of days” but a reference to the near future from the point of view of the speaker. Thus in Genesis 49:1 the settlement in Canaan is referred to, and Deuteronomy 4:30 and 31:29 refer to adversity following Israel’s defection.

15–19. The last and climactic oracle predicts the destruction of Moab and other enemies. It completes the 3 + 1 pattern whereby the last of a triad is enhanced by the addition of a fourth member. For other biblical examples, see Amos 1:3–2:6 and Proverbs 30:18–19,29–31. The mention of Edom and the Sethites is unanticipated, but the function of these oracles is the confirmation and fulfillment of the patriarchal blessings of Genesis 25:23 and 27:29, in which the overthrow of Edom is a prominent theme. In Genesis 27:29—if the Sethites refer to all the nomadic groups descended from Abraham (Gen. 25:1–18)—Jacob/Israel is promised dominion over all his kinsmen. According to Ibn Ezra and many moderns, this prophecy refers to King David, who conquered Moab and Edom, as mentioned in 2 Samuel 8:2,13–14, 1 Kings 11:15–16, and Psalms 60:2,10.⁴⁵

¹⁶Word of him who hears God's speech,
Who obtains knowledge from the Most High,
And beholds visions from the Almighty,
Prostrate, but with eyes unveiled:
¹⁷What I see for them is not yet,
What I behold will not be soon:
A star rises from Jacob,
A scepter comes forth from Israel;
It smashes the brow of Moab,
The foundation of all children of Seth.

16 נֶאֱמַר שְׁמַע אֱמֶר־אֵל
וַיֵּרַע דַּעַת עֲלֵיוֹן
מַחְזֶה שְׂדֵי יִחוּזָה
נִפְלָ וְגִלּוֹי עֵינָיו:
17 אֲרָאֵנּוּ וְלֹא עֲתִידָה
אֲשׁוּרֵנּוּ וְלֹא קָרוֹב
דְּרֹךְ בּוֹכֵב מִיַּעֲקֹב
וְקֶסֶם שֹׁבֵט מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל
וּמַחֵץ פְּאֵתֵי מוֹאָב
וְקִרְקַר כָּל-בְּנֵי-שֵׁת:

15. Verses 15–16 are almost identical with verses 3–4. The significance of the repetition of Balaam's self-introduction is that he continues to prophesy under the influence of the divine spirit without resort to divination (see the Comment to v. 3).

16. *Who obtains knowledge from the Most High*⁴⁶ Literally, "who knows the knowledge of the Most High." This refers to one who is privy to God's designs, even "the hour of the wrath of the Most High God,"⁴⁷ in order to time his curses against Israel.⁴⁸ However, the construct may be treated not as a subjective genitive, "the Lord's knowledge," but as an objective genitive, "knowledge from the Lord"; and the verb *yodea'* can also connote "apprehend, experience."⁴⁹

Most High Hebrew *'elyon*, a title for God in Genesis 14:18–22 and Deuteronomy 32:8.⁵⁰

17. *What I see for them . . . What I behold* Hebrew *'er'ennu . . . 'ashurennu*. These two verbs occur in the first oracle, in 23:9a. Their scope is graduated, indicating a heightening of Balaam's visionary powers. In the first oracle, he is endowed with normal physical sight. In the second, he attains the spiritual power to see Israel's invulnerable state in the present. Now his vision soars from the plane of the present to behold the distant future. The verb *ra'ah* also means "to divine" (e.g., 1 Kings 22:19), as does its synonym *hazah* (e.g., Ezek. 13:6), leading to the technical terms for diviner: *ro'eh* (e.g., 1 Sam. 9:6) and *hozeh* (e.g., Mic. 3:7). In the Deir 'Alla inscription (I.I), Balaam is called the *hzh 'lhn*, "the seer of the gods" (see Excursus 60).

is not yet . . . will not be soon Clearly, a prophecy for the distant future. Rashi and Ibn Ezra interpret this oracle as referring to King David, the "star" who will conquer Moab (2 Sam. 8:2) and Edom (2 Sam. 8:14).

A star Hebrew *kokhav* has been interpreted in four ways: (1) It is understood as an image of a king, as in Isaiah 14:12, where the Babylonian king is called the morning star (see Ezek. 32:7). This would refer to the rise of King David.⁵¹ (2) Some understand it as the messianic king,⁵² identified by Rabbi Akiba as Bar Kokhba: "R. Simeon bar Yohai taught: R. Akiba interpreted 'A star rises from Jacob' as Kokhba ('star') came forth out of Jacob. When R. Akiba saw Ben Kosba, he said: This is the king Messiah (Kosba = Kokhba). R. Johanan ben Torta replied: Akiba, grass will grow out of your cheekbones before the son of David comes."⁵³ Alexander Yannai, 150 years earlier (103–76 B.C.E.), imprinted a star on some of his coins to symbolize that *he* was the conquering star that rose from Jacob.⁵⁴ (3) In ancient Near Eastern mythology, the gods Resheph, Nergal, and Apollo direct shooting stars or comets to destroy their enemies.⁵⁵ (4) *Kokhab* (not meaning "star") can mean "host" (Arab. *kaukabun* can mean "multitude of an army"): Thus, "a host shall march forth from Jacob."⁵⁶

rises Hebrew *darakh*.⁵⁷ For its military connotation, see Deuteronomy 33:29 and Isaiah 63:3. The rendering here is doubtful, since it regularly means "march, trample" in Scripture. The meaning "prevail" has been suggested, from Ugaritic *darkatu*, "dominion," and as hinted by Targum Onkelos. And if the *mem* of *mi-ya'akov* is transferred to the previous word, without changing its

¹⁸Edom becomes a possession,
Yea, Seir a possession of its enemies;
But Israel is triumphant.
¹⁹A victor issues from Jacob
To wipe out what is left of Ir.

וְהָיָה אֶדְוֹם יְרֵשָׁה 18
וְהָיָה שֵׁעִיר אֹיְבָיו
וְיִשְׂרָאֵל עֹשֶׂה חֵיל:
וְיָרַד מִיַּעֲקֹב 19
וְהָאֲבִיר שְׂרִיר מַעִיר:

meaning (an enclitic), the line will read: “when the stars of Jacob prevail.”⁵⁸ The meaning “is aimed” (Pss. 58:8; 64:4) has also been suggested,⁵⁹ the star/comet imaged as an arrow. If, however, the above interpretation (4) for *kokhav* is adopted, *darakh* can have its attested meaning of “march.”

A scepter Hebrew *shevet* also means comet or meteor, based on Akkadian *šibtu* and on rabbinic *shavit*.⁶⁰ It describes both gods and kings. For example, the god Nergal is called *ša šibti* “of the comet,”⁶¹ and on the poetical stela of Thutmose III, the god Amen-Re proclaims: “I let them see your majesty as a shooting star, that scatters fire as it sheds its flame.”⁶² *Shevet* has three usual meanings. (1) “Scepter” refers to the king’s insignia, as in Genesis 49:10 and Isaiah 14:5. Ancient Egyptian iconography represents the victorious Pharaoh striking the enemy with his scepter.⁶³ (2) “Ruler” refers to the one who wields the scepter, as in Genesis 49:10,16 and Deuteronomy 29:9. (3) “Tribe” refers to its military units, as in Judges 20:12 and 1 Samuel 9:21. If *kokhav* can mean “host,” then this last rendering for *shevet* is best.

comes forth For *kam* with hostile intent, see the Comment to 10:35.

*smashes*⁶⁴

*the brow of*⁶⁵

Moab A fitting and ironic conclusion to the Balaam story: Balak of Moab wished to curse Israel; instead, his hired seer, Balaam, curses Moab—a measure for measure principle (see Excursus 56).

*the foundation of*⁶⁶

children of Seth Hebrew *benei shet*, or Sethites. Probably identified with the tribal Shutu mentioned in the Egyptian execration texts of the early second millennium B.C.E. as a nomadic people somewhere in Canaan.⁶⁷ Hence, this is a general designation for all the nomadic groups descended from Abraham (see Gen. 25) and considered his kinsmen, over whom Israel was promised dominance in the patriarchal blessings, as in Genesis 27:29.⁶⁸

18.⁶⁹

*a possession*⁷⁰

*of its enemies*⁷¹

19. *A victor issues from Jacob* Hebrew *ve-yerd mi-ya'akov*, from the verb *radah*, “rule, control,” as in Genesis 1:28 and Leviticus 25:43.⁷² However, this interpretation is forced. A preferable solution is to read *ve-yerd(m) ya'akov 'oyevav* (transposing the last word from v. 18) and reversing the sequence of 19a, 18c, yielding: “Jacob shall rule over his enemies and Israel shall be triumphant.”⁷³ Thus without any consonantal changes, the meter of verses 18–19 is restored; and Jacob and Israel are again a word pair with Jacob the “A” word, as in seven other verses in the Balaam oracles (23:7, 10,21,23[2]; 24:5,17).

of Ir If the reference is to Ir-moab (22:36) or the city of Ar (21:28), then this line belongs in verse 17 with the oracle against Moab. Alternatively, render “of cities” (*'ir*, a collective), a reference to David, who put to death all the Edomite males (1 Kings 11:15–16) and spared one-third of the Moabite fighting force, echoed in the wording of verse 17b.⁷⁴ This verse was clearly incorporated into Obadiah’s prophecy (1:17–18) against Edom: “The house of Jacob shall dispossess . . . and no savior shall be left of the House of Esau” (see Amos 9:12).⁷⁵

²⁰He saw Amalek and, taking up his theme, he said:
A leading nation is Amalek;
But its fate is to perish forever.

וַיֵּרָא אֶת־עַמְלֵק וַיִּשָּׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר
רֹאשִׁית גּוֹיִם עַמְלֵק
וְאַחֲרֵיתוֹ עַד־יִאָּבֵד׃

²¹He saw the Kenites and, taking up his theme, he said:
Though your abode be secure,
And your nest be set among cliffs,
²²Yet shall Kain be consumed,
When Asshur takes you captive.

וַיֵּרָא אֶת־הַקֵּנִי וַיִּשָּׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר
אֵיתָן מוֹשְׁבֶךָ
וְשֵׁים בְּסֻלַּע קִנְיָ׃
כִּי אִם־יִהְיֶה לְבָעֵר קַיִן
עַד־מָה אֲשׁוּר תִּשְׁבֶּךָ׃

ORACLES AGAINST NATIONS (vv. 20–25)

This is the first example of a genre that is fully developed by the classical prophets: Isaiah 13–23, Jeremiah 46–51, Amos 1:3–2:3. It consists of three more oracles introduced by the words “taking up his theme,” yielding a total of seven oracles for the “Book of Balaam.” They differ from the previous oracle against Moab and Edom (vv. 17–19) in that they do not mention Israel. The scene depicts Balaam, still on the height, as a series of nations come into view. Indeed, from the Moabite plateau one can actually see into the Negeb, the home of the Amalekites, Asshurim, and Kenites. These verses are among the most difficult in all Scripture because of the obscurity of most of the words and references.

20. He saw As he “saw Israel” (v. 2). So it must be assumed that from the peak of Peor he saw the Amalekite and Kenite territories.

leading Hebrew *re’shit*, as in Amos 6:1. This term was chosen because it is the antonym (lit. “beginning”) of *’aharit*, “fate” (lit. “end”) in the next line.

its fate Hebrew *’aharito* (see the Comment to 23:10), or “its remnant,” as in Amos 4:2, 9:1, and Ezekiel 23:25, a fitting antonym to Amalek’s “beginnings.”

to perish forever So Targum Onkelos for Hebrew *’adei ’oved*, literally “as far as one who perishes.” For this meaning, see Proverbs 31:6 and Job 29:13, 31:19.⁷⁶

21. The Kenites A nomadic group that attached itself to Midian, Amalek, and Israel and ranged from the Sinai Peninsula to the Galilee, as far as “Elon-bezaananim, which is near Kadesh” (Judg. 4:11). The name means “smith,”⁷⁷ implying that they were itinerant craftsmen, a guild of metalworkers who plied their metallurgical skills over a wide area. They also raised livestock (Exod. 2:16–22). They are represented as a subgroup of the Midianites (see the Comment to 10:29) through Moses’ wife (Judg. 1:16; 4:11; Num. 10:29). In Judges 1:16, 4:11 and 1 Samuel 15:6–7, the Kenites who settled in Canaan are represented as allies of the Israelites, suggesting that the Kenites of the following oracle are of an earlier period.

secure⁷⁸

your nest Hebrew *kinnekha*, a word play on *keni*, “Kenites.”

be set⁷⁹

22. Kain Hebrew *kayin*, literally “smith.” Tubal-cain (*kayin*) (Gen. 4:22) is the eponymous ancestor of all the smiths and, presumably, of all the Kenites.⁸⁰

be consumed Hebrew *le-va’er*, that is, “become fuel,” a play on the original meaning of *kayin* as “smith.”⁸¹

When Asshur takes you captive The likelihood that Assyria (Asshur) is the referent is slight, as it did not enter the horizon of the Israelites until the eighth century B.C.E.. It may, however, refer to the nomadic group Asshurim (see v. 24), of whom nothing is presently known.⁸²

²³He took up his theme and said:

Alas, who can survive except God has willed it!

²⁴Ships come from the quarter of Kittim;

They subject Asshur, subject Eber.

They, too, shall perish forever.

וַיִּשָּׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר ²³
 אֲוִי מִי יִחְיֶה מִשְׁמוֹ אֵל:
 וַיָּצִים מִיָּד כְּתִים ²⁴
 וַעֲנֵי אֲשֹׁר וַעֲנֵי-עֶבֶר
 וְגַם-הֵיא עַד־אֲבָד:

23. He took up No nation is the target of this final oracle. The Septuagint prefaces it by “He saw Og” (see 21:33), but a national grouping not a personal name is needed. Some feel that “Og” in the Septuagint is a mistake for “Agag” (see the Comment to v. 7), a clan name here⁸³ on the basis of “Agagite” (Esther 3:1). It probably means “a descendant of Agag.” Others read “Gog” (as the Septuagint does in v. 7), referring to the northern barbarians (the *gagāya* of the El-Amarna letters). The problem has not even begun to be solved.

Alas, who can survive except God has willed it Hebrew *’oy mi yihyeh mi-sumo ’el*. A literal rendering is incomprehensible. Albright reads *’iyyim yohyu mi-semo ’l*, “the (inhabitants of the) isles shall be gathered from the north,” combining *’oy mi* into *’iyyim*, “isles”; detecting the verb *hayah*, “gather together” (Zech. 10:9; Neh. 3:34), a denominative from *hai*, “clan” (1 Sam. 18:18), *havrot*, “tent village” (32:41); and combining *mi-sumo ’el* into *mi-semo ’l*, “from the north” (lit. “left,” as one faces east; Gen. 14:15; Josh. 19:27). According to this attractive rendering, the reference would be to the sea peoples, called in Egyptian inscriptions “foreigners from the north . . . from the isles . . . of the sea” who invaded the entire eastern Mediterranean littoral during the thirteenth and twelfth centuries. Another proposal suggests that *mi-sumo* derives from the root *som*, akin to Arabic *sham*, “to inflict ill fortune.”⁸⁴ Thus, this verse would translate: “Alas, who can survive whom God has condemned.”

24. Ships Hebrew *tsim*, an Egyptian loan word found also in Isaiah 33:21 and Daniel 11:30. Perhaps this is the source for the anchor imprinted, together with the star, by Alexander Yannai on his coins (see the Comment to v. 17). (Today *tsim*, written *Zim*, is the name of the commercial fleet of the State of Israel.) Alternatively, some render “demonic beasts,” connecting it with *tsiyim* of Isaiah 13:21, 23:13, and 34:14.

come from the quarter of Kittim Kittim is Cyprus (Gen. 10:4). According to Josephus,⁸⁵ the name derives from the city of Kition (Phoen. Kiti), present-day Larnaca. It is clear from biblical references (Jer. 2:10; Ezek. 27:6) that it must be an island. Hence, its identification with Macedonia (in 1 Maccabees 1:1 and 8:5) or Italy⁸⁶ cannot be correct. The Kittiyim of the Arad inscriptions were probably “Greek or Cypriot mercenaries serving in the Judean army, perhaps especially in garrisons of the more remote fortresses.”⁸⁷ These ships from Kittim are interpreted in Daniel 11:30 as referring to Roman galleys.⁸⁸ The Qumran texts frequently use Kittim as a generic term for a hostile foreign power, such as the Seleucids of Syria, the Ptolemies of Egypt, and the Romans.⁸⁹ Here, however, the reference may be to the invasions of the sea peoples in the thirteenth and twelfth centuries.⁹⁰

Asshur Perhaps the Asshurim of Genesis 25:3,18 and Psalms 83:9.

Eber Hebrew *’ever*. The Septuagint reads *’ivrim*, “Hebrews.” According to Genesis 11:14–17, Eber is the eponymous ancestor of the Hebrews. Targum Onkelos reads “across [*’ever*] the Euphrates,” that is, Assyria (see Josh. 24:2). According to the recently discovered Ebla tablets, in the mid-third millennium, the king of a great empire—stretching from northern Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean—was called Ibrim. However, the identification of Eber is still obscure. Another suggestion is to read *hever* instead of *’ever*,⁹¹ possibly referring to the non-Israelite Kenite clan of Heber, which settled in the Galilee around the time of the conquest (Judg. 4:11) and made peace with the Canaanites (Judg. 4:17) before it was absorbed into the tribe of Asher (Num. 26:45; Gen. 46:17). The letters *het* and *ayin* can interchange, for example, *hefer* (26:32) and *efer* (1 Chron. 5:24). This verse, then, would relate to the subjection of the tribe of Asher and the neighboring (non-Israelite) clan of Heber to the invading sea peoples.⁹²

²⁵Then Balaam set out on his journey back home; and Balak also went his way.

25 וַיֵּקֶם בָּלָעַם וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיָּשָׁב לְמִקְמוֹ וַיְגַם-בָּלָק הָלֶךְ לְדַרְכּוֹ: פ

25 While Israel was staying at Shittim, the people profaned themselves by whoring with the Moabite women,

כ"ה וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשִׁטִּים וַיַּחֲלֵהֶם לְזָנוֹת אֲלֵי-בָנוֹת מוֹאָב: 2 וַתִּקְרָאנָה לָעָם לְזִבְחֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶן

25. This is the usual literary formula for ending a narrative, as in Genesis 18:33 and 32:1–2a. According to the tradition represented by Numbers 31:8 and Joshua 13:22, Balaam now proceeds to advise the Midianites in their war against Israel.

*set out*⁹³

Idolatry and Expiation at Baal-Peor (vv. 1–19)

This chapter stands in sharp contrast to the preceding one. Balaam's prediction of Israel's glorious promise is immediately dashed by the sickening reality of Israel at Baal-peor. The nation that dwells alone with its God (23:9,21) pollutes itself with idolatry. Moabite women entice the Israelites to participate in the cult of Baal-peor. In punishment, pestilence breaks out, and God commands Moses to impale the ringleaders. Before the order is carried out, an Israelite and a Midianite princess enter an improvised alcove near the sanctuary, where Moses and the assembled Israelites are importuning God to end the plague. Phinehas—priest, grandson of Aaron, chief of the Levitical guards (see Num. 3:32; 1 Chron. 9:20) stationed at the entrance to the sanctuary—enters the alcove, spears the couple during their sexual intercourse, and the plague is halted (see Excursus 61).

CHAPTER 25 THE APOSTASY (vv. 1–9)

The apostasy of Baal-peor and that of the golden calf resemble one another in their inner detail. Both involve worship of other gods (Num. 25:2; Exod. 32:8), the assuaging of God's wrath by the slaughter of the guilty parties (Num. 25:7–8; Exod. 32:26–28), and the designation of the line of the Phinehas/Levites for sacred service in the sanctuary (Num. 25:11–13; Exod. 32:39).¹ Moreover, Baal-peor is the punishment for the sin and the fulfillment of the sentence for the golden calf. The editor who added the notice "Then the Lord sent a plague, for what they did with the calf that Aaron made" (Exod. 32:35) to the divine pronouncement "A day will come when I will punish them for their sin" (v. 34b, NEB), clearly had Baal-peor in mind. Ironically, yet justifiably, the *coup de grâce* to the generation of the Exodus is executed when they commit apostasy for the second time. In a real sense, Baal-peor is but an extension of the golden calf.

