ON DEFINING A PROPHET
A THEOLOGICAL-ETHICAL STUDY OF
THE BALAAM NARRATIVES OF NUMBERS 22-24

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Dissertation Presented for the Degree of Doctor of Theology
at the University of Stellenbosch

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March, 2009

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ABSTRACT

The Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24 have long proven to be a source of fascination for readers of the Old Testament. The narratives present Balaam as a faithful ‘word-of-Yahweh’ prophet. However, the Tale of the Donkey (22:22-35) portrays him as an ‘unseeing’ prophet intent on personal gain. How does one explain the conflicting views of Balaam within the narratives of Numbers 22-24?

Socio-rhetorical criticism was employed as a methodology to examine the development of these conflicting views of Balaam. An analysis of the Inner Texture revealed that the repeated themes of ‘seeing’, ‘blessing’, and ‘cursing’ are central to the narratives, and serve to connect Balaam with the paradigmatic prophet Moses of Exodus 3 and Deuteronomy 18. The study of the narratives’ Intertexture revealed numerous inner-biblical allusions, and considered the possible relevance of the Deir ‘Alla texts to the narratives. The Social-cultural and Ideological textures of the narratives suggest that a process of prophetic redefinition took place during either the late pre-exilic or exilic periods, which resulted in the exclusion of divination from Israel’s prophetic tradition. Prophets entered into an alliance with the priests in order to centralise religious authority and place the focus of ‘prophecy’ on the exposition and application of Torah.

A consideration of the theological texture of the narratives suggested that this process of prophetic redefinition continued into the early post-exilic period, and ultimately led to a re-evaluation of Balaam. Wide-spread xenophobia within early Yehud contributed to Balaam’s final demise, as later reception history within the Old Testament portrays Balaam as responsible for inciting Israel’s apostasy in Numbers 25. The Tale of the Donkey is integrated into the narratives of Numbers 22-24 by priestly writers in order to distance Balaam from Israel’s prophetic tradition. The

result is a dynamic theological synthesis that recalls both an earlier period in which divination was accepted as part of Israel's prophetic tradition, and a new perspective focused on the exposition and application of Torah.

The Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24 serve as the theological 'hinge' or 'fulcrum' of the book of Numbers, recalling both the old generation of rebellion, and the new generation of hope that will re-enter the land of promise. The Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24 serve to powerfully proclaim that Yahweh's purpose to bless his people will not be thwarted by the intrigues of Israel's enemies, or Israel's past disobedience.

OPSOMMING

Die Bileamverhale in Numeri 22 – 24 het oor baie jare belangstelling onder lesers van die Ou Testament ontlok. Hierdie verhale beskryf Bileam beide as ‘n getroue “woord – van – die Here” profeet; sowel as ‘n sienerprofeet wat nie kan sien nie in die sogenaamde “Verhaal van die donkie” (22:22 – 35) waar hy vir persoonlike gewin optree. Hiermee ontstaan die vraag hoe die uiteenlopende perspektiewe op Bileam in die verhale van Numeri 22 – 24 verklaar kan word?

Sosio-retoriese kritiek is as metodologie gebruik om die ontstaan van die uiteenlopende perspektiewe op Bileam te verklaar. ‘n Analise van die “intrateks” van die Bileamverhale toon aan hoe die herhaling van die temas van “sien”, “seën” en “vloek” ‘n sentrale rol in die verhale speel en dat dit ‘n verband lê met Moses as paradigmatiese profeet in Eksodus 3 en Deuteronomium 18. Die bestudering van die “interteks” van die Bileamverhale het talle intertekstuele verwysings binne die Bybel aangetoon en oorweging geskenk aan die moontlike verband met die Deir ‘Alla tekste. Vervolgens is daar aandag geskenk aan die sosio-kulturele en ideologiese aspekte van die verhale. Hiervolgens word die voorstel ontwikkel dat daar ‘n proses van profetiese herdefiniëring plaasgevind het in die tydperk net voor of tydens die ballingskap waarvolgens divinasie van die profetiese tradisie van Israel uitgesluit is. Sodoende ontstaan daar noue samewerking tussen die profete en die priesters ten einde godsdienstige mag te sentraliseer en om “profesie” te verstaan as die uitleg en toepassing van die Tora.

Die oorweging van die teologiese aspekte van die Bileamverhale doen aan die hand dat die herdefiniëring van profetisme tot in die tydperk na die ballingskap voortgeduur

het en dat dit aanleiding tot die herevaluering van Bileam aanleiding gegee het. Wydverspreide xenophobie het in die vroeë Yehud bygedra tot die negatiewe evaluering van Bileam. In die latere resepsie van Bileam binne die Ou Testament word hy uitgebeeld as die oorsaak Israel se afgodsdiens (Numeri 25). As deel van dieselfde proses van herevaluering word die Verhaal van die Donkie tot Numeri 22 – 24 deur priesterskrywers toegevoeg ten einde Bileam van Israel se profetiese tradisie te distansieer. Die resultaat is ‘n dinamiese teologiese sintese tussen die aanvanklike aanvaarding van divinasie as ‘n onderdeel van Israel se profetiese tradisie en die latere siening van profetisme as die uitleg en toepassing van die Tora.