The story of the reconnaissance of Canaan (chaps. 13–14) provides another illuminating parallel. "In both cases, the people stand on the brink of entering the land of Canaan, a setting filled with hope. The immediate response in the two stories, however, is open rebellion against God. A plague kills the people involved (14:37; 25:9). One or two faithful people separate themselves from the majority and act on behalf of God (Caleb and Joshua—Num. 14:6–10; Phinehas—Num. 25:6–7)."²

According to one tradition (31:16), the apostasy at Baal-peor was plotted by Balaam in his attempt to destroy Israel (see the Comment to 24:14). This interpretation is in keeping with Rabbi Akiba's principle: "Every section in Scripture is explained by the one that stands next to it."³

1. *was staying* Israel did not merely encamp at this site but settled for a while, as it did at Kadesh (20:1). Why? The Baal-peor apostasy is a setback; they cannot enter the land until they are purged.

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NUMBERS **במדבר**

The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation
Commentary by JACOB MILGROM



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The advantage in this scheme is that each panel is framed by an inclusion, the first by a death (AD₃) and the second, by victories (A'D'₃). The inclusion technique also reveals why the Canaanite encounter (21:1–3), removed from its original place, was inserted here (A'): to serve the purely redactional function of forming an inclusion with the victories at the end of the unit (D'). On the other hand, this scheme suffers from an imbalance: Three victories separately itemized in the text (21:21–31, 32, 33–35) are compressed into one subsection (D'₃).

The ambiguity concerning the meaning and place of the Canaanite encounter (21:1–3) within these two chapters has necessitated the presentation of the alternative schemes. However, in every other respect the two schemes are identical, which, we submit, proves that the arrangement of the material in chapters 20–21 is not haphazard but follows a structural scheme that is both aesthetic and logical. It reveals symmetry and purpose and, viewed as a whole and from a distance, satisfactorily resolves all the apparent problems that characterize the text when it is viewed from up close as a series of discrete parts.

EXCURSUS 56

The Unity of the Prose and Poetry in Chapters 22–24

Traditionists and moderns are in agreement that chapters 22–24 (the “Book of Balaam”; BB 14b [Munich MS]) constitute an independent work that was later inserted into the text of the Book of Numbers. Most scholars hold that the narrative and the oracle sections are independent compositions and, indeed, are themselves compilations of different sources. The narrative portion will be examined in Excursus 57. Here the subject is the relationship of the poetry to the prose text.

The conclusion will be stated outright: The poetry was composed for the sake of the prose. Without the narrative, the poetic oracles would make no sense, and all their allusions to personalities, nations, and events would be incomprehensible.

First, let us note that the oracles abound with references to the narrative, indeed to the very prose passages that precede the poetry. The first oracle, 23:7–10, confirms the preceding prose section that (1) King Balak of Moab has summoned Balaam from Aram to curse Israel (23:7; 22:6); (2) the Lord alone determines curse or blessing (23:8; 22:12, 24); (3) Balaam views Israel from a height (23:9; 22:41); and (4) finds them numerous (23:10; 22:5, 11). The second oracle (23:18–24) also refers to the narrative since (5) Balak’s question is answered immediately (23:18; 23:17) to the effect that (6) the Lord does not alter his decisions although Balak wants Him to (23:19; 22:13; cf. 23:27) and that (7) Israel is blessed (23:20; 22:17) or, alternatively, that Israel will be blessed (23:20; 24:1). (8) Balaam also is taught that he can approach the Lord directly without resort to divination (23:29), and he promptly does so (24:2). The final two oracles (24:3–9, 15–19) demonstrate that (9) since Balaam no longer has God’s word put into his mouth (23:5, 12, 16), he composes his own, divinely inspired oracles (24:4, 16; 24:2b). (10) His revelation is direct (24:4, 16; 24:2); (11) his eyes are open to revelation (24:4, 16), a point challenged by the ass episode (22:31); and (12) he sees the entirety of Israel’s encampment (24:5–6; 24:20). Thus the poetry is replete with indispensable references to the prose.

Moreover, the oracles keep perfect pace with the thematic progression of the adjoining

narrative text. In both texts, Balaam exhibits a step-by-step development from seer to prophet. In the first oracle (23:7–10), Balaam, brought by Balak from Aram to curse Israel, sees them from a height and realizes, from their strength and numbers, that God has no intention to curse them. In the second oracle (23:18–24), Balaam learns that neither sacrificial ritual nor a select view of Israel's camp can sway God's resolve, that God is with Israel and, hence, no harm can come to them, and that God intends to bless Israel and reveal His plans to them directly. In the third oracle (24:3–9), the theme of blessing approaches a climax. Whereas curse (and blessing) is determined solely by God (23:8), and His word cannot be revoked (23:20), this oracle now teaches that blessing or curse directed to Israel is empowered to redound to its author (24:9). Moreover, now that Balaam knows that the Lord will convey His will to him through prophecy, he renounces divination. Finally, in the fourth oracle (24:15–19), Balaam, who is still possessed by the divine spirit, prophesies that Moab will fall under Israel's domination. The measure for measure principle is invoked: Balak of Moab who hired Balaam to enable him to conquer Israel is now informed by Balaam that Israel will conquer Moab.

Also, Balaam's rise in esteem is inversely matched by the downgrading of Balak. In the first oracle Balak is king of Moab (23:7); in the second, the son of Zippor (23:18), that is, an ordinary mortal; and in the third and fourth oracles, he disappears entirely. Conversely, in the first oracle Balaam is the passive instrument of Balak (23:7); in the second, he gives orders to Balak (23:18); and in the third and fourth, having become the confidant of the Lord, he can ignore Balak altogether (24:4, 16).¹

Thus the many interlocking details and the parallel development of identical themes in the prose and poetry demonstrate that chapters 22–24 (with the exception of the ass episode—22:21–35; see Excursus 57) form an organic unity. Of course, the possibility must be considered that the poetic oracles and the narrative were originally independent of each other, discrete epics on the same theme, which were fused at a later date by a single editorial hand. However, even were this so, the fusion is so thoroughgoing and skillful that the original seams are no longer visible: The redaction is a new artistic creation.

EXCURSUS 57

Balaam and the Ass (22:22–35)

The opening segment of this episode clearly contradicts its immediate antecedent: God is wroth with Balaam for undertaking a journey (v. 22) that He has just permitted (v. 20). There is additional evidence that this episode is not a continuation of the previous narrative: Balak and the Moabites have disappeared from the scene. Balaam's ass traverses cultivated fields and vineyards, hardly the long stretches of desert she would have encountered had she set out from Balaam's home on the Euphrates (see the Comment to 22:24). The protagonists of the story have undergone a radical shift: Heretofore, it was Balak who pitted himself against God; now it is Balaam. Most important of all, Balaam, hitherto the compliant servant of God (Excursus 58), now openly defies Him by consenting to curse Israel without His permission (vv. 22, 34). Thus the inconsistencies of this episode point to its discreteness. And its origin can be surmised by its genre—a folk tale, current among many peoples, dealing with the confrontation with a demonic force encountered in the course of a journey. A particularly striking analogy is supplied by an Italian folktale:

Between Aci Castello and San Filipo, there is an ancient oak, haunted by spirits who prevent anyone from passing. A man who once found himself at the spot around midnight and who wanted at all costs to forge ahead, was knocked so violently against the walls on either side of the road that he died. Another, who likewise reached the place at midnight with his donkey, was forced to turn back. And a laborer who came by one day with a cartload of hay saw the rear-axle of his vehicle buckle and the oxen stop in a fit of terror. He had to take to his heels, leaving everything on the roadside.¹

The conclusion is inescapable: The ass episode represents a folk theme with a life of its own. Thus, it is a separate composition that was interpolated into the story of Balaam.² Various telltale signs bear witness to this fact: the editorial seams, the gross contradiction between verses 20 and 22 at its beginning, and the repetitive resumption in verse 35, repeating verses 20 and 21.

Now that the ass episode is recognized as an interpolation, one can inquire as to its purpose. Why was it inserted here? The goal of the episode is doubtless the humiliation of Balaam, evidenced by the strain of irony that runs through the entire pericope (and recognized by the midrash).³ Balaam, who desires to subdue Israel with words, cannot even subdue his ass with a stick (Tanḥ. Balak 9). Balaam, who claims prophetic sight (24:4,17), cannot see what his ass sees three times. Balaam, who claims prophetic speech since the Lord puts words into his mouth (22:38; 23:5,12,16), is now matched by his ass (v. 28). Balaam, who boasts that “his knowledge is from the Most High” (24:16), has to admit, “I did not know” (v. 34; Tanḥ. Balak 10). Balaam, who is the wisest of the wise, is bested in a verbal exchange with the most stupid of beasts (v. 30; Gen. R. 93:10; Num. R. 20:14). Balaam, who wishes to slay a whole people with his words, can only kill his ass with a sword (Num. R. 20:14). Balaam, who would slay his ass if only he could find a sword (v. 29), does not see the sword extended by the angel (v. 23). Thus “the ass in this episode plays the role of Balaam—beholding divine visions with eyes unveiled—to Balaam’s Balak.”⁴ In truth, Balaam is depicted on a level lower than his ass: more unseeing in his inability to detect the angel, more stupid in being defeated verbally by his ass, and more beastly in subduing it with his stick whereas it responds with tempered speech.

The lampooning of Balaam, then, serves the purpose of downgrading his reputation. It aims to demonstrate that this heathen seer, who was intent on cursing Israel without God’s consent, is in reality a fool, a caricature of a seer, one outwitted even by his dumb beast. This image of Balaam—as wicked—is the one reflected in the later biblical and postbiblical literature. He is depicted as one whose Pharaonic malice toward Israel will be frustrated by Israel’s God as He transforms Balaam’s curses into blessings (see Excursus 58).

EXCURSUS 58

Balaam: Saint or Sinner? (chaps. 22–24)

If one were to remove the ass episode (22:22–35) from the text, what would remain is a picture of Balaam the saint (see Excursus 57).¹ Over and over again, whether in response to Balak’s emissaries or to Balak himself, Balaam harps on a single theme: his unconditional submission to the will of the Lord. He will not allow himself to be hired without the Lord’s consent (22:8,13,18). All of Balak’s gold and silver will not sway him from pronouncing only that which the Lord has commanded him (22:38; 23:12,26; 24:12–13). Moreover, it is clear from the beginning that Balaam has no intention of cursing Israel:² “I could not do

anything, big or little, contrary to the command of the LORD my God" (22:18). He proffers no apologies for his failure to curse Israel and does not offer to try again, but explains as follows: "I can only repeat faithfully what the LORD puts into my mouth" (23:12). Consistently and unflinchingly, Balaam proclaims himself the Lord's obedient servant, who, like Moses, denies that he has ever done anything "of my own accord" (24:13; see 16:28). Indeed, even when he realizes that God wishes him to bless Israel (23:20; 24:1), he does not proceed to do so until he is suffused with God's spirit (24:2; see 24:13). Finally, Balaam is rewarded for his fidelity to God not only by God's promise that "Blessed are they who bless you" (24:9) but by the boon He bestows upon Balaam by granting him a direct revelation without having to resort to divination (24:2).

There was, then, a very old, favorable view of Balaam, as is evident in Micah: "My people, remember what Balak king of Moab plotted against you and how Balaam son of Beor responded to him" (Mic. 6:5). Thus, in eighth-century Judah a tradition existed that pinpointed as the villain of the story not Balaam but Balak. Another passage suggests a similar assessment: "He (Balak) sent for Balaam son of Beor to curse but the Lord your God refused to destroy you" (Josh. 24:9–10 LXX). Again, Balaam emerges as a neutral figure in the confrontation between God and Balak.

Reflexes of this affirmative appraisal of Balaam are occasionally found in the post-biblical literature as well. According to Pseudo-Philo, the night Balaam consulted God (see 22:8), he offered the following prayer: "Wherefore Lord do You tempt the race of men? They therefore cannot sustain it, for You know more than they all that was in the world before You founded it. And now enlighten your servant if it be right that I go with them" (BAP chap. 18, p. 123). And according to the midrash, Balaam gave the following reply to Balak's emissaries: "I cannot undertake to do any evil against Israel with whom is the Lord" (Ag. Ber. 65). The midrash also states that Balaam "was greater in wisdom than Moses" (SER 26:142). Praise of Balaam reaches its summit in the following midrash: "There were three features possessed by the prophecy of Balaam that were absent from that of Moses: (1) Moses did not know who was speaking with him (see Exod. 3:6; Exod. R. 3:1), whereas Balaam knew who was speaking with him (24:4). (2) Moses did not know when the Holy One Blessed Be He would speak with him, whereas Balaam knew (24:16a β). In illustration of this, Balaam has been compared with a king's cook who knows what fare the king will have on his table and how much is spent by the king on his board. It was in the same way that Balaam knew what the Holy One Blessed Be He would speak to him about. (3) Balaam spoke with Him whenever he pleased, for it says: 'prostrate, but with eyes unveiled' (24:4,16), which signifies that he used to prostrate himself on his face and straightway his eyes were unveiled to anything he inquired about. Moses, however, did not speak with Him whenever he wished (Num. R. 14:20)."³ Thus, according to this view, Balaam was in some respects even superior to Moses.

Yet the preponderance of the passages on Balaam, biblical and postbiblical alike, are derogatory. The *Grundtext* is in the Balaam section itself, in the episode of the ass (22:22–35): Here Balaam seeks to curse Israel without divine permission (22:22,34; see Excursus 57). Its reflex surfaces first in Deuteronomy with the explicit charge that Balaam set out to curse Israel: "The LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, for the LORD your God loves you" (Deut. 23:6; see Josh. 24:10; Neh. 13:2). Deuteronomy's denigration of Balaam is understandable given its premise that prophets arise only in Israel, whereas their pagan counterparts are abominable magicians (Deut. 18:9–15). And elsewhere Balaam is

censured for another reason: “They [the Midianites] are the very ones who, at the bidding of Balaam, induced the Israelites to trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, so that the LORD’s community was struck by the plague” (Num. 31:16). Balaam, that is, had advised Balak to demoralize Israel’s fighting force by using Midianite women to seduce it into the service of their cult (see the Comment to 24:14). That this tradition is as old as that of Deuteronomy, if not older, is now demonstrable by the eighth-century Deir ‘Alla inscription, which also tells of Balaam advising the establishment of an idolatrous cult (see Excursus 60). Both pejorative traditions are combined in Joshua 13:22, “Together with the others [the Midianites] that they slew, the Israelites put Balaam, the augur, to the sword.” That he was an augur points to his condemnation by the law of Deuteronomy 18:10–13, and that he was slain with the Midianites whom he incited against Israel points to Numbers 31:8, 16.

The postbiblical texts exaggerate Balaam’s vices to such a degree that he becomes an exemplar of villainy. Philo portrays him as more eager even than Balak to curse Israel (1 Mos. 285–286). Josephus also insists that Balaam intended to comply with Balak’s wishes (Ant. 4.119–122). The Christian Bible, too, emphasizes Balaam’s avarice (2 Pet. 2:15–16; Jude 11) and his counsel of idolatry and debauchery (Rev. 2:14). The tannaitic rabbis claim that “Balaam the Wicked” and all who follow in his ways are cut off from the world to come; that is, they forfeit immortality (Mish. Avot 5:19; see Sanh. 105a–106b, Targums to chaps. 22–24).

Thus the transformation is complete. Later tradition acknowledges almost nothing of Balaam the obedient servant of the Lord, who could not be bribed by all the wealth of Moab. He is, instead, the archetypal enemy of Israel, a Pharaoh or Haman, whose power would threaten to annihilate Israel were it not for the intervention of Israel’s God. Yet both traditions, the saint and the sinner, have their roots in Scripture, indeed, in these very chapters of the “Book of Balaam.”

EXCURSUS 59

Balaam: Diviner or Sorcerer? (chaps. 22–24)

Magic comprises two categories, sorcery and divination, which differ in their objective: the former attempts to alter the future; the latter, to predict it. The magician who claims to curse or bless is a sorcerer, whereas the one who foretells events but cannot affect them is a diviner.

In Israel, sorcery (*keshafim*) is not only banned (Deut. 18:10) but punished with death (Exod. 22:17). Mesopotamian laws also hold that sorcery (*kishpu*) is a capital crime, but they refer to black magic, for example, hexing an individual and other such antisocial behavior.¹ Sorcery also had a legitimate place in Mesopotamian society, in exorcising demons and countering the effects of black magic (*Shurpu*, *Maqlu*). In biblical religion, sorcery in any form was, by definition, deemed ineffectual since all events were under the control of the one God. It was also deemed heretical since any attempt to alter the future purported to flout and overrule the will of God. A sorcerer’s technique (still not fully understood) is both condemned and ridiculed by Ezekiel: “Woe to those who sew pads on all armjoints and make bonnets for the head of every person, in order to entrap! . . . You have announced the death of persons who will not die and the survival of persons who will not live—lying

to My people, who listen to your lies" (Ezek. 13:18–19). Yet, despite the official ban on sorcery (rather, because such legislation was necessary), we infer that it was widely practiced (see 2 Kings 9:22; Jer. 27:9; Mic. 5:11; Mal. 3:5; 2 Chron. 33:6).

Divination is the science of reading omens, predicated on the assumption that the course of events is predictable: its advance notices are imprinted in natural phenomena or discernible in man-made devices. The following forms of divination are mentioned in Scripture: casting of lots (sortilege; 1 Sam. 14:42–43); interpreting oil or water patterns in a cup (hydromancy or oleomancy; Gen. 44:5,15); inspecting the shape of a sacrificial animal's liver (hepatoscopy; Ezek. 21:6); and consulting (still unidentifiable) *terafim* (Judg. 17:5; 18:14; Hos. 3:4; Ezek. 21:26; Zech. 12:2) or the spirits of the dead (necromancy; 1 Sam. 28:9; Isa. 8:19; 19:3; 29:4). In the Bible the king of Israel consults the prophets performing divination before engaging the Arameans at Ramoth-gilead (1 Kings 22:5). Indeed, throughout the ancient Near East divination was widely practiced before battles in order to ascertain the will of the gods. Thus King Hammurabi of Babylon sends his *bārû*-diviner to "gather omens" before attacking Shabazum.² The Hittites divine by stars and birds, and the ancient Greeks consult diviners before military decisions are taken (e.g., Iliad 1.60–120, Anabasis 5.6.29; see the Comment to 23:3).

Divination could be tolerated in Israel since, theoretically, it was not incompatible with monotheism—the diviner could always claim that he was only trying to disclose the immutable will of God. Indeed, according to one source, the prophet originally was called a diviner (1 Sam. 9:9). Thus, the diviner, in contrast to the sorcerer, was never subject to judicial execution. The exception was the necromancer (Lev. 20:27; but not those who consulted him: Lev. 19:31), who laid claim to the sorcerer's power to raise up the dead even against their will (1 Sam. 28:15). Yet certain religious circles condemned divination as an abominable heresy (Deut. 18:10–12; 1 Sam. 15:23)—not that they doubted its efficacy. Rather, God had granted Israel the special boon: He communicated with them directly, either through prophets or dreams (Deut. 12:6–8; 13:2–6). Nonetheless, the official cult did sanction one divinatory medium: the Urim and Thummim, carried on the (High) Priest's ephod (Exod. 28:30–35; 1 Sam. 2:28; 14:3; 23:6,9; 28:6,30:7).

Into which category of magician does Balaam fall? It has already been noted in the Comment to 23:14 that Balaam required hilltops (and solitude; 23:3) in order to read astronomical signs and other omens—a sure sign of divination. The terminology applied to Balaam confirms this: His craft is called *naḥaṣh* (23:23; 24:1) and *kesem* (22:7; 23:23). *Naḥaṣh* was practiced by Joseph (Gen. 44:5,15), who manifestly sought to read the divine will. *Kesem* is the label put on clairvoyance (Zech. 10:2; see Ezek. 13:9; 21:34), necromancy (1 Sam. 28:8), and three other forms of divination (Ezek. 21:26–28). Indeed, in the Deir 'Alla inscription (Excursus 60), Balaam is expressly called a *ḥozeh*, a clairvoyant (1.1), indicating that outside of Israel he was also known as a diviner (see Josh. 13:22). Moreover, the list of birds in that inscription (1.7–10) may indicate that Balaam divined by interpreting the omens of birds, and it may be no accident that such is the Balaam tradition preserved in Philo (1 Mos. 282,287).

Yet Balak expects Balaam to curse Israel. This means that Balak regarded him as a sorcerer, one who has the power to determine Israel's destiny. Balak wanted a sorcerer—one who could emasculate Israel with his curses so that the Moabites would prevail over them in battle (see the Comments to 22:6,11). Balaam (rather, Balak's image of Balaam) is paralleled by the practice of pre-Islamic Arabs who would commission a poet (*shā'ir*) reputed to be inspired by the *jinn* (spirit) or *shaiṭān* to compose a *hijā'*-curse of the enemy.³

Indeed, Muhammad himself had a poet curse his opponents before the Battle of Bedr. The curse was conceived in material terms, as an arrow shot from the bow so that “if, when a man was cursed, he was thrown down, it avoided him” (Ibn Hishâm).⁴

Herein lies the major tension in the story. Balak hires Balaam as a sorcerer, but Balaam denies he has such power—his God is the Lord, God of Israel. He can act only as a diviner not as a sorcerer and maintains, again and again, that he can only speak and act as directed by God: “I could not of my own accord do anything good or bad contrary to the LORD’s command” (24:13; see 22:8,11,38; 23:3,6,12,26). Balak, just as relentlessly and despite three demonstrations to the contrary, insists that Balaam is a sorcerer and, therefore, responsible not only for his failure to curse Israel but for the fact that he blessed them (23:11,25; 24:10). Balaam does not deny this charge but again insists that he has blessed Israel under the Lord’s instructions: “My message was to bless: When He blesses, I cannot reverse it” (23:20; see 24:1,9).

Thus, Balaam never appears as a sorcerer but as a diviner. Indeed, the fact that he is given a northern Mesopotamian provenience corroborates his divining credentials. In Mesopotamian sources there are no instances of a sorcerer who curses the king’s enemies. The magician who accompanies the king into battle, as noted above, is the *bārû*, the diviner. Thus Balaam, if he is a Mesopotamian, should have been expected to divine for Balak not to curse for him. And, in fact, that is precisely how he operates. Twice while Balak is occupied with the sacrificial ritual, Balaam divines that God wants him—indeed, dictates the words to him—to bless Israel (23:3–5,15–16). The third and fourth times, casting divination aside, he rises to the level of prophecy. Needing no dictation from God, but flooded by His spirit, he composes his own utterance (*ne’um*) of blessing (24:1–2).

Balaam’s oracles of a blessing are an index of his spiritual growth. The first (23:7–10) expresses praise of Israel’s *present* status and Balaam’s desire to share it. The second (23:18–24) stresses that God’s Presence in Israel obviates the need for divination and endows Israel with leonine power. The third and fourth, Balaam’s own compositions, are predictive: Israel will be blessed with prosperity and victory (24:3–9) and, as a result, will crush Balak’s nation, Moab, and witness the destruction of other enemies (24:18–23). Thus Israel’s blessing moves from the present to the future, from a description of Israel’s immediate potential to its eventual fulfillment, reaching its crescendo in the full retribution it will exact from Balak (through his nation) for defying God by attempting to destroy Israel. Balak, in effect, is another Pharaoh whose nation was also punished because he dared to block the divine plan for Israel’s salvation. The parallel with Pharaoh is even more apposite since Balak, just as mulishly, tries three times to thwart God’s design to bless Israel and thereby brings doom to his own people.

EXCURSUS 60

Balaam and the Deir ‘Alla Inscription

In 1967 a Dutch archaeological expedition, digging at Deir ‘Alla in an ancient delta formed by the juncture of the Jabbok and Jordan rivers, uncovered fragments of an inscription written on wall plaster inside an Iron Age II (900–600 B.C.E.) temple. On both stratigraphic and epigraphic grounds, the inscription has been dated to the eighth century. Its language,

though originally thought to be Aramaic,¹ is clearly a dialect of Hebrew,² probably of that very region of Transjordan in which it was found. Judging by the curve of the fragments, the inscription was most likely written on a stele (pillar). And judging by the contents, it may have had something to do with the founding of a temple.

The plaster fragments belong to twelve groups of "combinations," only two of which are large enough to be regarded as continuous texts. The fragmentized state of the inscription allows only a conjectural translation and interpretation. What follows is a tentative translation of combinations 1 and 2.³ Reconstructions are indicated by square brackets, unclear letters by a superlinear dot, doubtful translations by a parenthetical question mark, and missing text by three dots.

COMBINATION 1

Line

1. [This is] the account of [Balaam, son of Be]or, who was a seer of the gods. The gods came to him in the night, and he saw a vision
2. according to the oracle of El. Then they spoke to Ba[laa]m son of Beor: "This he will do . . . in the future(?) . . ."
3. And Balaam rose on the next day . . . and he wept
4. bitterly. And his people came up to him [and said to] him, "Balaam, son of Beor, why do you fast and weep?" And he
5. said to them: "Sit down and I shall relate to you what the *shadda* [yin] are going to do.] Come now and see the work of the gods! The g[o]ds gathered together:
6. the *shaddayin* took their places at the assembly and they said to Sh[eger . . .]: "Sew up, bolt up the heavens with your dense cloud, ordain darkness and not eternal light.
7. And place the dark clou[d's se]al [on] your bolt, and do not remove it forever! For the swift shall
8. revile the eagle and the voice of the vulture shall sing [. . .], the young of the *nahats*-bird shall claw up the young of the heron, and the swallow shall tear at
9. the pigeon, and the sparrow . . . the staff. At the place where ewes are brought, the hares shall eat branches
10. . . . drink wine and (from) cups. They heard this reproach . . .
11. . . . He will take you to the wise women, mourners, the preparer of myrrh, and the priestess
12. . . . for the prince, a tattered loincloth. The respected man shall respect (others) and the one who gave respect shall be re[spected . . .]
13. . . . The deaf ones shall hear from afar
14. . . . the eyes (?) [of] a fool shall see visions. Sheger and Ashtar
15. . . . the panther. The pigling chases the you[ng] of . . .

COMBINATION 2

4. young woman full of love . . .
5. an offspring . . . every moist . . .
6. El will be satisfied. Let him cross over to the House of Eternity . . .
7. the house where the traveler does not come and bridegroom does not come, the house . . .

8. and the worm from the tomb; from the testicles of men, from the thighs of . . .
9. . . . Will he not take counsel with you? Or will he not take advice from one residing . . .
10. You will cover him with one garment. If you are hostile to him, he will be weak. If . . .
11. I shall pl[ace worms(?)] under your head. You will lie down on your eternal bed to perish . . .
12. . . . in their heart. The offspring sings in his heart . . .
13. . . . kings will see . . . Death will take the newborn child, the suckling . . .
14. . . . the heart of the offspring is hesitant. He comes to . . .
15. . . . to his end . . .
16. . . . a distant vision . . .
17. to make known (lit. "to know") the account he spoke to his people orally (lit. "by tongue") your judgment and your punishment
18. and we shall not drink . . .
35. . . . will drip rain (?) and tongue . . .
36. will drip dew and . . . tongue . . .

The many lacunae and the questionable readings and renderings give some idea why the above translation is largely conjectural. Yet the following is clear. A seer named Balaam the son of Beor has a nocturnal vision in which the gods speak to him (1.1–2)—precisely the circumstances of Numbers 22:8–9, 14–20. (Is this why *'elohim*, the plural form of the Deity, is used in the narrative? See chap. 22, note 56). The divine message is obscure but it causes Balaam to weep (1.3–4). His people ask him the meaning of his weeping and fasting, and he tells them that the council of the gods, the *shaddayin*, has decided to inflict a drought on the land (1.4–7). This is followed by a description of desolation that, in certain aspects, is also found in the Bible and the literature of the ancient Near East. The natural world is overturned. Light (*ngh*) is eclipsed by total darkness (*hšk*) (1.6–7); compare Amos 5:20: "Surely the day of the LORD shall be/not light, but darkness [*hoshekh*],/blackest night without a glimmer [*nogah*]" (see also Ezek. 32:7–8; Joel 2:2, 10; Zeph. 1:15). The devastated land is overrun by wild beasts and birds (see Isa. 34:10–15; Zeph. 2:14–15; Sfire I.A. 32–33). Their natures are reversed: The weak birds turn against the strong, and the vulture sings (1.7–9). The land is bereft of joy; the wayfarer and the bridegroom are no longer seen (2.7)—reminding us of Jeremiah 7:34: "I will silence in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem the sound of mirth and gladness, the voice of bridegroom and bride" (see Jer. 16:9; 25:10), and of Isaiah 33:8: "Highways are desolate,/wayfarers have ceased" (see Isa. 34:10; 60:15). Aristocrats will don loincloths (1.12; see Isa. 3:24), the honored and lowly will exchange roles (1.12; see Isa. 3:5), the deaf will hear from afar (1.13; see Isa. 29:18), and fools will see visions (1.14; see Joel 3:1; Zech. 13:4–6). Death will reign supreme (2.8, 11)—snatching the newborn (2.13; see Jer. 9:20; Hos. 9:16) and the youth (2.4, 8; see Deut. 32:25; 2 Kings 8:12) and occupying the professional mourners and morticians (1.11; see Jer. 9:16–19; 2 Chron. 16:14; Mark 14:8; 16:1; Ras Shamra 25.460.12).

The names Sheger and Ashtar (1.14) clearly relate to a tandem found in the Bible (Deut. 7:13; 28:4, 38, 51), where it refers to the offspring of cattle and sheep. Here it stands for two fertility deities: Ashtar, a god well known from the Moabite stone and the Ugaritic texts, and Sheger, a goddess, probably Ashtar's consort, known from the Punic personal name 'Ebhedsheger and from a Ugaritic list of offerings.⁴ It is probably they who are responsible for ending the drought with the onset of rain (2.35–36) and, presumably, fertility.

These data most plausibly fit into the following story line: Balaam, having learned in a dream that the gods intend to reverse nature, bringing blight to the land and death to its inhabitants, presumably intercedes with them (in the missing 2.19–34) to revoke their decision. Alternatively, or sequentially, Balaam's intercession may, in the manner of his biblical counterpart, have implored the gods by means of sacrifice (Num. 23:1–2, 14, 29–30). Perhaps the temple on whose walls this inscription was written was founded to honor the gods (Sheger and Ashtar?) who heeded Balaam's plea/sacrifice.

If this interpretation of the Deir 'Alla inscription is correct, it has far-reaching implications for the biblical story of Balaam. First, it distinctly shows that the Balaam tradition was very much alive in the eighth century in a non-Israelite, Transjordanian community. Indeed, that it is situated just to the north of the biblical setting of the story may indicate as well that Balaam was not a Mesopotamian from the Euphrates (see the Comments to 22:5; 23:3) but an Aramean (23:7) or an Ammonite (23:5 Sam.), that is, from a nearby region. Moreover, Balaam is not introduced, implying that his name was well known. And furthermore, Balaam is presented as a seer, not as a sorcerer, in keeping with the biblical narrative (see Excursus 59). Equally significant is that Balaam is presented in a positive light, again in agreement with the main biblical story (but not with the ass episode; see Excursus 57). It has also been noted in Excursus 58 that the prophet Micah, also of the eighth century, holds a favorable opinion of Balaam. However, the accusation that Balaam devised the scheme to have the Moabite women seduce Israel into worshipping Baal-peor (Num. 31:16; see Excursus 58) may be traceable to Deir 'Alla's assertion that Balaam founded a pagan (fertility?) cult. This means that both views of Balaam, positive and negative, are contemporary. In fact, they must be older than the eighth century, since both Micah and Deir 'Alla refer to the Balaam episode as having occurred long before. Thus we now have extrabiblical confirmation of the antiquity of the Balaam traditions.

EXCURSUS 61

The Apostasy of Baal-Peor (25:1–18)

The major critical problem in the text of the Baal-peor incident is that the solutions to the crisis offered by God and Moses do not agree with each other and that neither one is actually fulfilled. God orders the impalement of all the leaders; Moses orders the "judges" to slay all the idolators, and neither is done. A third solution, the slaying by Phinehas of a sinning couple *in flagrante*, appeases God's wrath.

According to most scholars, three different versions of this incident lie behind the text: The actual impalement of the leaders at God's command, the actual slaying of the guilty at Moses' command, and Phinehas's deed. The editor of the Masoretic text, so runs the theory, truncated the ends of the first two solutions to give the appearance that they were not carried out; Phinehas's solution alone was acceptable to God. From this alleged reconstruction—even if it is correct—we learn nothing, for it does not explain why the partial versions of the first two stories would have been retained. Surely, they must be there for a reason and only by viewing the text as a unity can one hope to disclose what it might be. Moreover, the grounds for maintaining this chapter as a conflation of sources are patently insufficient. There are four criteria by which to separate out literary sources: (1) factual contradictions; (2) expansions or glosses, usually of a tendentious nature; (3)

dependencies"; "dispossessed," *va-yoresb*, is singular. The versions, however, read it as a plural.

57. Kallai, "The Wandering-Traditions."

58. Num. 32:33; Deut. 1:4; 4:47; 29:6; 31:4; Josh. 2:10; 9:10; Neh. 9:22; Pss. 135:11; 136:20.

59. However, see the Comment to 32:39-42. This is another indication that this account of the conquest of the Bashan (vv. 33-35) is a later version.

60. A. Dillmann, *Die Bücher Numeri, Deuteronomium, und Josua* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1897).

Chapter 22

1. Rather, "Book of Balaam"; BB 14b, Munich MS.

2. R. Johanan in Git. 60a.

3. P. Volz, Review of A. F. von Gall, *Zusammensetzung und Herkunft der Bileam-Perikope in Num. 22-24* (Giessen: J. Ricker, 1900); TLZ 14 (1901):383-385.

4. The kingdom of Og is called Amorite only by Deut. (Deut. 3:8; 4:47; 31:4).

5. Contrast the similar idiom *kats be*, "loathe" (21:5; Gen. 27:46; Lev. 20:23).

6. G. E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

7. Num. R. 20:4; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 4.100-102, *Sif. Num.* 157, *Sanh.* 105a, *Tanh. B. Num.* 134.

8. Targ. Jon., *Meyuhas*.

9. *Yelahakhu* . . . *kilehokh*. The subject of the first verb is the horde and of the second, the ox. Hence, the first verb is in the Piel (intensive) pattern and the second in the Kal (simple) (cf. Judg. 7:5 with vv. 6 and 7; Ehrlich).

10. The name occurs in the Mesopotamian onomasticon, both in Old Babylonian (Amorite) and New Assyrian; R. Zadok, "Notes on the Biblical and Extra-Biblical Onomasticon" *JQR* 71 (1980), 69-85.

11. His identification with Bela son of Beor the Edomite (Gen. 36:32) must be rejected (Ibn Ezra).

12. Philo, *De Cherubim* 22.

13. Targ. Jon.

14. Targ. Jon.

15. *Sanh.* 105a.

16. *Be'ir*; *Sanh.* 105a.

17. The name Bil'am is characteristic of the second millennium. A Bil-amma was known in the fifteenth century. It is identical with the name of the Canaanite town Bileam (1 Chron. 6:55) or Ibleam (Josh. 17:11) in western Manasseh. "The original form of the name may have been *Yabil-'ammu*, probably meaning 'May the clan lead'" (W. F. Albright, *EncJud*, s.v. "Balaam.")

18. M. Görg, "Die 'Heimat' Bileams," *Biblische Notizen* 1 (1976):24-28.

19. A. Malamat, "The Arameans," in *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 134-155.

20. Targ. Jon., Targ. Neof., *Pesh.*, BAP 18.2.

21. Num. R. 20:7; *Tanh. B. Num.* 134.

22. *Sam.*, *Pesh.*, *Vulg.*

23. A. S. Yehuda, "The Name of Balaam's Homeland," *JBL* 64 (1945):547-551; W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), 15 n. 38.

24. W. Gross, "Bileam," *SANT* 38 (1974); Görg, "Die 'Heimat' Bileams."

25. Cf. *Krt A.* 104 (ANET, p. 144), Taylor Cylinder 5.42-45.

26. Ehrlich.

27. *'Ukhal nakkeh bo*. If *nakkeh* is first person plural, then read *nukhal* to correspond, yielding: "we can thus defeat them"; or understand *nakkeh* as a Piel infinitive (Ibn Ezra), corresponding to *le-hilahem*, "engage in battle" (v. 11). The intensive

verb pattern of *nakkeh* occurs once again (Exod. 9:31-32) in the Pual (Keter Torah).

28. Ibn Ezra.

29. Ehrlich.

30. *Tanh. B. Num.* 135, *Num. R.* 20:8, followed by Rashi, Sforino, Ramban, Abravanel.

31. L. Schmidt, "Die alttestamentliche Bileamüberlieferung," *BZ* 23 (1979):235-261.

32. Targ. Jon., Philo, 1 Mos. 26b, Samuel ha-Nagid, cited by Ibn Ezra, just as *besorah* can mean "tidings" and "the fee for tidings" (2 Sam. 4:10) and *peduyim* can mean "ransom" and the "ransom price" (3:46) and *pe'ulah* can mean "work" and "the wages for work" (Lev. 19:13).

33. See Isa. 3:2; Mic. 3:6, 7, 11; Jer. 29:8; Ezek. 12:24; 13:19; 21:34.

34. E.g., Gudea A.2.24 and 3.9-11, Rassam Cylinder 3.118-124, and possibly Solomon in the Gibeon sanctuary, 1 Kings 3:5.

35. H. Reviv, "History and Historiography during the Time of the Division of the Kingdoms: Toward an Understanding of the Term *Edah* in 1 Kings 12:20" (Hebrew), *Zion* 50 (1985):59-63.

36. Ibn Ezra.

37. Ehrlich. For *mi* meaning "what," see Gen. 33:8; Judg. 13:17; Mic. 1:5; Ruth 3:16 (Ibn Janah).

38. *Ha-'am ha-yotse'*, literally "the people that came out," which perhaps should be rendered "this people that came out." However, LXX, Targums, and *Sam.* read *'am yatsa'*, "a people that came out," as in v. 5.

39. Targ. Jon., BAP 18.5-6, Mid. Lek. Tov.

40. ARN² 45, 125; cf. Num. R. 20:10, *Tanh. B. Num.* 136.

41. Ibn Ezra.

42. *Timmana' min*, literally "be withheld, prevented" (Joel 1:13; Job 38:15). But the Nifal pattern can also express a reflexive, that is, "restrain yourself."

43. Ibn Ezra. Also, in Ugar. *kbd* is an ellipsis for a "heavy shekel" (UT 90.6, 7; cf. 9.13; 171.1; 1024.25; my student S. Pfann).

44. My son, A. M. Milgrom.

45. M. Margaliot, "The Connection of the Balaam Narrative with the Pentateuch," *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1977), 279-290.

46. *Ba-zeh*, equivalent of *poh* (v. 8); see also 23:1, 2a; Gen. 38:21; Exod. 24:14.

47. *Anabasis* 6.4.19.

48. ANET, p. 350; L. Rost, "Fragen um Bileam," in *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie*, ed. H. Donner et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1977), 377-387.

49. J. Pedersen, "The Role Played by Inspired Persons among the Israelites and the Arabs," in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy*, ed. H. H. Rowley (Edinburgh: Clark, 1950), 133.

50. *Ber.* 7a.

51. Ehrlich.

52. *Mak.* 10b, *Num. R.* 20:18.

53. *Shab.* 104a, *Yoma* 38b.

54. M. M. Kalisch, *Bible Studies: The Prophecies of Balaam* (London: Longmans, 1877).

55. Y. Zakovitch, "The Pattern of the Numerical Sequence Three-Four in the Bible" (Hebrew) (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1977).

56. Rost, "Fragen um Bileam." The use of the two divine names, YHVH and Elohim, also seems to follow a definite scheme: Throughout the story, Elohim is used in the narration and YHVH in Balaam's speech (vv. 8, 13, 18, 19), thereby emphasizing that He is Balaam's Deity. The exceptions are 22:8; 23:5, 16; 24:1, on which see the Comments. In vv. 22-35, only YHVH is used (for the ostensible exception of v. 22, see the Comment), which raises the possibility that the ass story is an interpolation from another hand. For other evidence pointing to the same conclusion, see Excursus 57.