Die Bileamverhale in Numeri 22 – 24 vorm die teologiese “skarnier” of “fulcrum” van die boek Numeri, waarvolgens die herinnering aan die opstand van die ouer geslag in die wildernis in verband gebring word met die nuwe geslag van hoop wat die beloofde land sal binnegaan. Sodoende funksioneer die Bileamverhale in Numeri 22 – 24 as ‘n kragtige getuienis dat die Here se bedoeling om Israel te seën nie gedwarsboom sal word deur die knoeiery van Israel se vyande of deur Israel se eie ongehoorsaamheid in die verlede nie.

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible Commentary
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
AcT	Acta Theologica
ANE	Ancient Near East
ANET	Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (Pritchard, ed.)
ATJ	Ashland Theological Journal
BA	Biblical Archaeologist
BAG	Bauer, Ardnt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd ed
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Society for Oriental Research
BIB	Biblica
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation
BDB	Brown Driver Briggs
BHS	Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia
BR	Biblical Research
CAD	The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CSR	Christian Scholar's Review
DAT	Deir 'Alla Text
DDD	Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, DDD, 2nd edition
DSD	Dead Sea Discoveries
EBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
Ex Aud	Ex Auditu
FOTL	Forms of Old Testament Literature

GKC	E. Kautzsch and A. Cowley, Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar
HR	History of Religions
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
Int	Interpretation
ITC	International Theological Commentary
IVP	Inter-Varsity Press
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JBQ	Jewish Biblical Quarterly
JETS	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
KB	Koehler-Baumgartner, The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament
LXX	The Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NAC	New American Commentary
NIB	New Interpreter's Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDOTTE	New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OTE	Old Testament Essays
OUP	Oxford University Press
ResQ	Restoration Quarterly
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SJOT	Scandanavian Journal of the Old Testament

SLJT	St. Luke’s Journal of Theology
STRev	Sewanee Theological Review
Targ Onq	Targum Onkelos
Targ P-J	Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (of the Pentateuch)
TBT	The Bible Today
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TynBul	Tyndale Bulletin
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WJK	Westminster John Knox
WTJ	Westminster Theological Journal
ZAW	Zeitschrift fur die alttestamentlische Wissenschaft

The form of this dissertation conforms to *Form and style in theological texts, a guide for the use of the Harvard Reference System.*

Acknowledgements

This study of the Balaam narratives has proven to be a long journey. One does not make such a journey without many guides and helpers along the way. I wish to express my deep appreciation to all of those who have assisted me in the preparation of this dissertation. First, I must express my deep gratitude to my supervisor, Professor H. L. Bosman of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch. For the past decade he has been unfailingly helpful and encouraging as I have pursued this study. He has encouraged my thinking in a multitude of ways, and this study could not possibly have been completed without his assistance. The library staff of the Faculty of Theology, and Ms. Felicity Grové have been a source of kindness and generosity during the times that I have been in Stellenbosch over many years.

I would also like to express my appreciation to my colleagues in the Department of Biblical and Theological Studies at Covenant College. In particular, Dr. Daniel MacDougall, Professor of New Testament and department chair (as well as a long-time friend) has been a source of continual encouragement. I am also deeply grateful to Dr. Scott C. Jones, my colleague in Old Testament studies, who has made helpful suggestions and drawn my attention to many useful articles and monographs. I am also in debt to Dr. Paul Morton, currently Professor of History and Dean of the Humanities division at Covenant College for his encouragement and support. Dean Morton permitted me to carry a reduced academic and administrative load on a number of occasions to help further my studies. Dr. Jeff Hall, Vice-President for Academic Affairs at Covenant College has also been a source of encouragement since I came to Covenant to teach in 2005. Mr. Tom Horner of the Covenant College library staff has cheerfully scoured libraries across the United States for interlibrary loan materials that I needed along the way.

My former colleagues at the Bible Institute of South Africa in Kalk Bay have been extremely helpful as well. Dr. Peter Smuts, current Vice-Principal, and former Principals, Dr. Thomas L. Austin and Dr. Bryan Williams have all encouraged me over the past years and assisted in various ways. I am also very grateful to Bruce and Barbara Wannemacher for their warm hospitality over the past several years during my visits to Cape Town. Our dear friends Shaun and Jenny Courtney have been a great encouragement and help during the finalization of this dissertation.

Most of all, I am grateful to my wife Kathleen for her constant encouragement, love and support, and to my children, Laura and David. I could never have undertaken this project without their enthusiastic partnership over these years. They have been the constant in my life and ministry, and I am grateful for them (and to them) beyond words.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

1.1 Is Balaam among the prophets?

The Balaam narratives have long been a source of fascination and puzzlement to biblical scholars. Balaam has been described as 'one of the most perplexing problem characters in all literature' (Butzer 1953:247). Zannoni succinctly puts the issue in this fashion: 'How are we to understand this figure who first confronts us as a pagan diviner, earning his wages as a master of the black arts, and again as the very channel of the word of God?' (1978:5). The discovery in 1967 of a wall inscription relating a story concerning a diviner named 'Balaam ben Beor' at Tell Deir 'Alla in Jordan has only served to fuel the flame of interest in this obscure figure.

The reader of the Balaam narratives quickly realizes that there is considerable ambiguity concerning Balaam in the Old Testament. Acting with Yahweh's apparent assent to his mission, he is, shortly thereafter, confronted with the imminent prospect of a violent death for having embarked upon his task. Nonetheless, he is used by Yahweh to pronounce blessing upon the people of Israel. Later still, we learn that he has been put to death along with the kings of Midian as enemies of Israel (Num 31:8). The portrait of Balaam given in the remainder of the Scriptures serves only to add to the puzzle. Although Balaam is portrayed as God's obedient servant in the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24, he is almost universally condemned in the rest of the Old Testament texts referring to him (cf. Deut 23:4-5; Josh 13:22; 24:9-10; Neh 13:2 and Mic 6:5). His reputation as something of a scoundrel continues into the New Testament era as well (cf. 2 Pet 2:15; Jude 1:11, Rev 2:14), and the literature of early Judaism as well (Baskin 1983).

1.2 The statement of the research problem

What is the reader to make of all of this? Was Balaam among the prophets of Yahweh? Or was he simply a pagan diviner/seer outside of Israel's prophetic tradition that was, nevertheless, used by Yahweh to bless Israel? Was he a hero of Israel, or a villain of the worst sort? The fundamental research problem could be stated in this way: **How do we explain the conflicting views of Balaam within the narratives of Numbers 22-24, against the background of the Old Testament?**

To answer this question, the reader must also consider the question of definition. How did the Old Testament authors define a prophet? What were the peculiar theological-ethical concerns that governed their understanding of the prophetic role? Was there a development in the Old Testament authors' view of what prophecy entailed? Did the understanding of what a prophet *ought to be* change during the various stages, and in the various contexts portrayed in the Old Testament?

Intimations of a change in definition are evident when one examines the Old Testament text. Deuteronomy 18:15-22 presents a portrait of a prophet as the one who speaks the words that Yahweh has put in his mouth (a prophet 'like Moses'). Yet, in 1 Samuel 9:9, we are told that the 'one who is now called a prophet' (נביא), was formerly called a 'seer' (חוזה). The 'prophet' appears to be understood as a sort of 'paid consultant' who may prove himself useful in locating lost animals and property. Within the 'classical' prophets, the picture is no less confusing. Hosea notes that Israel refers to the prophet as a 'fool' (Hos 9:7). Amos refuses to be identified as one of the prophets (Amos 7:14). Micah suggests that a prophet is no better than a seer or a diviner (Mic 3:6-7). In fact, the day will come when the prophet is ashamed of his vocation, and his own parents will disown him (Zech 13:3-4).

The study of the Balaam narratives by generations of scholars has not served to resolve this ambiguity. Barstad observes that 'Despite the vast amount of scholarly interest in the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible during the last hundred years or so, surprisingly little consensus has been reached in this field' (Barstad 1993:39).

It would appear, therefore, that the Old Testament authors' definition of a 'prophet', (and their understanding of the prophetic role), developed in stages and was governed by particular theological-ethical concerns appropriate to specific historical contexts. In our study, therefore, we will also seek to understand these peculiar theological-ethical concerns which governed the Old Testament authors' understanding of what the prophet's function as a social and divine intermediary entailed (Birch 1991:241).

1.3 The central theoretical argument (hypothesis)

The hypothesis or 'central theoretical argument' of our study is, as follows: **The definition of a prophet developed in stages within different contexts in the Old Testament, and these different perspectives are reflected in the diverging understandings of Balaam.**

In undertaking to prove the above hypothesis, we will focus our attention on the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24. Our study will have three specific goals in mind:

1. To examine the references to Balaam in Num 22-24 in an effort to determine what definition of a prophet is presupposed in those texts.
2. To evaluate the Balaam narratives of Num 22-24 in order to demonstrate the way in which they function as a critique of prophetism.
3. To study and evaluate the historical development of the definition of a prophet in the Old Testament, thereby clarifying the theological-ethical concerns that governed the Old Testament authors' view of what prophecy entailed.