57. Targ. Onk., Rashi, Rashbam, Tosafot.
58. Elohim. One manuscript of the MT, two manuscripts of the LXX, and the Sam. read YHVH, "Lord," the name of the Deity used consistently in the ass episode (vv. 22–35). Since the LXX frequently reads "God" when MT has "Lord," its reading "Lord" here where MT reads "God" argues for its authenticity. The change in the MT is probably due to the influence of the previous pericope, vv. 2–21, where "God" is consistently used in the narrative.
59. *Ki holekh hu'*. A verbal reference to v. 21b, illustrating the technique used by the redactor to lock the ass episode into place here. For other similar examples of this editorial technique, see Josh. 3:17; 4:1–10; Judg. 6:6, 7–10; 1 Sam. 17:57; 18:6; 1 Sam. 23:14, 15–18 (A. Rofer, *The Book of Balaam* [Hebrew] [Jerusalem: Sinai, 1979]), 56.
60. Num. R. 20:13; cf. Lev. R. 26:7.
61. Num. R. 20:14.
62. R. Largetment, "Les oracles de Bile'am et la mantique Suméro-Akkadienne," in *Mémorial du Cinquantenaire* (Paris: Bloud, 1964), 37–50.
63. Ibn Ezra.
64. So rendered by the Targums.
65. See LXX. For *sha'al*, see 1 Kings 20:10; Isa. 40:12; Ezek. 13:19.
66. *Va-tilahets*, a Nifal reflexive.
67. Ibn Ezra.
68. Mish. Avot 5:6.
69. *Zeh* (see Num. 14:22; Gen. 31:38).
70. H. L. Ginsberg, *The Israelian Heritage of Judaism* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1982), n. 68.
71. *Hir'allalt*. See Exod. 10:2; 1 Sam. 6:6; elsewhere this word connotes physical abuse (Judg. 19:25; 1 Sam. 31:4; Jer. 38:19).
72. Zohar, Balak; cf. Num. R. 20:14.
73. *Me'odekha*, literally "all your life" (Gen. 48:15, Pss. 104:33; 146:2, synonymously parallel with "life").
74. So Targ. Onk. and Rashi (see Ps. 139:3; Job 22:2, 21).
75. Num. R. 20:14.
76. Zakovitch, "The Pattern of the Numerical Sequence"; L. Rost, "Fragen um Bileam."
77. *Ki yarad ha-derekh le-negdi* (so Targ. Onk.). LXX, Sam., and Vulg. read *darkekha*, "your manner" (for this connotation of *derekh*, see Gen. 6:12; 18:19; 19:31; 31:35). *Yarat* is a hapax, which is alternately rendered "twisted" (Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Abravanel) or "blocked" (Mid. Lek. Tov, Meyuhas), interpreting *derekh* as "road."
78. *Le-fanai*. Rather, "before me," equivalent to *mi-panai* in the second half of the verse. See Sam., which conflates, *mi-lefanai*. For the lamed equivalence to *mem*, see 2 Sam. 24:4 (My student, D. P. Wright); Ps. 36:4 (Ramban). In Ugar., the exchange of the prepositions *lamed* and *mem* is frequently attested (see C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook: Grammar*) [Rome: Pontificum institutum biblicum, 1965], 92).
79. Abravanel.
80. *'Ulai* in the sense of *lule'* (Targ. Onk., Targ. Jon., Ibn Janah, Rashi, Ibn Ezra), which frequently begins a conditional clause followed by a main clause beginning with *ki 'attah* (e.g., Gen. 31:42; 43:10), as here.
81. Ehrlich.
82. Meyuhas.
83. *'Ashuva li*, literally "I will take myself back," a reflexive usage like *lekha lekha*, literally "take yourself forth" (Gen. 12:1).
84. Thus, the possibility exists that the original ending of the ass story had Balaam return home; the editor then lopped it off and replaced it with v. 35 in order to fit the interpolated ass story harmoniously into the main narrative (J. Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs*, 3rd ed. [Berlin: G. Reimer, 1899]). Alternatively, the ass story may also have had the same ending as the narrative, i.e., Balaam's blessing of Israel, in which case

v. 35a would be part of the ass story and v. 35b, the editor's repetitive resumption of v. 21b. "So Balaam went on with Balak's dignitaries" (v. 35b) repeats v. 21b. Moreover, "Go with the men. But you must say nothing except what I tell you" (v. 35a) is an almost literal repetition of v. 20a,b. Thus, this entire verse is a repetitive resumption that locks the ass episode into the narrative—unassailable proof that the ass story (vv. 22–34) is an interpolation (see Excursus 57).

85. *Ve-'efes* ('et), the equivalent of 'akh, "but" (v. 20; see the Comment to 23:13). It is usually expressed by the compound 'efes ki (e.g., 13:28; Deut. 15:4; Judg. 4:9).

86. M. Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary*, trans. J. D. Martin (London: S. C. M. Press, 1968); cf. Gen. 16:13a with vv. 7–12.

87. Saadia.

88. Plutarch, Symposium 5.7.6.

89. Ehrlich.

Chapter 23

1. Shab. 66b.
2. Cited in R. Largetment, "Les oracles de Bile'am et la mantique Suméro-Akkadienne," in *Mémorial du Cinquantenaire* (Paris: Bloud, 1964), 46; cf. Virgil, Aeneid 6.38–39.
3. Num. R. 20:8.
4. Targums, Saadia, Ibn Ezra.
5. M. Weinfeld, "Ancient Near Eastern Parallels in Prophetic Literature," VT 27 (1977): 186–187.
6. Anabasis 5.6.29.
7. 1QM 2:3–5.
8. Mish. Ta'an. 4:2.
9. D. Daiches, "Balaam: A Babylonian Bārū," in *Hilprecht Anniversary Volume* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1909), 63.
10. L. Rost, "Zu der Festopfertvorschriften von Numeri 28 and 29," TLZ 83(1958):329–334.
11. See Bel and Dragon 11–18.
12. With Targ. Jon. The Nifal of *k-r-h* implies chance or accident, as in 2 Sam. 1:6; 18:9. It is used deliberately here and in vv. 3, 15, 16 and in the context of a divine manifestation elsewhere only in Exod. 3:18; 5:3, in an address to a foreigner whose encounter with God cannot be counted on. In the Hifil causative, as in Gen. 24:16, it attributes the encounter directly to God. The same root, *kry*, in South Arabian inscriptions denotes oracular appearances of the deity (T. H. Gaster, *Legend, Myth, and Custom in the Old Testament* [New York: Harper and Row, 1969]).
13. So Targums; cf. Saadia, Rashi.
14. Ehrlich.
15. Ibn Ezra.
16. Ramban.
17. E. Gruenhut, *Sefer ha-Likkutim*, 6 vols. (Jerusalem, 1898–1902), Num. 64.
18. J. Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1899); Ehrlich.
19. So Ibn Ezra.
20. Ramban.
21. A. Rofé, *The Book of Balaam* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Sinai, 1979).
22. *Va-yisa'* (vv. 18; 24:3, 15, 20, 21, 23), i.e., took up on the lips, "uttered," e.g., a curse (1 Kings 8:31), a dirge (Jer. 7:29), a prayer (Isa. 37:4), a song (Ps. 81:3), a name (Exod. 20:7), a rumor (Exod. 23:1). The nominal form *massa'* means "oracle" (Isa. 15:1; 17:1; 19:1), and it occurs in the Deir 'Alla inscription concerning Balaam (see Excursus 60).
23. A. Malamat, "The Arameans," in *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 134–155.
24. ANET, p. 19.
25. M. Görg, "Die 'Heimat' Bileams," *Biblische Notizen* 1 (1976):24–28.

26. Perhaps Balaam's provenance must be sought elsewhere: e.g., the Hauran Mountains in lower Syria (H. P. Müller, "Die aramäische Inschrift von Deir 'Alla und die älteren Bileamsprüche," ZAW 94 [1982]: 214–244 or the land of Ammon, according to 22:5, Sam., Pesh. Alternatively, *kedem* can be rendered "of old" since it appears frequently in parallel with *'olam* (e.g., Deut. 15:33; Isa. 51:9; my student, H. Chapnick).
27. My student, H. Chapnick.
28. S. Gevirtz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).
29. *Tsurim*. Paired with "heights," it appears only in Ugar. If, however, *harim* "mountains" is read, then the ensuing word pair occurs thirty-one times in the Bible (Gevirtz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry*).
30. H. Chapnick.
31. Targ. Onk.; cf. Rashi.
32. Targ. Jon.; Targ. Yer.; see Philo, 1 Mos. 278. The emendation *la-vetah yashav*, "resting secure," has also been proposed, on the basis of the parallelism of Deut. 33:28; Jer. 49:31 (Gevirtz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry*), and since the verbs *shakhan* and *hashav* are found nowhere else in parallel cola.
33. H. Chapnick.
34. See CAD, s.v. *eperu* 1b.
35. Gevirtz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry*.
36. *U-mispar*, reading *mi safar* with the Gk. and manuscripts of Sam., which read *my spr, myspr*. In tannaitic Heb., *mi* was frequently attached to the following word (J. N. Epstein, *Introduction to the Text of the Mishnah* [Hebrew], vol. 2 [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1948], 1218; but cf. Y. Kutscher, *Studies in Hebrew and Aramaic* [Hebrew] [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977], 137). For the coupling of *manah* and *safar*, see 1 Kings 3:8 and UT 77.45–46 (S. E. Loewenstamm, "Notes on the Origin of Some Biblical Figures of Speech" [Hebrew], in *Studies in the Bible Presented to M. H. Segal*, ed. J. M. Grintz and S. Liver [Jerusalem: Kiriat Sefer, 1964], 183).
37. W. F. Albright, "The Oracles of Balaam," JBL 63 (1944):213 n. 28.
38. Loewenstamm, "Notes on the Origin," p. 186.
39. The exact parallel of dust/dust-cloud, *'afar/turba* is found in Akk.: *epam piki tarbu'am paniki*, "with the dust of your mouth, with the dust-cloud of your face." Also the Sam. Targum reads *'afar*, "dust" (Gen. 18:27), as *rbw* and this root has the same meaning in Arab. The change from projected consonantal *trb'* to *'t rb'* can be accounted for. In the Bar Kokhba letters, the particle *'et* is frequently found fused with the following word where the initial *alef* is dropped. This is what some Masorete thought happened to *trb'*, and he accordingly divided it into *'t rb'* (Loewenstamm, "Notes on the Origin," p. 186).
40. E.g., "the dustclouds, *turbû*, of the feet of my armies," H. R. Cohen, *Biblical Hapax Legomena in the Light of Akkadian and Ugaritic* [Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1978], 37–39.
41. E.g., Targ. Onk.
42. Assuming that letters *tsadi* and *ayin* can be interchanged.
43. G. B. Gray.
44. Literally, "Constellation," a popular saying; see RH 16b; BM 75b.
45. Shadal.
46. Cf. *har ha-tsofim*, "Mount Scopus"; cf. W. H. Propp, "On Hebrew *sāde(h)*, 'Highland,'" VT 37 (1987):230–236.
47. Sanchuniaton, quoted by Eusebius, Praep. evang. 1.6. Heb. *matsor*, "watch post" (Hab. 2:1), is equivalent to its Akk. cognate *maššertu*, "the watch for astronomical observation" (CAD *maššertu* 3b). Both roots are attested in Habakkuk: "I . . . will take up my station at the post [*matsor*; *matsori*, "my post," 1 QpHab] and wait [*'atsappeh*] to see . . ." (Hab. 2:1).
48. Wellhausen conjectured that since all other occurrences of this verb have God as the subject, they should be revoicalized to read as Kal not Nifal as here. However, see the Comment to v. 3, where the MT Nifal is justified.
49. 1 Mos. 282.
50. Meyuhas, Keter Torah. And see also Gen. 19:35; 27:19; Ezek. 3:22; Isa. 32:9.
51. For this meaning, see Amos 4:6 (Ibn Janah, Ibn Ezra) or read *'edi*, "my witness," as in Job 16:19 (LXX, Pesh.).
52. *Beno* (instead of *ben*). The nominative case ending was preserved before a genitive in both Canaanite and biblical poetry (e.g., Pss. 104:11,20; 114:8).
53. Also *ben yonah*, "pigeon" (Lev. 12:6); *bin hakkot*, "one deserving of a flogging" (Deut. 25:2); *ben horim*, "freeman" (Ecclus. 10:17); *ben hakhamim*, "wise man" (1 Kings 20:35).
54. A Hitpael that, however, elsewhere means "take comfort/satisfaction" (e.g., Gen. 27:42; Deut. 32:36). The meaning "change one's mind" is attested in the Nifal (e.g., Exod. 13:17; 32:12,14; 1 Sam. 15:19). See S. Morag, "Layers of Antiquity: Some Linguistic Observations on the Oracles of Balaam" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 50 (1980/1981): n. 76.
55. R. Caplice, "Namburbi Texts in the British Museum," *Orientalia* 34 (1965):116.
56. J. A. Holstein, "The Case of *'is hā'elohim* Reconsidered," HUCA 48 (1977): 69–81.
57. *Yekimennah*. The final syllable is for emphasis (energetic *nun*) and is not to be translated.
58. *Lakahti*. Read as a passive *lukahti* (LXX, Pesh.), it would be rendered "I was summoned" (see on v. 11; Albright, "The Oracles of Balaam," p. 214 n. 38 or render "I perceived, heard" (Jer. 9:19; Job 4:12; Ehrlich).
59. *U-berekh*, (1) understood as a perfect with a sequential *var*. Alternatively, (2) "He has blessed" (beforehand; see 22:12), the *var* taken as conjunctive (Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, Sforino) or (3) vocalizing *barekh*, infinitive absolute (see v. 25), render "to bless," as in the previous line, or (4) read as a first person singular, *'avarekh*, "I shall bless" (LXX, Targums).
60. Targ. Onk., Targ. Jon., Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban.
61. *Hibbit . . . ra'ah*, literally "He sees . . . views," i.e., God (Rashi), but it is best to think of an impersonal subject (LXX, Targums, Pesh., Ramban).
62. *Melekh*. Read as *mal'ko* (Targ. Onk., Pesh.), referring to the Lord (Exod. 15:18; Deut. 33:5; 1 Sam. 8:7; 12:12; Ps. 68:25).
63. With Targ. Onk.
64. *Motsi'am*, which perhaps should be read *motsi'o* (as in 24:8), in keeping with the other third person singular suffixes in this oracle. The variation can be accounted for as a dittography of the initial *mem* in the next word (Ehrlich).
65. G. B. Gray.
66. J. H. Greenstone, *Numbers with Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1939).
67. Tanh. Balak 22.
68. Gilgamesh VI. 169–185 (ANET, p. 85). Albright renders "stormed like" from Arab. *wgf*, "run fast," i.e., Israel moves with swiftness and strength.
69. Saadia.
70. Ibn Ezra.
71. B. Mazar et al., *Views of the Biblical World*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Jordan Publications, 1959), 228.
72. *Be-ya'akov . . . be-yisra'el*, so the Gk., Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, Ramban, whereas others, like Targ. Onk., render the preposition *be* as "against." However, the context points to the rendering "in." Moreover, there is no indication in either the prose or the poetry (except in the ass episode) that Balaam ever intended to curse Israel. Finally, augury and divination, the craft of Balaam, are used for prediction, not "against" (see Excursus 59).
73. For this meaning of *lo'* in a request, see Exod. 8:24; 1 Sam. 14:36; 1 Kings 2:6 (Rofé, *The Book of Balaam*).

Chapter 24

1. *Tov be- 'einei*, synonymous with *yashar be- 'einei* (23:27); see Deut. 6:18; 12:28; Ps. 25:8; 2 Chron. 14:1; 31:20.

2. I.e., the first two oracles (25:7–10, 18–24). *Ke-fa'am be-fa'am* is used of successive occurrences (Judg. 16:20; 20:30–31; 1 Sam. 3:10; 20:25).

3. E. L. Greenstein, "Trans-Semitic Idiomatic Equivalency and the Derivation of Hebrew *ML'kh*," UF 11 (1979):329–336.

4. Abbravanel.

5. Ramban.

6. D. Vetter, *Seherspruch und Segensschilderung* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1974).

7. My son, A. M. Milgrom.

8. 4QSam^a.

9. Read as *shettammah 'eino*, where no consonantal change is required (J. Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs*, 3rd ed. [Berlin: G. Reimer, 1899]; cf. LXX; Targ. Onk.). For the *shin* as a relative in old biblical Heb., see Gen. 6:3; 49:10; Judg. 5:7; 6:17; 7:12.

10. Mish. Av. Zar. 5:3; Tosef. Av. Zar. 7[8]:13; cf. Targ. Onk., Saadia, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Rashbam. See S. Morag, "Layers of Antiquity: Some Linguistic Observations on the Oracles of Balaam" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 50 (1980/1981):112–14.

11. Aq., Sym., Theodotion.

12. Num. 22:31, Ned. 31a, Sanh. 105a.

13. W. F. Albright, "The Names Shaddai and Abram," JBL 54 (1935):180–187; F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 52–66.

14. R. de Vaux, "El et Baal: Le Dieu des pères et Yahweh," *Ugaritica*, vol. 6 (Paris: Geuthner, 1969); W. Wifall, "El Shaddai or El of the Fields," ZAW 92 (1980):24–32.

15. M. M. Kalisch, *Bible Studies: The Prophecies of Balaam* (London: Longman, 1877). Cf. also Ezek. 1:28; 3:23; 43:3.

16. Vetter, *Seherspruch und Segensschilderung*.

17. The Akk. semantic equivalent *igigallu*, "large eye," is used of either man or deity possessing insight (T. H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament*, vol. 1 [New York: Harper and Row, 1969], 306).

18. A verbal form (Gen. 14:3).

19. Targ. Jon., Targ. Yer.

20. E. B. Smick, "A Study of the Structure of the Third Balaam Oracle," in *The Law and the Prophets*, ed. J. M. Skilton (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1974); but cf. Morag, "Layers of Antiquity," n. 54.

21. See Ps. 45:9; Prov. 7:19; Song 4:14; see Targ. Onk.

22. RH 23a.

23. G. B. Gray.

24. Rashi, see Isa. 44:3; 66:12; Ps. 65:10–11.

25. My son, A. M. Milgrom. Some commentators suggest reading instead of *ve-zar'o be-mayim*, *u-zero'o be-'ammim*, "their arm shall be upon many peoples" (hinted by LXX, Targ. Onk.), thereby avoiding the repetition of "water." However, this image of physical might would conflict with that of arborescent fertility in the first line. Also, the fact that Qumran did not interpret this verse messianically (as it did v. 17) indicates that their text was probably in agreement with the MT and Sam. against LXX (Smick, *The Third Balaam Oracle*).

26. Targ. Yer., Rashi, Ibn Ezra.

27. W. F. Albright, "The Oracles of Balaam," JBL 63 (1944):218 n. 69.

28. Targ. Yer., Targ. Neof.; also LXX and Sam., which identify the king as Gog.

29. *Motsi'o* (see 23:22), but LXX and Sam. read *nahahu*, "led them" (see 23:7; Exod. 13:17), which may be original.

30. The image as it stands is incongruous since the verb *mahats*, "smash," usually takes as its object the head (Ps. 68:22), the legs (Ps. 68:24), the loins (Deut. 33:11), the temples (v. 17)—implying the use of a club. Equally inappropriate is the reading

behitsav, "smash (the enemy) with their arrows" (LXX, Targ. Jon., Bekhor Shor). *Lohatsav*, "oppressors" (A. Dillmann, *Die Bücher Numeri, Deuteronomium, und Josua* [Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1886]) destroys the symmetry of bodily organs in this verse. Preferable, then, is the reading *halatsav*, "loins" (Pesh., Ehrlich; see Deut. 33:11), in parallelism with "bones." See also the Comment to v. 17.

31. The suggestion has also been made to switch cola 9a and 8b so that it is the lion who consumes the enemy and breaks its bones (Vetter, *Seherspruch und Segensschilderung*).

32. GKC, sec. 145, 1; Vetter, *Seherspruch und Segensschilderung*.

33. Ehrlich.

34. G. Coats, "The Way of Obedience," *Semeia* 24 (1982): 53–79, esp. 72.

35. Y. Zakovitch, "The Pattern of the Numerical Sequence Three-Four in the Bible" (Hebrew) (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1977).

36. *Mal'akhekha* (see 22:5). Vv. 12–13 repeat 22:18 with slight variations.

37. Kalisch, *Bible Studies*; see Excursus 56.

38. Kalisch, *Bible Studies*.

39. L. Schmidt, "Die alttestamentliche Bileamüberlieferung," BZ 23 (1979), 235–261.

40. I. Goldziher, *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie* (Leiden: Brill, 1896).

41. Meyuhas.

42. Targ. Jon.; cf. Sanh. 106a.

43. Philo, 1 Mos. 294–301; Josephus, Ant. 4.126–130, TJ Sanh. 28cd.

44. Kalisch, *Bible Studies*.

45. The many parallels between this fourth oracle and Ps. 110: *ne'um* (24:15; Ps. 110:1), *redeh*, "rule" (24:19; Ps. 110:2), *mahats*, "crush" (24:17; Ps. 110:6) as well as synonyms for "scepter," "heads" (24:17/Ps. 110:2; 24:17/Ps. 110:6) make it likely that the psalmist knew Balaam's oracle (J. de Vaulx, *Les Nombres* [Paris: J. Gabalda, 1972]).

46. With Targ. Onk.

47. Targ. Jon.; see Ber. 7a.

48. Rashi.

49. Perhaps *da'at* should be vocalized *de'ot* (pl.) in parallel with *'imre*, "speech" (also pl.), as in 1 Sam. 2:3; Job 36:4 (Vetter, *Seherspruch und Segensschilderung*).