It is submitted that the answers to these questions will allow us to understand the differing perspectives of Balaam within Numbers 22-24. (In the course of our study, we will examine other references to Balaam within the Old Testament as part of our study of *intertexture*.) We will show that a process of 'redefinition' took place in the Old Testament authors' understanding of what being a prophet entailed, from the pre-exilic period in Israel's history (when no clear distinction was made between seers, diviners and prophets), to an understanding developed within the exilic & post-exilic periods that excluded divinatory practices and put forward the Mosaic 'ideal' (Deut 18:15-18) of what a prophet 'ought to be'. This redefinition will serve to explain the differing viewpoints of Balaam evidenced within the narratives of Numbers 22-24 (as well as within the reception history concerning Balaam within the Old Testament).

1.4 The use of Socio-Rhetorical Criticism in examining and proving the hypothesis raised in the Theological-Ethical Study of the Balaam Narratives of Numbers 22-24

There have been multiple interpretative approaches to the Balaam narratives. None of these has yielded anything remotely like a scholarly consensus on the figure or role of Balaam within the Old Testament. The very fact that so many different approaches have been taken with respect to these narratives argues well for the utilization of a multi-disciplinary approach to the investigation and interpretation of the Balaam narratives.

Our study has been entitled a 'theological-ethical' analysis of the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24. It is 'theological' in focus in that we are concerned with the the exegesis and application of the Old Testament within a theological context. It is 'ethical' in focus in that it seeks to understand the ethical issues involved in our understanding of prophecy and prophetism, and the impact that these ethical considerations may have had on the 'redefinition of prophecy'. It is submitted that a socio-rhetorical reading strategy and

methodology will provide just the sort of 'close reading' of Scripture that will serve to significantly advance our understanding of the specific theological and ethical issues under consideration. Socio-rhetorical criticism involves the multi-disciplinary investigation, analysis and interpretation of the Bible through the study of the 'textures' that make up the 'tapestry' of the text(s) under consideration. The goal of the reader is to arrive at an integration of the fruit of this multi-perspectival approach to exegesis.

Vernon K. Robbins pioneered the use of socio-rhetorical criticism through his writings, and in particular his books *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (1996a) and *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (1996b). The strength of Robbins' approach is that it enables the interpreter to approach the study of the text from multiple perspectives, thereby yielding rich insights into the meaning of the text. This methodology has been put to good advantage in the field of New Testament studies (deSilva:2000; Witherington:1998).

While one would be hard pressed to contend that Old Testament authors were influenced by classical Greek rhetoric, there is sufficient reason to anticipate that the application of this methodology to Old Testament study might prove fruitful for our understanding. Hebrew narrative uses such literary techniques as scenic narration, economy of means, *Leitwortstil*, paronomasia, poetry as heightened speech, reticence, indirection, repetition, analogy and contrast (Long 1987:9-42). It has been demonstrated that Hebrew prophetic discourse contains rhetorical features as well. Phyllis Trible (*Rhetorical criticism: context, method and the book of Jonah*, 1994), Jack Lundbom (*Jeremiah: a study in ancient Hebrew rhetoric,* 1997) and Yehoshua Gitay (*Prophecy and persuasion*, 1981) have each utilized insights from classical rhetoric to help elucidate prophetic literature.

However, socio-rhetorical criticism involves much more than just the use of rhetorical criticism. It presupposes a multi-disciplinary investigative and interpretative approach that seeks to arrive at an integrated understanding of the text. Gina Hens-Piazza has effectively utilised a form of socio-rhetorical criticism in her study of selected Hebrew narratives in Samuel-Kings. She notes that socio-rhetorical criticism also seeks to recognise that: 'Social features such as identities, institutions, mores, behaviours, and laws are inscribed in the form and content of rhetoric' (Hens-Piazza 1996:32). Rhetorical elements (e.g. repetitions, narrative descriptions, parallels, etc.) are 'loaded with social import and information' (Hens-Piazza 1996:33). When explored together, the socio-rhetorical aspects of the text serve to provide the reader with a 'thick reading' of the narrative.

Socio-rhetorical criticism seeks to give careful attention to 'the individual realms of texture in a text in a framework of awareness of multiple arenas of texture' (Robbins 1996b:237). Robbins sets out the key presupposition underlying this interpretative analytic approach:

> Underlying the method is a presupposition that words themselves work in complex ways to communicate meanings that we only partially understand. It also presupposes that meanings themselves have their meanings by their relation to other meanings. In other words, all of our attempts to name truth are limited insights into small aspects of the relation of things and meanings in complex but structured ways that are informative about life and the world in which we live. Socio-rhetorical criticism challenges interpreters to use a wide spectrum of these amazing human abilities when they investigate and interpret biblical texts (Robbins 1996b:4).