50. *'El 'elyon* of Gen. 14:18–22 is divided into the synonymous parallel lines here and elsewhere (e.g., Ps. 73:11; 77:10–11; 78:17–18; 107:11; Sfire A.11).

51. Rashi, Ibn Ezra.

52. Targ. Onk., Targ. Jon., 1QM 11:6–7, CD 7:19, Rev. 22:16 (Jesus), Test. Patr. Levi 18:3, Test. Patr. Judah 24:1.

53. TJ Ta'an. 68d.

54. C. Roth, "Star and Anchor: Coin Symbolism and the Early Days," *Eretz Israel* 6 (1960):13–16.

55. M. Weinfeld, "They Fought from Heaven": Divine Intervention in War in Israel and in the Ancient Near East," *Eretz Israel* 14 (1978):23–30.

56. S. Gevirtz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

57. A prophetic perfect (without the converse *rav*).

58. Albright, "The Oracles of Balaam," p. 219 n. 83.

59. Weinfeld, "They Fought from Heaven."

60. Ber. 48b.

61. Weinfeld, "They Fought from Heaven."

62. M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 37.

63. E.g., ANEP, no. 317.

64. *Mahats*. Its Akk. cognate *mahāsu* is used with a country as its object (e.g., ARM 1.123). In the Bible, its objects are "head" (Hab. 3:13), "loins" (Deut. 33:11), kings (Ps. 110:5), the monster Rahab (Job 26:12); see the Comment to v. 8.

65. *Pa'atei*. Dual in form: “temples” or, if taken figuratively, “chiefs” (LXX; cf. Targ. Onk., Targ. Jer., Pesh.) or “frontiers” (“regions,” Sym.), since *pe'ah* means “edge, rim” (e.g., Exod. 25:26; 27:9; Lev. 19:9; 23:22) also in its Ugar. and Akk. cognates (UT 52.68; Krt 105, 193–194; ARM 2.35.7–8; Albright “The Oracles of Balaam,” p. 220 n. 86; Gevartz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry*).

66. *Ve-karkar*, reading *ve-kadkod* on the basis of Sam. and Jer. 48:45. Alternatively, render “the borders of” since Akk. *qaggaru* means “ground, territory,” just as Heb. *kadkod* = Akk. *qagqadu*, “head” (*kdkd* of Jer. 48:45 may be an error for *krkr*; Gevartz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry*).

67. A. H. Sayce, “Balaam’s Prophecy (Numbers 24:17–24) and the God Sheth,” *Hebraica* 4 (1887):1–6; Albright, “The Oracles of Balaam,” p. 220 n. 89.

68. Some read *benei sha'on*, “the people of Shaon” (Jer. 48:45; Amos 2:2, parallel to Moab), perhaps an old name for Moab.

69. The order of the MT, abc acb', is characteristic of Ugar. poetry (C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Grammar* [Rome: Pontificum institutum biblicum, 1965], 133; Albright, “The Oracles of Balaam,” p. 221 n. 94).

70. *Yereshah*. Perhaps should be vocalized *yerushah*, “dispossessed,” a passive participle (Albright, “The Oracles of Balaam,” p. 221 n. 92).

71. *'Oyevav*, literally “its enemies.” It has been suggested to transpose it to the end of v. 19a (Albright “The Oracles of Balaam,” p. 221 n. 92). A radical solution is to emend *se'ir* to *sha'ar*, yielding: “the gate (of) its enemies will become a possession” (Gen. 22:17; Ehrlich).

72. Targ. Jon., Saadia, Ibn Ezra, Rashbam.

73. Albright, “The Oracles of Balaam,” p. 221 n. 93.

74. K. Seybold, “Das Herrscherbild des Bileamorakels Num. 24, 15–19,” TZ 29 (1973):1–19.

75. Kalisch, *Bible Studies*.

76. Either vocalize *'adei 'avod* (infinitive absolute, as in Deut. 7:20), read as *'ad yo'ved* (shifting the *yod*), literally “until it will perish forever,” or regard the participle as an abstract noun “destruction” (P. Wernberg-Möller, “Observations on the Hebrew Participle,” ZAW 71 [1959]:55) requiring no textual alteration.

77. Aram. and Syr.; see Targum to Judg. 17:4; Jer. 10:9; Ps. 66:10; TJ BB 2:2 (13b).

78. Some add “Kain” (from v. 22) here for the sake of the meter (Albright, “The Oracles of Balaam,” p. 222 n. 99). Jer. 49:16 and Obad. 4 borrow from this verse.

79. *Sim*, a passive participle (1 Sam. 9:24; Obad. 4).

80. Some transpose it to the previous verse (after “secure”) for the sake of the meter (Albright, “The Oracles of Balaam,” p. 222 n. 99).

81. Ibid.

82. Albright (“The Oracles of Balaam,” p. 222 n. 103) renders “the while I gaze” taking *'ad* as meaning “while” (1 Sam. 14:19; Job 14:12); *mah* as an untranslatable enclitic (see Sam.); and reading *'ashur*, “I gaze” (23:9; 24:1). However, his reading *toshavekha*, “your sojourners,” for *tishbekha* makes little sense. A third possibility is the rendering “Asher” instead of “Asshur” (W. Wifall, “Asshur and Eber, or Asher and Heber,” ZAW 82 [1970]:110–114). It would refer to the possible conquest and absorption of the Galilean Kenite clan of Heber (Judg. 4:11), which earlier was allied with the Canaanites (Judg. 4:17) by the tribe of Asher (26:45; Gen. 46:17).

83. Albright, “The Oracles of Balaam,” p. 222 n. 106.

84. S. Morag, “Layers of Antiquity.”

85. Ant. 1.128.

86. Targ. Yer.

87. Y. Aharoni, *Arad Inscriptions* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981), 12–13.

88. See LXX.

89. Albright, however, would read *mi-yarketei yam*, “from the furthest sea” (“The Oracles of Balaam,” p. 223 n. 111).

90. de Vaulx, *Les Nombres*.

91. Wifall, “Asshur and Eber.”

92. Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom*, p. 308, following mainly Albright, renders vv. 23–24 so as to substitute “wild beasts” for the ethnic names. This is based on Isa. 13:21–22; 34:14: “Howling beasts (*'iyyim*) come hieing from the Northland/And yowling beasts (*tsiyyim*) from the far reaches of the West/But even as I look, they have passed by/So too shall this one disappear.”

93. *Va-yakom va-yelekh*. For the idiom, see Gen. 23:3; 24:10; Judg. 13:11; 19:3,10.

Chapter 25

1. G. J. Wenham.

2. D. T. Olson, *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 160.

3. Sif. Num. 131.

4. Ant. 5.1.

5. Ant. 4.176.

6. *Va-yahel* (Hifil of *h-l-l*) with LXX, repointed to *va-yehel* or *va-yehal* (Nifal reflexive; see Lev. 21:4,9), a root that goes with *zanah*, “whore” (e.g., Lev. 19:29; 21:9).

7. 'El. A construction attested elsewhere with *zanah* (e.g., Ezek. 16:26,28) to describe Israel’s religious and political defections.

8. For biblical *marzeah*, see Jer. 16:5; Amos 6:7.

9. Lev. R. 5:3.

10. PRU 3.

11. Ehrlich. The sexual connotation of this term is attested in an old, bilingual Mesopotamian text: “A girl who did not reach her bloom . . . *eṭlu la šum[mudu]* a boy who remained unyoked” (CAD, s.v. *šummuḍu*).

12. Buber, *Moses* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1947), 193.

13. R. de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978).

14. Rashi.

15. Ehrlich would even go so far as to insist that only the innocent were selected since their execution was dedicated to God, and a sacrificial expiation mandated pure, i.e., innocent, victims.

16. Num. R. 20:23, Tanḥ. Balak 19, Tanḥ. B. 28.

17. Sif. Num. 131; cf. Targ. Jon.

18. The Sam. actually contains a different text for v. 4a: “command that they (i.e., the leaders) slay all the men who have attached themselves to Baal-peor,” i.e., Moses’ taking of the leaders was to charge them with the responsibility of executing the guilty (equating leaders with “judges” in v. 5). This view is followed by the Targums: “judge and slay him who is guilty of death” (Targ. Onk.); “let them give the judgment to put to death the people who have gone astray after Peor” (Targ. Jon.); “set them for a Sanhedrin before the Lord and let them hang all who are worthy of death” (Targ. Yer.; cf. Targ. Neof.). This interpretation, however, runs into grammatical obstacles: “Them” would have no antecedent and “take” is hardly the proper word for charging the leaders. It would therefore seem that all the leaders fell under the decree (see Excursus 61).

19. Cf. also Sfire I.C.5 (reconstructed).

20. W. R. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 3rd ed. (London: A. and C. Black, 1927).

21. R. Polzin, “HWQY and Covenantal Institutions in Early Israel,” HTR 62 (1969):227–240.

22. Sfire I.A.40.

23. Mish. Sanh. 6:4.

24. Sanh. 34b.

25. Middle Assyrian laws, par. 53; cf. Hammurabi, par. 153.

THE
EARLY TRADITIONS
OF ISRAEL

*A Critical Analysis of the
Pre-deuteronomic Narrative of the Hexateuch*

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of Jazer for *strong* be correct, the gloss will be dependent on 32, and will have as its purpose the definite delimitation of the conquered territory.

The phraseology of 25 is suspicious. If all these cities had been part of the original narrative a list of cities would necessarily have been included; the double occurrence of Israel is awkward, as is the sequence in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon and in all the towns (daughters) thereof. There can be no doubt that a redactor has been busy here. The primary E material would seem to be *and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites* (cf. Num. 32:17b). This was glossed first with *in Heshbon and in all the towns (daughters) thereof*, and then with *and Israel took all these cities*.

This reconstruction of 25 leaves without a *stichwort* 26, which introduces the poem 27-30. Now it is to be noted that the explanation of the Amorite kingdom centring at Heshbon, which is furnished by 26ff, comes too late in the narrative; it is required at the first mention of Sihon king of the Amorites. It is therefore in the highest degree probable that the position of the verses in E was before 23ab (from *but*), from which they were shifted by Rje when he inserted 21-23aa. They must have been preceded by some such introduction as *And Sihon king of the Amorites who dwelt in Heshbon heard that Israel was encamped upon his border*.

To substantiate the statement in 26 that Sihon had taken from the first or former king of Moab all his land north of the Arnon, there is cited a song, 27ab-30. The text of the song is corrupt. In 28b *cities of*¹¹ is to be read for *Ar* (Meyer, ZATW i, p. 131, Holzinger, Gressmann), both as providing a better parallel to the high places of the Arnon and because *Ar* is south of the Arnon. For the *lords of* is to be read either *it hath swallowed up*,¹² with the LXX, or *it hath burned*¹³ (Gressmann following Paterson), as providing a parallel to *it hath devoured*. 29bc, *unto Sihon king of the Amorites*, is an explanatory gloss, and is to be deleted (Meyer *et al.*). The removal of these three words leaves 29b one beat short of the three demanded by the metre. (*And we have shot at them at the beginning of 30 is difficult; to whom does them refer? That there is some uncertainty about the text is shown by the LXX reading and their seed, in which their presents the same difficulty as them in the Hebrew. Furthermore, the word destroys the parallelism. It would seem to be a corruption of a verb¹⁴ parallel to given, which originally stood after captivity and was displaced by the addition of unto Sihon king of the Amorites. Its replacement restores the metre of 29b, and also leaves 30a (to Diban) with three beats. 30a must be further*

emended to read *Destruction from Heshbon to Diban*¹⁵ and 30b to read *Fire bloweth upon Medeba*.¹⁶

28 is thus two lines of double thirds; so too is 29b, 30. 27abb will fall into the same scheme if *let it be built* be taken with *Come ye to Heshbon* (Gray); so, *Come ye to Heshbon, let it be built, Let the city of Sihon be established*. 29a is also a balanced line, though the metre may be 2:2.

31 is from Rje, made necessary by the transposition of 27-30. 32, in which the LXX reading and *took it and its towns for and took the towns thereof* is to be accepted, is a later addition to prepare for the mention of Jazer in Num. 32:1b. The absence of a subject to the verbs suggests its secondary nature.

NUMBERS 21:33-35

The account of the war with Og king of Basan is generally recognized as a late addition to the JE narrative (Wellhausen *et al.*).

It is taken almost verbally from Dt. 3:1-3. The story is not presupposed in what follows, for example in Num. 22:2, where only the conquest of Sihon is referred to.

NUMBERS 22-24

22:1 is from P, as is indicated by *and journeyed . . . and encamped; the plains of Moab*, cf. Num. 26:3, 63, 31:12, 33:48, 50, 35:1, 36:13, Dt. 34:8, Josh. 13:32, all P; *the Jordan at Jericho*, cf. Num. 26:3, 63, 31:12, 33:48, 50, 35:1, 36:13, Josh. 13:32. The verse is the continuation of Num. 21:10, 11aba. It is to be noted that it is only P which brings the Israelites to the Jordan before the Balaam story; both the J and E versions of that story have a different implication.

That the story of Balaam, 22:2-24:25, is not a unity is indicated by the presence of doublets in the text; by the alternation of *Jahveh* and *Elohim*, which is more marked in the versions than in the Hebrew; by the contradiction between 22:20 and 22:22ff; by the awkwardness of 22:37, which implies that Balaam had not yet acceded to Balak's request; by the incongruousness of Balak's third attempt to obtain his desire, 23:27ff, 24, after his speech in 23:25.¹⁷

22:2 implies that Israel was stationed, not in Moab, but in the recently conquered Amorite territory. This agrees with the E strand of chapter 21; it is likely that E wrote *king of Moab* after *Zipper*, which was dropped by Rje in view of 4b; cf. *Moab* as subject in 3b, E. 3a (to many), in which *the people* occurs, may be derived from J, 3b, containing the *children of Israel*, from E. In 4a (to field)¹⁸ *unto the elders of Midian* is a

gloss due to the influence of the later tradition of Midianite hostility to Israel at this time, cf. 25:18, 31:1ff.8. The half-verse implies that the Israelites are in Moab, and is therefore to be derived from J, as is 4b, a doublet to 2.

In 5 it is stated that Balak sent messengers to Balaam to Pethor which is by the River, to the land of the children of his people. This is clearly a conflation. The land of the children of his people is scarcely original. Baentsch, following Sam, Syr, Vul, and a number of Hebrew mss, reads for his people, Ammon,¹¹ as do Holzinger, Gressmann, Smend, and Eissfeldt. This meets the requirements of the narrative, that Balaam lived only a short distance from Moab (he could make the journey riding on his ass with two servants accompanying him, presumably on foot, Num. 22:22); it also agrees with the E representation that Balaam came from a northerly direction.¹² Since, as will be shown,¹³ the E recension of the Balaam story is based on that of J2, this is a relevant consideration.

In E, 22:36, it is stated that Balak met Balaam at Ar-Moab on the Arnon. Since in E, Num. 21:13, the Arnon was the northern boundary of Moab, Num. 22:36 implies that Balaam came from the north, and was met by Balak as soon as he had entered the latter's territory. From Pethor which is by the River Balaam would arrive from the north; nevertheless the place is remote from Moab, and in view of the fact noted above, that according to J Balaam lived nearby, it is perhaps questionable whether E would represent him as living such a distance away. Eissfeldt holds, probably correctly, that, in view of Num. 23:7, in E Balaam came from the region of the Hauran mountains, which he maintains can be the only meaning of the mountains of the east, cf. Gen. 10:30, 25:6, 29:1; to Pethor which is by the River he deletes as late substitution.

Apart from to Pethor which is by the River, 5a (to him) is from J, the continuation of 4b; cf. sent to call him with 37 and Num. 16:12 (Smend); note also the use of messengers as against princes in verses 8, 14, 15, 21, etc. 5bb, behold, they cover the face (literally eye) of the land¹⁴ (cf. Ex. 10:5 J), implying the presence of Israel in Moab, is also from J; behold, unnecessarily after 5a, may be redactional; it is lacking in 11; 5bc, and they abide over against me, implying that Israel is near rather than in Moab, is from E. 5ba, behold, there is a people come out of Egypt, is from J, cf. 11a.

In 6a (to land) for I shall prevail, awkward before the plural that we may smite, is to be read with LXX, we shall prevail¹⁵ (Baentsch). Per-adventure we shall prevail, that we may smite them will then be from E, since the singular that I may drive them out of the land, implying the

presence of the Israelites in Moab, must be from J. The remainder of 6a, in view of the singular me, will likewise be from that document, as will 6b because of its similarity to Num. 24:9, Gen. 12:3, 27:29.

In 7, and the elders of Midian, is a later addition, cf. 4, and the elders of Moab is probably a substitution by the same hand for the messengers of Balak, cf. 5a; with the rewards of divination in their hand indicates that 7a (to hand) is from J (cf. 17 and see below); 7b is not its continuation, see comment on 11 below; it is from E.

8 is from E (Baentsch, Mowinckel et al) as is indicated by the implication that God will reveal himself to Balaam in a dream at night, by bring back word, see Table A, and by the designation princes, cf. 22:14, 15, 21, 23:6, contrast messengers 22:5. According to E, the purpose of the messengers remaining overnight was that Balaam might consult Jahveh. In J no such consultation took place before Balaam set out for Moab, as is clear from 22ff. Indeed, J represents Balaam as a seer who lived by his profession, cf. 7a, 37. Mowinckel, recognizing this, has acutely described the way in which J (or the author of the independent saga which J incorporated into his narrative) maintained the interest of his hearers. Balaam, asked by Balak to come and curse Israel, sets out on his journey. The hearers are at once in a state of suspense. What is going to happen? Will Balaam actually utter the fatal words? The episode of the ass followed, Balaam was turned back by Jahveh, and the tension was relieved. Now Balak comes in person, and Balaam goes with him, 39. The hearers wait in suspense once more. Will Jahveh again turn him back? No, Balaam reaches Moab, is taken to a high place whence he can see Israel, the curse is about to be uttered, when the Spirit of Jahveh comes upon him, and the utterance becomes a blessing. Mowinckel has without doubt recovered the atmosphere of the J story, a narrative as skillfully told as any of the sagas of Genesis.

9, the continuation of 8, is also from E, as is further indicated by the use of Elohim, and by the similarity of what men are these with thee? to Gen. 33:5, 48:8. 10, the continuation of 9, and in which Elohim again occurs, is from E; contrast sent unto me with sent to call him in 5a, J. 11, in which for the people that is come is to be read with Sam, LXX, Syr a people is come, is from J; with 11a cf. 5ba and note the use of drive out, implying the presence of Israel in Moab.

Since this verse is from J it cannot originally have formed part of a speech of Balaam, for, as has been seen, J knew nothing of any consultation of Jahveh by the seer. It must therefore have belonged to the speech of the messengers to Balaam, and, preceded by some such sentence as 16aba (to him), have been the continuation of 7a, now displaced

by 7b, E. This speech must have continued with 17aa (to *honour*), cf. 22:37, 24:11.

11 has displaced the E continuation of 10, the reply to which is contained in 12, derived from E, as is indicated by *Elohim*. It is possible that *thou shalt not go with them* is a gloss, making explicit the refusal of permission communicated by Balaam to Balak's embassy in 13. 13 and 14 are from E (Holzinger *et al.*), as is indicated by the implication that the revelation had been received at night, and by *princes*, cf. 15; *princes of Balak* instead of the usual *princes of Moab* may be a redactional alteration made to include the elders of Midian, mentioned in 7. In 13 the LXX has *Elohim* for *Jahveh*. This may be the correct reading, but since in 8 *Jahveh* is put in the mouth of Balaam it seems more likely that the Greek rendering of 13 is due to assimilation to verses 9, 10, 12.

15, 16, 17ab (*whatsoever . . . do*) are inseparable from, and dependent upon, 14 and so from E, as is further indicated by *princes* in 15, and by the fact that 17ab is a doublet to aa; and before *whatsoever* is redactional. 16aba also appeared as the introduction to the speech of 11, in J. 17b (from *come*), the conclusion of the speech, is from E. 18 is the continuation of 17, and so E; for *servants* is possibly to be read with the LXX *princes*. 19, 20, referring to the revelation at night, are from E; note also *Elohim*, 20; in 19 *Jahveh* occurs in the mouth of Balaam, as in 8, 13. 21, the continuation of, and fulfilment of the command in, 20, is E, as *princes* further indicates; with aa, cf. 13aa; and *saddled his ass* may be a redactional insertion from J; on the other hand, in view of the close dependence of E on J in the Balaam story, it is not impossible that E himself made this reference to the ass, the sole survival of 22f.

That 22-34 are from J is shown by (a) the contradiction of the passage to 20f; (b) the use of *Jahveh* throughout; in 22 *Jahveh* is to be read for *Elohim*, with LXX; (c) *bow the head and fall*, 31, see Table A.¹¹ In 32 *against thee* is to be inserted after *adversary*, with Sam, cf. Syr, Vul (Eissfeldt).¹²

That the original material in this section has been expanded is indicated by: (a) *And went further*, 26, missing from 24. (b) The fact that the situation depicted in 26, *no way to turn, etc.*, is identical with that in 24f. (c) The absence of again after *smote the ass* in 27; contrast 25, where, further, *her* is used instead of the *ass*. (d) *With his staff*, 27, which would rather have been expected in the account of the first smiting. (e) The occurrence of *with his sword drawn in his hand* in both 23 and 31 is infelicitous.

It would therefore appear that 23-26 is secondary material from two hands, 23f being first inserted, and later 25f.¹³ The elimination of the

verses removes the difficulty that Balaam's servants are ignored throughout the somewhat complicated movements of the story in its present form. *These three times* in 28 and 32 obviously depends upon 23-26, and is to be deleted. 33 and 34ad (*for . . . against me*) are also secondary; the ass did not *turn aside* three times according to the present narrative, but only twice; and Balaam's sin lay not in the smiting of the ass, but in his making the journey at all, cf. 22.

35, which does not fit with the implication of 37, J, that Balak himself went and fetched Balaam, is a redactional substitution for the original conclusion of the section (Wellhausen *et al.*), according to which the angel must have caused Balaam to return home. The present conclusion empties the episode of all significance. The command, *go with the men* (note the vague *men*), implies that the messengers of Balak have been present throughout Balak's dealings with the angel, while the implications of the narrative itself are directly contrary to this. The rest of the angel's speech is a mere repetition of 20b; the *princes of Balak*, instead of the *princes of Moab*, or the *messengers of Balak*, also suggests a redactor's hand.

36 is the continuation of 21, and so from E; for *city* is to be read *Ar* (Baentsch, Holzinger, Eissfeldt). The double *which* suggests the presence of more than one hand; *bc, which is in the utmost part of the border* (on border, meaning territory, see Table A), is either a gloss based on Num. 21:13, 24; or has been shifted by Rje from its original position in the J narrative at the end of 39, where *his border* would be read for *the border*.

While Balak's protest in 37 might be taken as having reference to Balaam's refusal to come when the first embassy was sent to him, the fact that Balaam's speech in 38 is not a suitable reply to Balak's utterance of 37 indicates that the verses are from different sources. Since 38 is from E (see below), 37 must be from J. It is not then the continuation of 36. Furthermore, Balak's protest implies that Balaam had not come to him. J must therefore have told that Balak, after waiting for some time for Balaam to arrive, and naturally knowing nothing of his encounter with the angel, went himself to fetch him. 37 is then Balak's speech on meeting Balaam, not at Ar of Moab, but at the latter's home (Wellhausen *et al.*). It may be noted that Balak's words imply that he had expected Balaam to come to him, and so that the messengers had brought him a favourable reply from the seer.

38 is the continuation 36 and so from E, as the use of *Elohim* further indicates; with 38b (*from the word*) cf. Ex. 4:15.

39 is from J, the continuation of 37; it may have been preceded by

some notice of Jahveh reversing his former prohibition and commanding Balaam to go; possibly *Go with the men of 35* is an adaptation of *Go with the man*, occurring at this point, which would convey some measure of contempt for Balak's kingship; cf. also the use of *men* in the account of God's dealings with Balaam, 9,20; E may have taken over the term from J at this point. The location of *Kiriath-huzoth* is uncertain, but in view of the fact that E had Balaam come from the north, it seems likely, bearing in mind the dependence of his version on the earlier account, that J had him come from the same direction.

40a (*to sheep*) is from J, the account of Balak's preparation for the uttering of the curse. 40b, *and sent to Balaam*, is from J; it tells of the sending of the entrails of the victims to Balaam for his scrutiny. That J contained something of this kind seems to be indicated by the fact that in E sacrifices were offered by Balak, though they really were without significance since Balaam did not examine them for omens, but went to meet God. That is, E has taken over somewhat mechanically a feature of the J narrative, for which he had no use. 40b¹ is a harmonizing gloss. 41 is from E; *the utmost part of* is to be deleted as a redactional harmonization. According to E Balaam first saw the people as a whole, cf. 23:10a, then, when the blessing was uttered instead of the desired curse, Balak took him to another place, where he could see only a part of them, 23:13, in the hope that a curse might fall on at least those within the range of vision. The combination of the E narrative with that of J resulted in a sequence by which Balaam saw first all the people, then a part only, and finally all of them again.¹¹ This obviously emptied of significance the limitation of the objective on the second occasion. The editor therefore inserted *the utmost part of* in 22:41 (Smend).

Bamoth-baal, the scene of the first attempt of Balak in E, is to be identified with *Bamoth*, Num. 21:19, the last station of the Israelites before Pisgah, according to the itinerary. This was presumably not in the territory which the Israelites had taken from the Amorites, and so, not being under Israelite control, would be easily accessible to Balak.

That 23:1-25 is from E, apart from some slight redactional alterations, is indicated by (a) the use of *Elohim* in 4, and, accepting the LXX reading (cf. Vns), in 3,12,16,26; (b) *princes of Moab*, 6,17; (c) the Aramaean origin of Balaam, 7, cf. 22:5ab; (d) *put a word in (Balaam's) mouth*, 5,12,16, cf. 22:38b; (e) *what hast thou done unto me?*, 11, cf. Gen. 20:9.

In 2 *Balak and Balaam* is to be deleted with LXX (Baentsch, Smend); the subject of *offered* is thus the same as that of *did*, that is *Balak*, cf. 14b. In 3 *Elohim* is to be read for *Jahveh*, with the LXX; probably for a bare

place should be read *to enquire of God* (cf. LXX; Volz, *Theol. Literatur-Zeitung*, 1901, coll. 383ff).

4b (*from and he said*) belongs after 2 (Baentsch); note *the before seven altars*. The words were spoken by Balak to Balaam; whether they were shifted to their present position by accident or by design it is impossible to say. If by design, the purpose may have been a desire to provide the sacrifices with a more vital significance than they had in E (see comment on 22:40 above). In any case, it was the transposition of the words which led to the insertion of *Balak and Balaam* in 2. In 5 *Jahveh* (LXX, *Elohim*) and *Balaam's* are redactional insertions, made necessary by the transposition of 4b; *his mouth* must be read, cf. 16.

In 7b *me* is to be inserted after *defy*, with LXX. In 10 *who can* is to be inserted before *number*, with LXX, and for *fourth part* is to be read *multitude*.¹² 10b (*from let me*) is an addition (Baentsch, Holzinger); the expression of a personal wish by Balaam fits badly with the rest of the poem; *the righteous* can scarcely be a synonym for Israel, since the nation cannot die (Holzinger); for *his* is to be read *theirs*, since *righteous* in the Hebrew is plural (Baentsch, Holzinger; cf. LXX).

Balak's words in 11 with their note of consternation imply that he had realized the import of Balaam's utterance only at its very end. This demands a very brief oracle, concluding with a sudden stroke. For this reason 8, which anticipates 10a, is secondary; with it belongs the introductory for of 9. 9b (*from Lo*) is also secondary, in that (a) it destroys the strophic arrangement of the poem, which will otherwise consist of two strophes, each containing two distichs, 7b and 9a,10a; (b) it makes the blessing too long in view of Balak's sudden consternation in 11; (c) it breaks the connection between 9a and 10a; (d) *a people* is awkward in view of *Jacob and Israel* in 7 and 10.

In 12 for *Jahveh* is to be read *Elohim*, with the LXX.

13a is overloaded.¹³ The original has been changed consequent upon the insertion of *the utmost part of* in 22:41; otherwise the move to another place would have been emptied of all significance. Since in 24:2 Balaam was to see the whole of Israel, Rje at this point altered the text so as to convey the impression that from the top of Pisgah, 23:14, a somewhat larger part of the people was visible than from Bamoth-baal, 22:41. This he did by inserting *thou mayest see them and but*.

14 states that the scene of the second attempt (in E) was *the field of the watchmen (Zophim) near the top of Pisgah*.¹⁴ After Pisgah is to be inserted *which looketh down upon the desert* (cf. Num. 21:20), which was shifted to 23:28 by Rp. This point again is on the border of the Amorite territory occupied by the Israelites, according to E, and so, like Bamoth-

bal, was accessible to Balak. The Israelites were now no longer encamped there, but were spread throughout the recently conquered Amorite territory; consequently only a part of the people would be visible.

It is to be noted that E represents Balak as being now familiar with the ceremonial requirements and preparing the seven altars and offering the sacrifices of his own accord, without being commanded thereto by Balaam. It would therefore be unnecessary for Balaam to tell him to stand by his sacrifice, while he went to meet God; Balak would be equally familiar with this part of the procedure. Consequently 15, suspicious because of the lack of a subject to *said* and of an object to *meet*, is to be stricken out as a later addition, possibly by Rje in preparation for the redactional 24:1. In 16 *Elohim* is to be read for *Jahveh*, with LXX and a number of Hebrew mss. 17b (from *and Balak*), in which *Jahveh* occurs in the mouth of Balak (the versions do not here read *Elohim*), is also an addition, possibly part of the same editing; note the absence of any equivalent statement after 23:6, and the grammatical ambiguity as to the subject of *took up* in 18, as a result of its inclusion here.

In the poem 18b-24, 22 is to be deleted (Baentsch *et al*); it is an insertion from 24:8a, occasioned by the similarity of 24a to 24:9a; 23 is a variant to 21¹¹; 23b, it may be noted, is a six beat line, rather than a double three (Holzinger). The poem then falls into four strophes, each containing two distichs, 18b,19a (to *repent*)¹²; 19b,20; 21; 24.¹³ In 20 *for and he hath blessed* is to be read with Sam, LXX, *I will bless*; the succeeding clause will then be rendered, *and I will not, etc.*

With 25 the E narrative breaks off; the lost conclusion presumably told of Balaam's dismissal, cf. 24:11,25. Certainly Balak's words in 25, which can only be a prohibition of further 'cursing' of the kind Balaam has been providing, cannot in the original have been followed by an account of a third attempt to procure the discomfiture of Israel. This, 24:1b,2b,3ff, must therefore be from J; 23:26f,29f,24:1a (to *enchantsments*), 2a (to *tribes*) are a transitional passage from the hand of Rje, further elaborated by Rp (cf. Wellhausen *et al*). 27 is based on 23:13, but has substituted for the concrete motivation of its pattern the vague hope that it may please God to change his mind. 29f reveal their secondary origin in that they represent Balak as again having to be told what to do, cf. 23:1f, although at Pisgah he had made all preparations of his own initiative, 23:14b. In 24:1a it is stated that on the former occasions Balaam had gone to meet with enchantments, thus contradicting 23:3, cf. 23:16, according to which he had gone to meet God.

This indicates its redactional origin; the purpose of the verse is to explain the difference of method between 23:3ff, 16 and 24:2. 23:28 is from J, with the exception of the words that *looketh down upon the desert* which belong to 23:14, E, qualifying *Pisgah*. The clause was moved to the present position by Rp, who took *Jeshimon* (*desert*) to mean not the desert to the east of Gilead, but *Beth-jeshimoth*, cf. Num. 33:49, the scene of Israel's final camping place in the plains of Moab, at the northern end of the Dead Sea. According to Rp, Israel, throughout the negotiations between Balak and Balaam, was not *covering the face of the land (of Moab)* as in J, or settled in the former Amorite territory, as in E, but encamped in a body on the plains of Moab, Num. 22:1 (cf. Holzinger). Therefore, the oracle uttered from the point which overlooked this camping ground could only be the final one, so he shifted that *looketh down upon the desert* from 23:14 to its present place in 23:28. 23:28, without this clause, originally followed 22:40 in J. It is, however, highly probable that the *top of Peor* is Rje's substitution for the J location, made in the interests of Num. 25:3.

24:1b is from J, the wilderness probably being the wilderness of Judah; that is J represented Balaam as looking not upon the people dwelling as they were at the moment in Moab, but upon their future home, and seeing there their *tents*, 24:5; *tents* is not to be taken literally; cf. II Sam. 20:1, I Kings 12:16. 2a (to *tribes*) is from the hand of Rp, giving expression to his idea that Israel was encamped in a body on the plains of Moab.

Indications of the J origin of 24:2b-11 are (a) the impression conveyed by 2b that Balaam is seeing Israel for the first time; (b) the changed method of inspiration in 2b; contrast 23:5,16; (c) Balaam's introduction of himself in 3b (from Balaam); (d) the identity of 9b, except for the transposition of clauses, with Gen. 27:29b; (e) *and Balak's anger was kindled*, 10, cf. 22:22a; (f) the dependence of 11b on 22:37b.

It is possible that for *Spirit of God* in 2 there originally stood *Spirit of Jahveh*. While there is no manuscript or version support for such a reading, its occurrence in II Sam. 23:2a is perhaps not without significance for this passage; for the poem II Sam. 23:1b-7, which 2a ascribes to the power of the Spirit of Jahveh, begins with the same Hebrew word, ¹⁴as do Num. 24:3bff,15bff; and apart from Psalm 36:1 (Heb. 2) and Proverbs 30:1 these are the only occurrences of the word used of other than a divine utterance. That there is some connection between II Sam. 23:1b-7 and the J oracles of Balaam is obvious.

The text of the poem 3b-9 presents serious difficulties. In 3bb *and saith* (one word in Hebrew at the beginning of the clause) is to be

deleted, on metrical grounds (Sievers, Holzinger, Mowinckel). For *was closed* is to be read as *clear*¹¹ (Wellhausen *et al.*; cf. LXX). After 44ba (to *Almighty*) Baentsch *et al.* insert from 16 and knoweth the knowledge of the Most High to complete the first strophe of three distichs. This assumes that *falling down and having his eyes open* is an authentic part of the poem, which in view of the recurrence of *eye*, cf. 3b, is doubtful. The words seem to describe the effects of a trance, and are to be regarded as a gloss on the obscure *whose eye is clear* of 3b. If they are deleted, the introduction to the poem will consist of two distichs, 3b, 44ba.¹² And is to be inserted at the beginning of 5b, with Sam, Vul, Syr, some Hebrew mss, for metrical reasons (Baentsch *et al.*). 6aa (to forth) is too short, and should read as *valleys which Jahveh hath spread forth*.¹³ This makes even more marked the textual similarity of 6a and 6b, already evident.¹⁴ This similarity at once suggests that 6b is a variant to 6a (to side). A further argument for the secondary nature of 6b is the fact that the aloes tree is not known in Palestine (see *Aloes, Enc. Bib.*), so that a reference to it suggests a late author (cf. von Gall, Holzinger). If as *oaks*¹⁵ be read for as *lign-aloes* as is tentatively suggested by Baentsch and accepted by Mowinckel (who argues that *cedars* in 6bb requires the mention of some great tree here) this difficulty is removed, but there remains that raised by the unsuitability of the likening Israel's tents to great trees, especially after 6a. Furthermore, the cedar does not grow beside the water (*Cedar*, in HDB). If it be held that *cedars* is a substitution, due to the influence of which *Jahveh hath planted* (cf. Ps. 104:16), for the name of a tree more closely parallel to *lign-aloes*, the difficulty caused by the unfamiliarity of the aloes tree to the Israelite of the time of J reappears. For these reasons 6b is to be rejected, as a variant to 6a.

For 7ab (and . . . waters) is to be read, with LXX, and his arm is upon many peoples¹⁶ (Cheyne); and, on the basis of this, before his might nations tremble¹⁷ (Cheyne, Mowinckel *et al.*) for aa. This gives a line, the content of which—the prowess of the nation—is of the same nature as that of 7b, the might of the nation's king. 7bb (from and his kingdom)¹⁸ lacks one beat; there can be no doubt that a comparison has dropped out (cf. Baentsch, Holzinger) which, in view of than Agag in 7ba, was probably *above Amalak*. The disappearance of the word may well be due to the later inclusion of the oracle on Amalek, 20.

The text of 8a and of 9 is intact. 8b (from he shall) in its present form is metrically too long, and in content *smite through with arrows* is incongruous with the metaphor either of the wild ox, 8a, or of the lion, 9a. None of the attempts¹⁹ at the restoration of a text, both correct as

regards metre, and congruous with the figure of 9a, is satisfactory. The half-verse to *pieces* is simply an explanatory gloss on *gab* to which and *smite (them) through with his arrows* was later added.

The poem as included by J in his narrative consisted then of 3b, 44ba, 5, 6a, 7, 8a, and 9.

It falls into four parts, an introduction 3b, 44ba; an apostrophe to Israel, 5, 6a; a description of Israel's coming greatness, 7, 8a, 9a; and a conclusion, 9b. 5, 6a are marked off from 7, 8a, 9a by the fact that in the former Israel is addressed in the second person, and in the latter referred to in the third person. It should therefore be recognized that these two parts of the present composition have been derived from two separate poems. Further, the third part, 7, 8a, 9a, is not a unity. 7b, referring to Israel's conquest of one nation, is with difficulty the continuation of 7a, telling of the subjugation of many peoples. The reference to the exodus in 8a introduces an extraneous thought between 7b and 9a.

The mention of Agag provides the key to the solution of these difficulties. Although I Sam. 15 is a late composition, as is shown by the position of Samuel therein, it is based on a trustworthy tradition (against H. P. Smith, *Samuel*) of Saul's conquest of the Amalekites. That Saul's influence did extend into Judah is shown by the presence of the Southerner, David, at his court and in his army; it is therefore by no means impossible that he came into conflict with the Amalekites. In view of the unfavourable treatment accorded Saul and his career, especially in the later strands of I Samuel, it is highly improbable that the author would have invented a story of the defeat of Amalek by the king whose reputation and achievements he was concerned to minimize; to be noted, too, is the similarity of I Sam. 15:33b to the admittedly ancient Judges 8:20f, as evidence of an old tradition underlying the present Agag narrative. The story must have some foundation in fact. Saul's defeat of the hated Amalekites (cf. Ex. 17:14f) was the cause of great rejoicing, and, it is now suggested, was celebrated by a song of exultation, composed of verses 7b, 9a of the poem under consideration:

His (Israel's) king is higher²⁰ than Agag,
His kingdom is exalted above Amalek.
He coucheth, he lieth down as a lion,
And as a lioness, who will stir him up?

The significance of the last two lines is this, that such a powerful nation is best left alone. This was not understood by the author of 8b, who glossed the text to explain what the lion was doing lying

down; a later writer, abandoning the metaphor, added *bc*, and *smite them* through with arrows.

The song was later brought up to date by the addition of 7a (as emended above) which celebrates Israel's victories over other peoples besides the Amalekites. 8a was added when the exodus had become a vital part of the tradition of the northern tribes, with whom the original song obviously originated, since it celebrated the achievement of Saul.

This composite poem then lay before J, who found a place for it in his tradition by putting it in the mouth of Balaam. To it he prefixed the apostrophe, 5,6a, from another source. 3b,4ab are his own introduction¹¹¹ linking the poem to the narrative, and 9b (cf. Gen. 27:29b) his conclusion, adapting the whole to its context.

If this analysis of the oracle be correct, a strophic arrangement can scarcely be expected. It is the belief that such an arrangement must exist which has prevented hitherto the recognition of the composite nature of the poem.

From 10 is to be deleted the redactional *these three times* (Baentsch *et al.*). 12f are from Rje as is shown on the one hand by their dependence upon 22:18,38, E, and on the other by the occurrence therein of *messenger*, 12, and *Jahveh*, 13. 14 was originally the continuation of 11; it must of course have been preceded by some such sentence as *Balaam said unto Balak*, and has suffered some adaptation by Rje as a result of the insertion of 12f. It is possible that part of this alteration was the excision of a reference to the Spirit of Jahveh coming on Balaam, cf. 24:2, though this is by no means necessarily the case. J may well have taken it for granted that the possession still continued.

15f introduce the originally independent poem contained in 17b; 16b (from *who seeth*) is to be deleted as an insertion from 4b; that is, to Balaam's second utterance J provided a slightly different form of introduction, substituting for *who seeth the vision of the Almighty, and knoweth the knowledge of the Most High*. In 17 for *shall come forth* is to be read *hath shone forth*,¹¹² with LXX, Vul, Syr (Wellhausen *et al.*); the corruption may have been due, as Wellhausen suggests, to faulty hearing on the part of some scribe. The word translated *scripture* is to be rendered *comet* (Gemser, ZATW, 1925, pp. 301f, Mowinckel), though there is doubtless a play on *scripture*. For *and break down* is to be read *the crown of the head* with Sam, cf. Jer. 48:45 (Baentsch *et al.*). Whether *Seth* (*Sheth*) is to be emended to *humile*, following Jer. 48:45 with Baentsch (hesitantly) and Holzinger, and adopted by the English translators, is questionable. *Moab* in the first stichos of the line seems to demand a personal name here.¹¹³ It is possible that the Moabites re-

garded themselves as peculiarly the sons of Seth; their tradition may well have differed from that preserved in Gen. 4.