Such an interpretative approach is necessarily of very broad scope. Robbins famously remarks that 'Any broad-based interpretative approach contains at least two to three hundred strategies and techniques for analysis and interpretation' (Robbins 1996a:44). This has led at least one observer to note that 'Robbins's program sometimes threatens to collapse into the simple exhortation to study a text from every conceivable point of view' (Gallagher

1999:409). However, in *Exploring the Texture of Texts, A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (1996b), Robbins identifies five primary 'arenas of texture' which the interpreter may fruitfully investigate: inner texture, intertexture, social & cultural texture, ideological texture and sacred texture. Each of these 'textures' displays multiple features of the text that warrant close investigation as well. Robbins is quick to point out that the interpreter is not bound to utilize every possible approach, and is free to start at any point of interest to her (Robbins 1996b:5).

1.4.1 Inner texture

Inner texture refers to 'data that linguistic, literary, narratological, rhetorical, and aesthetic interpreters gather when they emphasize the relation of signs in a text to one another' (Robbins 1996a:238). This arena draws the interpreter into the traditional domains of literary and rhetorical criticism. In pursuing this texture, the interpreter looks for different kinds of inner texture, including the repetition of words or phrases; the progression of movement within the text; the use of opening-middle-closing techniques to frame the narrative; the role of the narrator in shaping the discourse; the flow of the author's argument; and the use of sensory or aesthetic textures to convey the author's meaning. Such studies recognize that the author of the text was engaged in a communicative act. The goal is the discovery of the 'natural sense' of the text. The reader, in her study of the narrative, understands that 'literary conventions craft the content of this "story world"' (Hens-Piazza 1996:32). The Balaam narratives in their final form are a literary gem, and we will pursue an understanding of the inner textual dimensions of the narratives in this study.

1.4.2 Intertexture

Socio rhetorical critics speak of intertexture with reference to the actual words of the text as viewed from four perspectives: oral-scribal; cultural; social; and historical (Robbins

1996a:238). The study of intertexture takes the reader into 'the conversation that exists or may exist between the text and other available texts' (deSilva 2000:xii). What sorts of texts 'resonate' with the text under consideration? Lyle Eslinger has noted that 'Taken as a book, the Bible is littered with self-referential allusions' (Eslinger 1992:47). These 'inner biblical allusions' not only help us better understand the text under consideration, but may well serve to give us clues to its compositional history.

Within the context of oral-scribal intertexture, the reading of the text may bring to mind quotations, allusions, etc. from other passages within the Scriptures (e.g. Jonathan Safren's reflection narrative analysis of Num 22 and Gen 22, Safren:1998). Alternatively, the reader may be drawn to consider non-biblical texts that may speak to one's understanding of the text at hand. The reader also seeks to be alert to 'cultural' intertexture, through the text's reference to, or 'echo' of persons, traditions, etc. within the author's culture. Social intertexture focuses attention on the description of social roles within a given context (e.g. kings, masters, soldiers, priests and prophets, etc.).[1] In the course of our study we will see that the intertextual references to, and 'echoes' of the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24 abound within the Old Testament. We will also consider the Septuagint, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Balaam inscription from Tell Deir 'Alla as possible intertextures.

1.4.3 Social and Cultural Texture

David deSilva has noted that the study of social and cultural texture 'moves from the world of the text to the world of the author and audience', and seeks to understand the way in which the text serves to 'orient its audience to the world of everyday life' (deSilva 2000:xii). In analyzing social and cultural texture, the interpreter seeks to borrow from the insights of sociology and cultural anthropology in analysing the cultural and social customs, practices

[1] While the topic of social-cultural intertexture can be treated under the heading of 'intertexture', in our study we will consider it under our treatment of social & cultural texture.

and institutions that inform our understanding of the historical context (Robbins 1996a:239). Here the work of scholars such as Bruce Malina is helpful in drawing to the reader's attention the insights of cultural anthropology (Malina:1993). The reader's recognition and comprehension of data pertaining to patronage relationships, kinship systems, and shame-honour codes is essential to arriving at a fuller understanding of the text, and in enabling the reader to bridge contexts between the reader's world, and the world of the text. Within the study of the Balaam narratives, we will give particular consideration to the role of shame-honour codes within the narratives. We will also give attention to the 'world of the text', that is, the possible social and cultural contexts in which the Balaam narratives of Num 22-24 developed.

1.4.4 Ideological Texture

John Thompson has observed that ideology (insofar as it functions within the interpretative process), can be understood as 'meaning in the service of power' (Thompson 1990:7). Ideological readings reflect a 'closed system' of interpretation. Robbins has famously observed that 'every theology has a politics' (Robbins 1996a:192). The text serves as 'a vehicle by which the author hopes to achieve a certain goal' in changing the reader's understanding of his or her situation, and in seeking to move the reader to the author's 'favoured alternative' position (deSilva 2000:xiii). An examination of the ideological texture of a text helps to identify and clarify the author's goals for the reader's interaction with the text. In assessing the ideological texture of a text, the reader seeks to understand the ideological commitments of the *implied author* and *implied reader*. In doing so, the reader seeks to understand the implied author's social location and point of view, as well as the ideological commitments that he wants his readers to adopt. An ideological reading of the

text will also move the reader to examine the interests and commitments of scholars who have previously studied the text. [2]

However, a caveat is needed. Taken to an extreme, the recognition that 'every theology has a politics' could suggest that all readings are equally helpful or defensible. In his review of *Exploring the Texture of Texts,* Robert Doran has noted that Robbins offers no guidance as to which readings of a text are acceptable:

> It is true that we all have different life experiences and so will all read texts differently, but if there is to be no privileged reading of a text, I with that R. had addressed the question whether every reading is to be accepted. Are not some readings unacceptable? Who is to decide this?
> (Doran 1998:585)

The interpreter must, therefore, be careful to steer a course between 'the Scylla of mechanical replication and the Charybdis of radical polyvalence and unconstrained textual indeterminacy' (Lundin, Walhout and Thiselton 1999:137). As Thiselton notes, 'some understandings are clearly wrong' (Lundin, Walhout, and Thiselton 1999:142). Only as the reader of the Old Testament reads with an awareness of their own 'embeddedness' in their own specific time, culture and theological tradition, can the reader hope to 'listen' to the author's communicative intent (Lundin, Walhout and Thiselton 1999:134).

A focus on the ideological texture of the tapestry should, therefore, help serve to help keep the interpreter 'honest' in her reading of the text. We will therefore, seek to reflect upon the ideological elements that are present in the text as they are reflected in the implied author and implied reader's ideological commitments, as well as the commitments evidenced by other readers of the Balaam narratives.

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[2] This should move the reader to evaluate her own *a priori* commitments insofar as these function as a sort of interpretative 'grid' used in screening the meaning derived from the text. In this way, the reader seeks to be honest about her own 'interpretative baggage', insofar as it influences her interpretation of the text under consideration.

1.4.5 Theological (or 'sacred') Texture

At the end of the day, the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24 represent a *theological* text. Therefore, one of the primary concerns of this study is to engage with the theological (or 'sacred') texture of the text under consideration. Theological texture differs from *ideological* texture, in that the former is a dynamic and open-ended reflection which remains critical of all ideological approaches to the text of the Bible. The process of 'doing theology' is, by its nature, a process in which the interpreter seeks to engage with the Word of the Living God, as his Spirit works 'by and with the Word'. Such an engagement with the text could hardly be farther removed from that ideological reading which seeks to impart a closed and fixed understanding to the text of the Old Testament.

Interestingly, in *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse, rhetoric, society and ideology* (1996a), Robbins did not mention 'sacred' texture. But in *Exploring the Texture of Texts, A Guide to Socio-rhetorical Interpretation* (1996b), chapter 5 is devoted to sacred texture. In analysing the sacred texture of a text, the reader is focusing on what the text has to say about God, as well as humankind's relationship to him. In order to fully appreciate the sacred texture of a text, the interpreter must give careful attention to each of the other textures as well. Otherwise, the interpreter will run the risk of arriving at an interpretation that represents 'a disembodiment of their sacred texture from the realities of living in the world' (Robbins 1996b:130).

Robbins utilises a non-traditional theological terminology of deity, holy person, spirit being, divine history, human redemption, human commitment, religious community and ethics, as subset descriptive categories of 'sacred' texture. Even the terminology of 'sacred' texture evidences an intention to develop an analytical methodology that could be applied to any sacred text. However, Culpepper has right critiqued Robbins on the use of these generic

categories, observing that Robbins has provided 'little guidance regarding the categories, construction, or functions of the theology of New Testament texts' (1998:75-76). Robbins' response has been that what is needed are 'new categories to re-establish scripture as the basis of a Christian theology for the twenty-first century' (Robbins 1998:106). His point seems to be that traditional theological categories can serve to 'cut-off' our interaction with 'the history of religions throughout the world', in a 'manner that suggested that "true Christianity" is in no way social, cultural or ideological' (Robbins 1998:106). Robbins observes:

> I want to bring theology in, but I want to understand the nature of its presence in the context of social, cultural and ideological phenomena. In other words, we should not stack the deck theologically at the beginning, like I think we so often have. This is the reason for bringing theological categories in through the agency of the sacred texture in writings. This was an intentional matter of bringing theology in through generalized categories that could function in all religious traditions. So the first two categories are not God and Christology, but deity and holy person. There is an attempt here to use more general, history of religions categories, rather than to use Christian terminology. (Robbins 1998:111)

This coincides with Robbins's belief that such an overtly theological emphasis will function as 'setting boundaries based on arrogance and ignorance that destroy the spiritual base that potentially bonds people of all kinds together throughout the universe' (Robbins 1998:107). These commitments reflect Robbins's perspective that socio-rhetorical criticism serves as an interpretative analytics that serves to further advance the 'history of religions' approach to the study of 'sacred' texts.