As 7b,9a in the preceding oracle had reference to the victory of Saul over Amalek, so 17b alludes to David's subjugation of Moab, II Sam. 8:2. 17a is J's adaptation of this material, so that it will be fitting in the mouth of Balaam some centuries before the rise of David.

25, the conclusion of the J story (with *his place* cf. *thy place*, 11), followed immediately upon 17. 18-24 are a series of later additions. 20a,21a,23a indicate this as regards the oracles they introduce. J would not have implied that either the Amalekites or the Kenites were at the moment within range of Balaam's vision; further evidence of a later date is provided by the references to Assyria in 22b,24. That the oracle on Edom, 18f,¹¹⁴ is an addition is suggested by the facts (a) that an utterance regarding a people other than Moab falls outside Balaam's declared intention in 14 (cf. Baentsch, Holzinger), and (b) that it destroys the climax to the whole story provided by the curse on the people of Balak, who had trafficked to procure a curse on Israel.

18ab (*Seir . . . enemies*) is too long and 19a (to *dominion*) too short; *his enemies* is to be shifted from 18ab to 19a (Baentsch) which is to be read *And Jacob putteth to flight¹¹⁵ his enemies*. 18ab is too similar to 18aa to be the original second member of the distich. 19b (from *and shall*) stands isolated; it is to be transposed to the position occupied by 18ab, which is to be struck out with the exception of *Seir*, the only original word in the stichos; *Seir* is to replace the vague *the city* of 19b.

21b speaks of a people whose nest is in the rock. This is said of Edom in Jer. 49:16, Ob. 3f. It is therefore not impossible, as Holzinger suggests, that 21b (from *strong*), prefixed by *Edom* (which Sam, LXX read for *Seir* in 18ab), belonged originally before 18, and was the opening distich of the oracle on Edom. If this be the case, then for *and shall destroy* in the reconstructed 18ab (19b) must be read *a destruction*.¹¹⁶

The editor who inserted the oracle on Edom was of course lacking in appreciation of the delicate articulation of the J narrative. His action was doubtless motivated by a desire to encourage his readers by assuring them that Edom, at the time threatening, would eventually fall. The insertion may well have been made during the exile. The inclusion of the oracle on Amalek, 20, may have been due to a feeling that it was fitting that Balaam should predict the destruction of that hated tribe (cf. Ex. 17:8ff, I Sam. 15). The oracle is a mere generality, and, since Amalek was never the first of the nations, seems to be dependent on 7.¹¹⁷ What the reason was for the inclusion of the oracle on the Kenites, 21f, it is difficult to say. There is no tradition of any hostility

on their part to Israel; in fact they seem to have been consistently friendly, cf. Num. 10:29ff as reconstructed above, Ju. 1:16, I Sam. 15:6, 30:29. Possibly, as Wellhausen conjectures, *Kain* here refers to the Nabataeans who in the fourth century pressed into Edomite territory.¹¹⁴ If the Nabataeans be meant, then *Asshur* will be the Syrians. For *wasted*, 22a, is to be read for *Eber*, cf. 24 (Baentsch et al). 23f must come from the Maccabaeen period; with 24a cf. Dan. 11:30.¹¹⁴

NUMBERS 25:1-5

Since 1b (from *and the people*) and 2 refer to the presence of Israel in Moab, they are from J. The change of subject from *Israel* in 1a to *the people* suggests that the two halves of the verse are from different hands; further support for this is found in the implication of 1b,2 that the Israelites were living among the Moabites, not concentrated in one place. 1a, mentioning Shittim as a station, cannot be E, as will be shown by the analysis of Josh. 1-4; it is from Rp, inserted for the same reason as 24:12a.

The repetition of *Israel* in 3 indicates a conflation. 3a (to *peer*) is a doublet of 1b,2, and so E; 3b is accordingly J. 4 and 5 are doublets; 5 obviously belongs with 3a, E. 4, in its original form, is thus from J; but the double reference to *Jahveh* in the third person in a speech addressed by him to Moses is impossible; *unto Jahveh* is therefore a gloss, intended to remove any implication of idolatry from *before the sun*. 4b was not originally part of the speech (cf. Gressmann), but, reading and the fierce anger of *Jahveh* turned away¹¹⁵ from *Israel*, the conclusion of the account of the fulfilment of the command of 4a, the rest of which was dropped by Rje because of 5.

It is evident that both the component narratives have been preserved only fragmentarily; J must have told of the form in which *Jahveh's* anger (3b) manifested itself, and, as has been noted, of the execution of the sentence pronounced in 4. Further, the command in 4 is curious; Holzinger points out that *all* the chiefs of the people could not have been punished, and suggests that there is a lacuna between 4aa (to *Moser*) and 4ab. E must have elaborated to some extent the statement of 3a.

The passage has been used by Rp as an introduction to the P narrative (redactionally elaborated) of 25:6-18 and 31:1-54.

At what point in their respective narratives the J and E stories of Num. 25:1-5 occurred cannot be ascertained.

Numbers 26-31 is P material throughout.

NUMBERS 32

That Num. 32 is not a unity is indicated by the following points, among others:

- (a) *Came near*, 16, is a doublet to *came*, 2.
- (b) The list of cities in 3 occurs again, with additions, in 34-38.
- (c) In 19 it is implied that the assignment of land east of the Jordan has already been made to the tribes of Gad and Reuben; in 20-26 negotiations thereto are still in progress; in 28-30 Eleazar, Joshua, and the heads of the tribes are instructed by Moses to give the land to Gad and Reuben when they shall have fulfilled the undertaking of 27; in 33 Moses assigns the land to them.
- (d) In 31 the children of Gad and the children of Reuben reply to a speech, 28-30, made not to them but to Eleazar, Joshua, and the heads of the tribes of Israel.
- (e) The half-tribe of Manasseh is abruptly mentioned in 33 (cf. 39ff) though hitherto only the tribes of Gad and Reuben have appeared as interested in the land east of the Jordan.

Quite apart from 7-15 (on which see below) there are a number of characteristic P expressions occurring in the chapter: The sequence Reuben and Gad, 1 (as against Gad and Reuben in the rest of the chapter), cf. Josh. 4:12, 13:15, 24, 20:8, 21:7, 22:9ff, etc. *Eleazar the priest*, 2,28, cf. Ex. 6:23, 28:1, Lev. 10:12,16, Num. 20:22ff, etc.; *the heads of the fathers of the tribes*, 28, cf. Josh. 14:1, 19:51, 21:1; *land of Gilead*, 29, cf. Josh. 17:5,6, 22:9,13,15,32; also *congregation*, 2,4, *possession*, 5,22,29,32, *inherit*, 18,19, *subdue*, 22,29, *have possessions*, 30, see Table B.

It is accordingly evident that there is considerable P material in this chapter. It is, however, not derived from a P narrative, parallel to those of J and E, of the allocation of the land east of the Jordan to the tribes of Gad and Reuben. In Josh. 13:15ff there is contained the P account of Moses' action in this connection. While it is of course possible that this material (Josh. 13:15ff) was originally preceded by some statement of the causes or events leading to Moses' action, it is highly improbable if not impossible that P would either have represented the tribes as asking for the land (Smend), or would have allowed the economic motive of 1a (Holzinger). For these reasons the material in the chapter containing P characteristics is to be taken as coming from the hand of Rp (Smend, Eissfeldt; against Baentsch et al).

The order of 1a in the Hebrew is *and much cattle was to the children of*

Moab, this would account for his ignoring of Num. 21:12-20, the inclusion of which indicates that Rp favoured the older representation (JE) of the march around Moab. It is difficult to suppose that the compiler of Num. 33, who elsewhere adheres to the order of the Pentateuch (the absence of mention of the wilderness of Paran in 18f is due probably to the fact that the compiler, not regarding this as a definite locality, intended to represent Rithmah and the places immediately following in the list as situated in the wilderness), should have broken away from it after Iye-abarim, without the backing of a tradition other than that in Num. 21:12-20. It seems necessary therefore to postulate that a rival (P) list of stations still existed at the time of the compilation of Num. 33:1-49. This being so, Moseroth, Bene-jaakan, Horhaggidgad, and Jotbathah, may well have found a place in it, and if so, they must have occurred prior to the arrival at Kadesh, since P, as will be shown, represented the march from Kadesh as being made directly through, not around, Edom. It is, of course, possible that the compiler of Num. 33:1-49 obtained the four names from Dt. 10:6f, where they now occur; it is however unlikely, in view of the change in spelling, for elsewhere he reproduces the names mentioned in the Pentateuch in the form in which they are there given.

70. Diben, Jer. 48:18; Moabite Stone, line 21, etc. *Diblahaim*, Jer. 48:22; Moabite Stone, line 30.

71. Whereas some commentators (Smend and Eissfeldt) emend the text, with LXX, to *מַתָּנָה*, and from Beer, others (Budde, Baentsch) hold that 18b is the conclusion of the song, *מַתָּנָה* being not a place name, *Mattannah*, but literally *a gift*; deleting the *v* before *מַתָּנָה*, they translate *a gift from the desert*; they then emend *and from Mattannah* in 19 to *and from Beer*. If this treatment be correct, some light is possibly thrown on E's purpose in including the fragment in his narrative; it is to make clear the fact that the Israelites are still in the desert east of the territory (then) belonging to the Amorites. There is a third possibility, that, in view of the absence of an article, *מַתָּנָה* is here a place name, as Gray suggests. If this be so, it would seem there has dropped from the text after 18a *and from thence to Midbar*.

72. Reading *מַתָּנָה* with Sam, Vns; cf. Num. 23:28 (Baentsch et al). No change is involved in the English.

NUMBERS 21:21-31

73. *מַתָּנָה*.74. *מַתָּנָה*.75. *מַתָּנָה*.

76. What the verb was it is difficult to conjecture; *מַתָּנָה*, he has caused to wander, is attractive, but fits badly to *מַתָּנָה*, captivity. Possibly *מַתָּנָה* is a corruption of some word more suitable to *מַתָּנָה*.

77. *מַתָּנָה*, the name of a city, is with difficulty the subject of the masculine *מַתָּנָה*; and *מַתָּנָה מַתָּנָה* is impossible. *מַתָּנָה* is best taken as the infinitive absolute, and *מ* should be restored before *מַתָּנָה* from which it was dropped possibly when *מַתָּנָה* came to be regarded as a finite form requiring a subject.

78. Omitting *מַתָּנָה* (read by LXX as plural of *מַתָּנָה*) as a variant to the corrupt *מַתָּנָה*, 30a (Baentsch); pointing *מַתָּנָה*, infinitive absolute (LXX reads it as a verbal form), the *מ* preceding it being deleted as an insertion made when *מַתָּנָה* was taken as a place name; reading for the second *מַתָּנָה*, *מַתָּנָה*, with two Heb. mss, Sam, LXX; reading *מַתָּנָה* for *מַתָּנָה*, with LXX; cf. the point over *מ* in MT.

NUMBERS 22-24

79. Two words are used for *curse* in the narrative, *מַתָּנָה* in 22:6, 12, 23:7, and *מַתָּנָה* in 22:11, 17, 23:8, 11, 13, 25:27, 24:10. Holzinger assigns 22:6b to E on the ground that in Gen. 27:29 J uses the form *מַתָּנָה*, not *מַתָּנָה* as in 22:6b, and *מַתָּנָה*, not *מַתָּנָה*. He then notes that in this E verse, 22:6, *מַתָּנָה* is the word used for *curse*, and from this reasons that *מַתָּנָה* must be a mark of J. But the appeal to the incidence of *מַתָּנָה* and *מַתָּנָה* as criteria of J and E respectively results in an intolerable confusion, and must be rejected, with Baentsch explicitly, and others by implication.

80. *מַתָּנָה* is to be inserted after *מַתָּנָה*, with Sam, LXX, Syr, Vul. No change is involved in the English.

81. The received reading *his people* might be a correction occasioned by the immediately preceding *Perth which is by the River*; cf. Mowinkel, *ZATW*, 1930. Mowinkel rejects the reading *Ammon* on the ground that that country lay to the north-east of Moab, whereas J2 has Balaam come to

Beth-peor, 23:28, by way of Kiriath-huzoth in the south. Mowinckel therefore suggests that the original reading was the *children of the east*. But, as is noted below, the *top of Peor*, 23:28, may well be from the hand of Rje, a substitution for the place named by Ja, made to reconcile the narrative with the geographical implications of Num. 25:3. Nor can there be any certainty as to the location of Kiriath-huzoth. Mowinckel apparently accepts Dillmann's identification of the place with the modern Kurejat, north-west of Dibon; Abel suggests Qerye, some seven miles to the north-east of Dibon.

82. See below.

83. Pages 640ff.

84. לְאֶרֶץ must mean *land here*; cf. 6a that *I may drive them out of the land*.

85. The present אֹרֶל will be due to the influence of אֹרֶל in אֹרֶל preceding and of אֹרֶל following; cf. also אֹרֶל in 11.

86. Also בְּצֵב לִקְרָאִי , *stand in the way against me*, 34, cf. Ex. 5:20, 7:15.

87. In 33 for אֹרֶל read לֹאֶל , with LXX, Vul, Syr (Baentsch *et al*); the English translators have tacitly accepted this.

88. Note the use of לֹאֶל in 23f, not in 23f.

89. The idea that Balaam saw all the people on the occasion of the third (in J the only) attempt was read into the J story by Rje, who was influenced in this by the fact that the extent to which Israel was visible to Balaam was a crucial point in the progress of the E narrative. Actually to J this was a matter of no importance, and one which he did not even consider. He could not have pictured Balaam physically seeing all the people from one point, for they *covered the face of the land*. See further the comment on 23:28, 24:1f below. It must be added that in E the emphasis was not so much on the fact that Balaam saw *all* the people at the first attempt, but rather that he saw only a part at the second.

90. Taking רֶבֶעַ as a cognate of the Assyrian *rubu'u*, meaning *dust, dust-cloud, crowd* (Haube-Paterson, *SBOT*); the parallelism between 10as and ab is thus complete.

91. And אֵלֶּם with the meaning *but, only*, not occurring elsewhere except in the redactional Num. 22:35, is suspicious.

92. This distinguishes it from the other Mizpahs, Gen. 31:49, Ju. 10:17, Josh. 11:3, Ju. 20:1, Josh. 15:38, I Sam. 22:3.

93. Or a gloss on (a mistaken interpretation of) אֵלֶּם in 21.

94. In 18b is to be read for אֵלֶּם (Baentsch, Mowinckel); in 19 for לֹאֶל (Sievers, Baentsch); no change is involved in the English.

95. 24ab lacks one beat; possibly הָאֵלֶּם should be inserted.

96. אֵלֶּם .

97. אֵלֶּם .

98. אֵלֶּם is to be deleted from 4b on metrical grounds (Baentsch *et al*); the word is not contained in 16b; no change is involved in the English.

99. Taking נִשְׁי as a contraction of נִשְׁי יְהוָה , cf. Holzinger, who would read נִשְׁי אֵלֶּם .

100. נִשְׁי יְהוָה and נִשְׁי יְהוָה ; נִשְׁי יְהוָה occurring in both lines; and נִשְׁי יְהוָה bearing a like meaning.

101. נִשְׁי יְהוָה .

102. נִשְׁי יְהוָה .

103. נִשְׁי יְהוָה .

104. Point נִשְׁי יְהוָה (Baentsch *et al*). No change is involved in the English.

105. Cf. Holzinger, where a recapitulation of such attempts is made; also Baentsch and Mowinckel.

106. Reading יְהוָה (cf. Dillmann) for יְהוָה ; the change was made by J when he put the words in the mouth of Balaam.

107. It has been suggested above that 8b was inserted subsequent to the inclusion of the material in J; it may, of course, have been in the song as J received it.

108. Unless it was the traditional formula with which the seer Balaam was supposed to have begun his utterances; it is noteworthy that the name *Jahveh* does not appear therein.

109. יְהוָה .

110. Furthermore, it is difficult to account for the corruption of יְהוָה to יְהוָה .

111. In 18 point יְהוָה , cf. Sam and pointing elsewhere in MT (Baentsch). No change is involved in the English.

112. $\text{לְהַחֲזִיק בְּיָדָם}$ for $\text{לְהַחֲזִיק בְּיָדָם}$; the corruption of ב to ב (the old Hebrew forms of the letters are very similar) took place when יָדָם , the object of the verb, was accidentally transposed to 18.

113. לְהַחֲזִיק . The attraction of יָדָם , 21a, 22a, for יָדָם , 21b, may well be the reason for the present position of the dative.

114. לְהַחֲזִיק , 20, is curious, and may perhaps indicate a corruption of the text.

115. If 21b originally formed part of the oracle on Edom, as suggested above, it was probably transferred to its present position by the interpolator of 21a, 22.

116. With לְהַחֲזִיק (possibly corrupt) cf. לְהַחֲזִיק Dan. 9:27, 11:31, 12:11.

NUMBERS 25:1-5

117. Pointing לְהַחֲזִיק .

NUMBERS 32

118. With לְהַחֲזִיק , numerous, cf. Gen. 18:18, Ex. 1:9, Num. 22:6.

119. לְהַחֲזִיק is a scribal error for לְהַחֲזִיק , cf. LXX, Vul. and Ex. 13:18 (Baentsch *et al.*). No change is involved in the English.

120. לְהַחֲזִיק , 19b, bears another meaning than that in 19a.

121. Read לְהַחֲזִיק , with Sam, Vns. No change is involved in the English.

122. Note also לְהַחֲזִיק ; contrast לְהַחֲזִיק , 1b, J.

123. It might of course be held that verses 28-32 are simply the composition of Rp who has made use of J phraseology, and that he inserted the section for the purpose of exalting the position of Eleazar. Against this, however, is the repetition of *Moses* in 29, after 28, and the awkwardness of the tribes of Gad and Reuben replying to a speech made to Eleazar *et al.*

124. Also point לְהַחֲזִיק ; no change is involved in the English.

DEUTERONOMY 31

1. The LXX recognized the unevenness in 15 and deleted in the text and the pillar of cloud.

DEUTERONOMY 32:48-52

(NUMBERS 27:12-14)

DEUTERONOMY 34

2. In Num. 27:12-14 the same command as that in Dt. 32:48-52 is given to Moses, and in almost identical language. Both passages are accordingly in the main derived from, or dependent upon, P. Since in P the account of the giving of the command would presumably have been followed immediately by the account of its fulfilment, it may be assumed that Dt. 32:48-52, followed as it is by Dt. 34 (Dt. 33 is of course non-P) is the original, and Num. 27:12-14 an insertion by Rp, dependent upon it (Baentsch, Gressmann; against Smend). The text of neither passage is as it left the hand of P. Rp's motive for the insertion of Num. 27:12-14 was his desire to make the appointment of Joshua to some extent a consequence of Moses' prayer, Num. 27:15-17. (Another example of Rp's care for the reputation of Moses, cf. the editing of Num. 20:1-12.) Num. 27:18-23 is Pg. This represented the appointment of Joshua as due entirely to Jahveh's unasked for command. To this Rp prefixed verses 15-17, the redactional character of which is indicated by the occurrence of *the God of the spirits of all flesh*, cf. Num. 16:22, and *the congregation of Jahveh*, cf. Num. 31:16, Josh. 22:16, 17, neither of which are found in Pg (Smend). Then, to provide an occasion for this petition of Moses, Rp inserted 12-14, from the account of Moses' death, Dt. 32:48-52, 34.

Num. 21:14, and encamping in the territory of Moab to the east of the Jordan.¹

(Num. 16:1) And Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben, (2) rose up before Moses . . . (12) And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab; and they said, We will not come up. (25) And Moses rose up and went unto Dathan and Abiram; and the elders of Israel followed him. (27) And Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood at the door of their tents. (28) And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that Jahveh hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. (29) If these men die the common death of all men, then Jahveh hath sent me. (30) But if the ground open its mouth, and swallow them up, then ye shall understand that these men have despised Jahveh. (31) And it came to pass, as he made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave assunder that was under them, (33) and they, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into Sheol. (34) And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them.