This writer is sympathetic to Robbins's concerns that we not discuss theology in ways that reflect 'arrogance and ignorance', and to his stated desire to develop a scientific methodology that will apply to the study of sacred scripture regardless of the faith tradition that it represents. In this vein, it is interesting to note that socio-rhetorical methodology has fruitfully been applied to the study of the Qur'an (Newby 1998:93-100). However, for the

Christian reader of the Old Testament, the neutral consideration of 'Christianity' as one religion among many is not a viable option.[3] The very use of the terminology 'Old Testament' (rather than 'Hebrew Bible') presupposes that there is some continuity between the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament requires that the reader 'confess' God on the basis of his general and special revelation. As Helberg notes:

> Nobody can remain uncommitted toward this revelation. God proclaims his absolute sovereignty over us and lays claim to us. We are called upon to serve and confess God. (Helberg 1994:237)

The Christian interpreter of the Old Testament will, invariably, read and interpret it as a *theological* text.[4] Therefore, in our study of the Balaam narratives, it seems both unnecessary and unfruitful to insist that the interpretation of the *theological* texture of the Biblical text (and consequent theologizing from it) can only be discussed in generic categories. Therefore, this writer will adapt Robbins's 'sacred' texture in such a way as to utilise the historic terminology of Christian theology (e.g. *theological* texture, Yahweh, prophets, priests, angels, eschatology, etc.) rather than Robbins's 'generic' categories as we examine the Balaam narratives in Numbers 22-24. We will also expand our examination of the theological texture to reflect upon the theological perspectives and viewpoints reflected in the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24, as well as the way in which these narratives function within the theology of the book of Numbers and the Pentateuch as a whole.

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[3] Certainly, for this writer (who is both a clergyman and a lecturer within a theological context), it is important to intentionally pursue a *theological* understanding of the texts under consideration. While affirming the authority and trustworthiness of the Biblical 'revelation', it is acknowledged that the text has undergone a long period of transmission. The doctrine of 'inspiration' implies that this process of transmission was carried out under God's providential oversight through the human authors of the Old Testament. There is, therefore, no contradiction *per se* between affirming the text as 'revelation' and undertaking to reflect upon the way in which the text reached its final form.

[4] The reader might also refer to Barth's discussion in 'The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion' in his *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2 (17). This is not to suggest that the Christian interpreter cannot learn from the 'sacred' texts of other faiths. Only that for the Christian reader, the biblical text must hold a unique place.

1.4.6 Keeping the Tapestry in view

For the interpreter utilising socio-rhetorical criticism, it is important to keep all of the strands of the tapestry of the text in view. With this in mind, Robbins contends that no one texture should take precedence over any other inasmuch as the interwoven threads of a tapestry are not in competition with one another. As deSilva puts it, 'The poetry of the methods is the integration and dialogue created between these approaches' (deSilva 1999:36). However, it is important to remember that all 'biblical' interpreters do their work ultimately under the authority of the Scriptures, which are the 'infallible rule' of the faith community (*The Belgic Confession,* Article 7). Therefore, the understanding and application of the theological or 'sacred' texture of the biblical text to the faith community must be kept in focus as the primary goal of biblical interpretation. The Old Testament should be read as a 'revelation of God' to humankind: 'The Old Testament presents itself as God's revelation to his people, a revelation about God himself and his actions' (Helberg 1994:237). As Vanhoozer notes, the critical need of the interpreter is to engage in a close reading of the text in order to ensure that their understanding of the text is not simply the imposition of a historically and culturally relative interpretative grid onto the text (Vanhoozer 2000:13).

It is at this point that socio-rhetorical criticism can help to keep the interpreter 'honest' in his task. For socio-rhetorical criticism forces the reader of Scripture to look at the text from multiple perspectives, requiring her to acknowledge the richness of the variety of textures within the 'tapestry' of the text. The 'close reading' of the text from the multiple perspectives of *inner texture, intertexture, social & cultural texture, ideological texture,* and *theological texture* will wonderfully serve to open up the dimensions of the text of Numbers 22-24 in ways that will help to clarify as well as answer the research problem of this study. Through such a multi-disciplinary investigation of the text, it is submitted that we will be able

to reach an understanding of the reasons for the differing views of Balaam with the narratives of Numbers 22-24, as well as to glean a clearer understanding of the development of the definition of a prophet within the context of the Old Testament.

Chapter 2
Interpretative Approaches to the Balaam Narratives

2.1 An introduction to the recent literature on Balaam

The Balaam narratives have long perplexed biblical scholars. Balaam represents one of the most enigmatic literary figures in the whole of the Old Testament. Michael Moore has correctly observed that:

> Few traditions in the Hebrew Bible manifest so great a degree of internal conflict as do the Balaam traditions. The simple task of designating who Balaam was and what he did in Israelite history appears to have been one of the most delicate and complex issues Israelite students have ever had to face (Moore 1990:116).