It has been argued above² that the relationship existing between the Reubenites and the southern tribes, reflected in the J1 narrative, was established³ subsequent to the location of the latter in the vicinity of Hebron. The story of the revolt of Dathan and Abiram, Num. 16:1-34, suggests that certain Reubenite clans resented, as an attempt to limit their tribal independence,⁴ the claim of the southern tribes (a claim which is implicit in J1) that, because they were, through the Levitical priesthood, the inheritors and custodians of the Mosaic tradition, leadership, if not control, of the confederacy belonged to them *de jure*. J2 in this story dramatizes this recalcitrance of the Reubenites, which he stigmatizes as sacrilege, a revolt against Jahveh himself who had bestowed upon Moses the exclusive authority which, after his death, had passed to his successors, the Levitical priesthood.

In the composition of the story J2 may have drawn upon an earlier independent legend which attributed to supernatural causation a striking geological fissure located in Reubenite territory.⁵

. . . (Num. 22:3) And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they were many. (4) And Moab said, Now will this multitude lick up all that

¹ The J2 notice of this has disappeared in the process of conflation with the E and P narratives. However, they cover the face of the land, Num. 22:5, indicates clearly that the benedictions, according to J2, had encamped in Moab.

² Pages 449f.

³ The tribe of Reuben may, of course, have had contact with the southern tribes before the migration from Sinai; see above, pages 449f.

⁴ See 22:5f reflects the tendency of the Reubenites to tribal individualism; cf. also Gen. 49:3f.

⁵ Cf. Grossmann, *Mos.*, pages 255f. This motif was obscured by the intrusion of verse 33b, R_p on stylistic grounds; see the analysis, page 230.

is round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor was king of Moab at that time. (5) And he sent messengers unto Balaam the son of Beor, to the land of the children of Ammon, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the land. (6) Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me; and I shall drive them out of the land; for I know that he whom thou blestest is blessed, and he whom thou cursedst is cursed. (7) And the messengers of Balak departed with the rewards of divination in their hand; [and they came unto Balaam, and said unto him], (11) Behold, a people is come out of Egypt; it covereth the face of the land: now, come curse me them; peradventure I shall be able to fight against them, and shall drive them out. (17) For I will promote thee unto very great honour . . . (22) And Jahveh's anger was kindled because he went; and the angel of Jahveh placed himself in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him. (27) And the ass saw the angel of Jahveh, and she lay down under Balaam: and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with his staff. (28) And Jahveh opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me? (29) And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in my hand, for now I had killed thee. (30) And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden all thy life long unto this day? was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay. (31) Then Jahveh opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of Jahveh standing in the way, with his sword drawn in his hand; and he bowed his head, and fell on his face. (32) And the angel of Jahveh said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass? behold, I am come forth for an adversary against thee, because thy way is perverse before me. (34) And Balaam said unto the angel of Jahveh, I have sinned; now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again. (35) And the angel of Jahveh said unto Balaam, . . . (37) And Balak said unto Balaam, Did I not earnestly send unto thee to call thee? wherefore camest thou not unto me? am I not able indeed to promote thee to honour? . . . (39) And Balaam went with Balak, and they came unto Kiriath-huzoth, (1 which is in the utmost part of his border 1). (40) And Balak sacrificed oxen and sheep, and sent to Balaam . . . (23:28) And Balak took Balaam unto (1 the top of Peor 1): (24:1) and he set his face toward the wilderness. (2) And the Spirit of God (1 Jahveh 1) came upon him. (3) And he took up his parable, and said,

The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor,
The man whose eye is clear;

- (4) The oracle of him who heareth the words of God,
Who seeth the vision of the Almighty:

- (5) How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob,
And thy tabernacles, O Israel!
(6) As valleys which Jahveh hath spread forth,
As gardens by the river-side.
(7) Before his might nations tremble,
And his arm is upon many peoples,
And his king shall be higher than Agag,
And his kingdom exalted above Amalek.
(8) God bringeth him forth out of Egypt;
He hath as it were the strength of the wild-ox:
(9) He coucheth, he lieth down as a lion,
And as a lioness: who shall rouse him up
Blessed be every one that blesteth thee,
And cursed be every one that curseth thee.

(10) And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together; and Balak said unto Balaam, I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them. (11) Therefore now flee thou to thy place: I thought to promote thee unto great honour; but, lo, Jahveh hath kept thee back from honour. [And Balaam said unto Balak . . .] (14) And now, behold, I go unto my people: come, I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days.

- (15) And he took up his parable, and said,

The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor,
The man whose eye is clear;

- (16) The oracle of him who heareth the words of God,
And knoweth the knowledge of the Most High:

- (17) I see him, but not now:

I behold him, but not nigh:
There hath shone forth a star out of Jacob,
And a comet hath risen out of Israel,
And shall smite through the corners of Moab,
The crown of the head of the sons of Seth.

- (25) And Balaam rose up, and went¹ and returned to his place; and Balak also went his way.

That there is any historical kernel to the story of Balaam, Num. 22:3-24:25, is doubtful in the extreme. It assumes that Israel crossed the Jordan as a unit, which was certainly not the case. It has no knowledge of the Amorite kingdom of Sihon which, there is reason to believe,¹ once actually existed. Mowinckel's suggestion has much to commend it, that the legend took its rise during a period when Moab was becoming a serious danger, and was intended to give reassurance

to Israel.² J2, incorporating it into his narrative, may have been moved by a desire to justify David's subjugation of Moab, II Sam. 8:2, as he had previously justified his subjection of Edom.³

The fact that Balak and Balaam are both introduced as known figures, Num. 22:4b, 5, suggests that in the construction of the tale recourse was had to an independent legend or collection of legends concerning them,⁴ possibly current among the Reubenites. Balak may originally have been the personification of the *Balak*,⁵ the land east of the Jordan. Balaam appears to have been a professional seer, cf. Num. 22:7, 37. J2 apparently represented him as living in Ammon.⁶ The tale of his perilous encounter with the angel of Jahveh and of the speaking ass is possibly an adaptation, as Mowinckel suggests, of one of the folk-tales concerning him. The two oracles, Num. 24:3-9 and 15-17 are adaptations of independent poems.⁷

(Num. 25:1) And the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab: (2) for they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods; and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. (3) And the anger of Jahveh was kindled against Israel . . . (4) And Jahveh said unto Moses, Take (1 all?) the chiefs of the people, and hang them up before the sun . . . And the fierce anger of Jahveh turned away from Israel.

The story in Num. 25:1-4 would seem to be in the nature of a warning against commerce with alien deities.

. . . (Num. 32:1) exceedingly numerous: and when they saw the land of Jazer, and the land of Gilead, that, behold, the place was a place for cattle: (2) the children of Gad and the children of Reuben came unto Moses, (5) and they said, If we have found favour in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants; bring us not over the Jordan. (6) And Moses said unto the children of Gad and to the children of Reuben, Shall your brethren go to the war, and shall ye sit here? (20) If ye will do this thing, if ye will arm yourselves to go before Jahveh to the war, (21) and every armed man of you will pass over the Jordan before Jahveh, until he hath driven out his enemies from before him; (22) then afterward ye shall return, and be guiltless towards Jahveh, and towards Israel. (23) But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against Jahveh. (25) And

¹ Mowinckel, *Der Ursprung der Bil'amage*, ZATW, vii (Neue Folge), 1930, pages 233ff.

² See above, page 557.

³ Mowinckel, *op. cit.*

⁴ So Greenman, *Mose*, page 317, note 3; Mowinckel, *op. cit.*

⁵ See the analysis, page 258. As to whether Balaam was thus located in the original tradition concerning him it is impossible to say. There is little doubt that Balaam the son of Beor, Gen. 36:32, and Balaam are the same figure. (Skinner, *Genesis*, page 435; Baentsch, *Numeri*, page 593; cf. *id.*) and it may be questioned whether J2 was aware of this fact, and, further, whether the connection with Edom, which finds expression in Gen. 36:32 is more ancient than the (presumed) J2 location of him in this story.

⁶ See the analysis, pages 267ff.

⁷ See below, pages 637f.

conquest of the kingdom into as close as possible agreement with the poem which he cited, however unjustifiably, in support of the tradition that the kingdom had once existed. If this be the case, then the evidence of Num. 21:24 as to the extent of the kingdom is without value. And as regards Num. 21:14f, the extremely fragmentary character of the lines must be noted; in their original context they may have had another significance.

Whatever its extent may have been, E has represented the Amorite kingdom as a mere interlude in the history of the land, between Moabite and Israelite control. There is, however, no historical evidence that the Moabite kingdom anciently reached the Jabbok. Further, it is not impossible that the Reubenites had wrested the territory east of the Dead Sea, north of the Arnon, directly from the Amorites, and that the Moabites only subsequently obtained possession of it as the result of a later drive northward.¹

To sum up, it would seem that underlying the story of the war with Sihon is an authentic tradition of the conquest of Amorite territory east of the Jordan by a group either of Israelite extraction, or later reckoned as Israelite. This tradition E placed against the background of the exodus.²

(Num. 22:2) And Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. (3) And Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel . . . (5) to the mountains of the east . . . and they abide over against me . . . (6) peradventure we shall prevail, that we may smite them . . . (7) And they came unto Balaam, and spake unto him the words of Balak. (8) And he said unto them, Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as Jahveh shall speak unto me: and the princes of Moab abode with Balaam. (9) And God came unto Balaam, and said, What men are these with thee? (10) And Balaam said unto God, Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, hath sent unto me, saying, . . . (12) And God said unto Balaam, († Thou shalt not go with them; †) thou shalt not curse the people; for they are blessed. (13) And Balaam rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Moab, Get you into your land; for Jahveh refuseth to give me leave to go with you. (14) And the princes of Moab rose up, and they went unto Balak, and said, Balaam refuseth to come with us.

(15) And Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honourable than

they. (16) And they came unto Balaam, and said to him, Thus saith Balak the son of Zippor, Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me: (17) whatsoever thou sayest unto me I will do: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people. (18) And Balaam answered and said unto the princes of Moab, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of Jahveh my God, to do less or more. (19) And therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what Jahveh will speak unto me more. (20) And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men are come to call thee, rise up, go with them; but only the word which I speak unto thee, that shalt thou do. (21) And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab.

(36) And when Balak heard that Balaam was come, he went out to meet him unto Ar of Moab. (38) And Balaam said unto Balak, Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to speak anything? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak.

(41) And it came to pass in the morning, that Balak took Balaam, and brought him up unto Bamoth-baal; and he saw from thence the people. (23:1) And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven bullocks and seven rams. (2) And Balak did as Balaam had spoken; and offered on every altar a bullock and a ram. (4) And he said unto him, I have prepared the seven altars, and I have offered up a bullock and a ram on every altar. (3) And Balaam said unto Balak, Stand by thy burnt-offering, and I will go: peradventure God will come to meet me; and whatsoever he sheweth me I will tell thee. And he went († to enquire of God †). (4) And God met Balaam, (5) and he put a word in his mouth, and said, Return unto Balak, and thus thou shalt speak. (6) And he returned unto him, and, lo, he was standing by his burnt-offering, he, and all the princes of Moab. (7) And he took up his parable, and said,

From Aram hath Balak brought me,
The king of Moab from the mountains of the east:
Come, curse me Jacob,
And come, defy me Israel.

(9) From the top of the rocks I see him,

And from the hills I behold him:

(10) Who can count the dust of Jacob?

Or who can number the multitude of Israel?

(11) And Balak said unto Balaam, What hast thou done unto me? I took thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast blessed them altogether. (12) And he answered and said, Must I not take heed to speak that which God putteth in my mouth?

(13) And Balak said unto him, Come, I pray thee, with me unto another place, from whence thou shalt see the utmost part of them, and shalt not see them all, and curse me them from thence. (14) And he took

¹ Such a northward movement of the Moabites may have been the background of the Elhad story in Ju. 13:2ff.

² The fact that, despite this setting, Moses is not mentioned in the account of the campaign is an indication that he had no place in the tradition which E was preserving, and carries the further implication that even in E's time the part assigned to him in the east-Jordan as a whole was extremely meagre. Further support is thus furnished for the conclusion that the tradition that Moses died there is fictitious.

him into the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, which looketh down upon the desert, and built seven altars, and offered up a bullock and a ram on every altar. (16) And God met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, and said, Return unto Balak, and thus shalt thou speak. (17) And he came to him, and, lo, he was standing by his burnt-offering, and the princes of Moab with him. (18) And he took up his parable, and said,

Rise up, Balak, and hear;

Hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor:

(19) God is not a man, that he should lie,

Neither the son of man, that he should repent:

Hath he said, and will he not do it?

Or hath he spoken, and will he not make good?

(20) Behold, I have received commandment to bless:

And I will bless, and I will not reverse it.

(21) He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob;

Neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel:

Jahveh his God is with him,

And the shout of a king is among them.

(24) Behold, the people riseth up as a lioness,

And as a lion doth he lift himself up:

He shall not lie down until he eat of the prey,

And drink the blood of the slain.

(25) And Balak said unto Balaam, Neither curse them at all, nor bless

them at all. . . .

That E's recension of the story of Balaam, Num. 22:2-33:25, is an adaptation of, and ultimately dependent upon, that of J₂ with which it is now conflated is apparent from a comparison of the two narratives.¹ According to J₂ the Israelites had spread themselves like locusts over the land of Moab. The king of Moab, Balak the son of Zippor, a well-known figure, recognizing the dangerous implications of the situation, sent for Balaam the son of Beor, a professional seer, also well known, to come and curse the intruders. Balaam promised to come, and, apparently prepared to pronounce the desired curse, set out, riding on his ass and accompanied by his two servants. He was turned back, however, by an angel. Balak then went in person to fetch him; Balaam, presumably on receiving a somewhat contemptuous permission from Jahveh,² then accompanied him to Kiriath-huzoth. Here a preparatory sacrifice was offered. Balak then took Balaam to the top of Peor.³ There Balaam was seized by the Spirit of God, and uttered not a curse but a blessing on Israel. Balak in anger commanded him to return to

his home. Balaam, however, before leaving gave utterance to a second oracle, predicting the eventual triumph of Israel over Moab. He then took his departure.

In the E narrative Balak's concern is aroused not by the presence of Israel in his country but by their success against the Amorites, as a result of which they were abiding over against him, Num. 22:5. Balaam, whom E seems to have represented as living not in Ammon but in the Hauran region,⁴ on receiving Balak's embassy informed them that he could not accompany them to Moab without God's permission. This permission being refused, the embassy was forced to return without him. A second embassy, more impressive in its personnel, was then despatched by Balak. God now gave Balaam leave to go with them, at the same time enjoining him to speak only that which he should put in his mouth. There is thus the same retarded action as in the J₂ recension, but it is much less skilfully contrived. According to E, God simply changed his mind; J₂ had told how he had first threatened Balaam's life, and then contemptuously given him permission to go. And the note of suspense which characterized the earlier narrative is absent from E; there is never any doubt in the reader's mind as to what Balaam will do. J₂, on the other hand, had so delineated Balaam's character as to leave open the possibility that he might at the last moment utter a curse. Only when he was seized by the Spirit was the danger finally removed.

E continued his narrative by telling how Balak met Balaam at the northern boundary of Moab, and the next day took him to Bamoth-baal on the edge of the territory occupied by the Israelites, from whence he could see the dreaded people. The prescribed sacrifices having been offered by Balak, Balaam went to meet God, who put a word in his mouth. Balaam returned to the king, and uttered a blessing upon Israel. To Balak's indignant protest Balaam replied with the reminder that he could only speak that which God commanded him. Balak, hoping apparently that God would again change his mind, then took him to the top of Pisgah, also on the edge of the formerly Amorite territory, so that perchance a curse might fall upon at least the small section of Israel visible from there. But again God commanded a blessing, and, this being uttered, Balaam was dismissed. The dramatic prediction of Israel's future subjugation of Moab which had pointed the climax of the J₂ narrative, and had finally revealed Jahveh's ironic purpose in allowing the seer to go with Balak, is thus absent from the E recension.

¹ Cf. Mowinkel, *Der Ursprung der Bil'sage*, ZATW, 1930.

² See the analysis, page 262.

³ Or to some other point; see the analysis, page 265.

⁴ See the analysis, page 258.

This comparison of the two narratives makes it clear that the basic difference between them is in the character of Balaam. J2 had apparently been content to permit the implication that the utterances of a professional seer, concerned chiefly to earn his fee, were of crucial importance. The fundamental motif of his story was therefore the divine overruling of Balaam in spite of himself. E was unwilling to allow such a quasi-magical power to the words of a man without principle. He accordingly represented Balaam as a conscientious prophet, at the same time qualifying J2's characterization of him as a sheer ecstatic.¹ This change necessitated a rewriting of the earlier narrative which while raising its religious tone unfortunately destroyed its artistry.

A further point may be noted. The taunts against Amalek, Num. 24:7, and Moab, 24:17, once capable of evoking enthusiasm as predictions, since fulfilled, of Israel's political dominance, struck no answering chord in E. For him the true foundation of the national hope lay in the consistent faithfulness of Jahveh, and in the banishment of iniquity from Jacob and perverseness from Israel (cf. Num. 23:21). He accordingly thoroughly revised the oracles which J2 had put in Balaam's mouth, though the dependence of his compositions² upon the earlier poems is clear: with 24:7b, 17bab (the reference to David) cf. 23:21b; with 24:9 cf. 23:24a.

In the J2 setting of the story Balak's concern was adequately motivated; Israel was in his land, and so dangerous; the tale formed an integral part of the main narrative. In E, in view of the fact that no encroachment upon Moab, either before or after the episode, is mentioned, Balak's concern is forced and artificial. The whole story hangs in the air, prepared for by, and preparing for, nothing. This very irrelevance suggests that the legend had obtained so firm a place in the national tradition that it was impossible for E to ignore it. He was therefore compelled to rewrite it along the lines indicated above.

(Num. 25:3) And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor . . . (5) And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that have joined themselves unto Baal-peor. . . .

The story of the apostasy of Baal-peor, of which the fragments in

Num. 25:3,5 alone survive, would seem to be a variant of the J2 story with which it is now conflated. The substitution of Baal-peor for the Moabite deities of the earlier recension was made to bring the tale into line with E's representation that Israel was at the time not in Moab, but further north, in the territory recently taken from the Amorites.

(Num. 32:1) Now the children of Gad and the children of Reuben had much cattle. (16) And they came near unto Moses, and said, (4) The land which Jahveh smote before Israel is a land for cattle . . . (16) We will build sheepfolds here for our cattle; (17) but we ourselves will be ready armed to go before the children of Israel, until we have brought them unto their place; and our little ones shall dwell in the fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land. (33) And Moses gave unto them the cities of the land round about. And Moses said unto them, (24) Build you folds for your sheep; and do that which hath proceeded out of your mouth. (34) And the children of Gad (37) and the children of Reuben (34) built (36) folds for sheep.

The story in Num. 32 is a variant to the J2 story with which it is now conflated. According to the earlier narrative, the Gadites and the Reubenites had first asked that they might not be required to cross the Jordan with the other tribes, and only agreed to do so when reproached by Moses for their selfishness, Num. 32:6. This stigma E removed from their reputation by representing them as themselves suggesting that they should take their part in the western campaign. He also explicitly stated that the families and possessions of the fighting men of Gad and Reuben did not cross the Jordan with them, but remained in the territory which Moses gave them.

(Ex. 23:20) Behold, I send my angel before thee, to keep thee by the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. (22) If thou shalt indeed hearken unto his voice, then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries; (25) and I will bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee; (26) and the number of thy days I will fulfil. (27) I will send my terror before thee, and will discomfit all the people to whom thou shalt come, (1) and I will make all thine enemies to turn their backs unto thee (1). (31) And I will set thy border from the Red Sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness unto the River.

In the exhortation in Ex. 23:20-31, ascribing the success of Israel in the conquest of the land, about to be undertaken, to the protection and blessing of the angel of Jahveh, E asserts the claim that the settlement of Israel in Canaan was divinely purposed. If the argument advanced above³ be valid, that E wrote after the fall of the northern kingdom, the

¹ Contrast put a word in his mouth, Num. 23:15, 16, E, with the Spirit of God came upon him, Num. 24:2, and the ecstatic implications of the opening lines of the oracles, 24:3f, 15f, J2. With this manifestation of E's distrust of ecstasies, cf. Num. 12, and see above, page 690.

² It may be noted that whereas the J2 oracles are elaborations of poems which had existed independently, the strophic arrangement of the E oracles (see the analysis, pages 267f) strongly suggests that they are verse composed for their present context to which they are closely related, and apart from which they would have little meaning: Num. 31:7b depends on the material, now missing, corresponding to that of J2 in 22:3f; 31:3f on 22:41; and 32:120 on 31:31.

³ Page 35.