As recently as 1992, John Greene noted that there had been a paucity of 'sustained scholarly works about Balaam ben Beor' (Greene 1992:x). However, that situation seems to have been somewhat remedied in recent years. The most recent major contributions are dissertations by Mark Stewart Leson (2007), Uwe Weise (2006) and Andreas Kurt Schuele (2001). Erasmus Gass has also recently published a detailed philological study of the Balaam Oracles (2001).

Leson seeks to identify key themes (e.g. space and place; ethnicity and foreignness; animal and plant imagery; communication, both ordinary and supernatural), and motifs and to examine the way in which they function within the narratives. He approaches the narratives as folklore, and reaches the conclusion that the biblical accounts of Balaam in Numbers 22-24 should be seen essentially as a 'literary construct' rather than as a reflection of a historical diviner (Leson 2007:453-455). His study is rich in the consideration of specific themes of 'space and place', 'ethnicity and forgiveness', 'animal and plant imagery', and forms of communication (Leson 2007).

In his exhaustive exegetical and 'text-theoretical' study, Weise carefully examines the structure of the text, following the narratological work of Hardmeier. He suggests that the Balaam story within Numbers 22-24 towers like a 'monolith' from the diverse narrative

landscape of the book of Numbers (Weise 2006:1). He observes further that the narratives evidence a very 'high quality of editorial work' in their development, wherein seemingly divergent traditions have been brought together in a theologically unified narrative (Weise 2006:2). He suggests that one of the striking things about the story is that neither Moses nor Israel plays a direct role in the function of the narrative (Weise 2006:227). Rather the focus is on the blessing and curse themes presented in the story. The Tale of the Donkey serves to 'accent' the 'prophetic catharsis' found within the narrative.

With respect to the dating of the narratives, Weise contends that the DAT provide a 'terminus a quo' for Numbers 22-24, but that the likely period is late-exilic or early post-exilic (Weise 2006:229). Within that (presumed) context, he suggests that the Balaam narratives are intended to give hope to the Exilic community, stressing God's continued plans for his people Israel. Despite the destruction experienced by Israel under the Babylonians, Israel is not 'cursed', but remains a people who will continue to experience God's blessing after the exile (Weise 2006:233). The Balaam narratives point to the hope that God's people have, that Yahweh still has plans to give them a 'future with hope' (Jer 29:11)

Schuele takes a slightly different approach, and undertakes a thorough study of the Balaam pericope (Num 22-24) in an effort to understand the process by which extra-biblical traditions about Balaam were incorporated into the Hebrew Bible. He suggests that the 'reception record' (*Rezeptionsvorgang)* of the Balaam narratives can be plausibly reconstructed (Schuele 2001:20). His suggestion is that the insertion of the Balaam pericope into the Exodus/Conquest narratives just prior to their entry into the Promised Land reflects the internal religious conflict and refugee concerns within post-exilic Israel (Schuele 2001:20). The Balaam figure receives a more positive treatment from the DAT than that of the traditions reflected in the Hebrew Bible (Schuele 2001:16). Balaam's role within the Old

Testament as a 'prophet' reflects the 'tendency of legitimation' (*Tendenz der Legitimation*) within the post-exilic refugee community as devout editors attempted to legitimize and incorporate the Balaam figure into Israel's biblical tradition (Schuele 2001:235).

Gass's concerns with the Balaam Oracles centres on the analysis of the text and poetic forms that 'clothe' (*kleiden)* the oracles. His conclusion is that the MT of the oracles is fundamentally 'reliable', and that attempts to assign the poems to different redactional strata are unproductive. His suggestion is that the first three poems are from the early postexilic period (as is the narrative context of the first two poems). The fourth poem probably dates to the early fifth century. The Deir 'Alla Texts are helpful only to the degree that they demonstrate attestation of the Balaam figure outside of the Hebrew Bible (Gass 2001:259).

Serious studies of the Balaam narratives can also be found in the recent commentaries published by Baruch Levine (2000), R. Dennis Cole (2000), Timothy Ashley (1993), Jacob Milgrom (1989) and Dennis Olson (1989), as well as shorter contributions in Dozeman (1996) and Sakenfeld (1995). David Marcus has provided a fascinating study of anti-prophetic satire in his work, *From Balaam to Jonah, anti-prophetic satire in the Hebrew Bible* (1995). Helpful 'survey' articles in major reference works have been supplied by Seebass (2007), Olson (2006*)*, Chavalas (2003), and Hackett (1998). Worth noting are older works by Judith Baskin (1983) and Alexander Rofe (1979), as well as articles by Coats (1973) and Zannoni (1978).

From the continental perspective, Hedwige Rouillard (1985) and Stefan Timm (1989) have made helpful contributions to the literature on the Balaam narratives. Within the past year, a volume on the *reception history* of the Balaam traditions entitled *The prestige of the prophet Balaam in Judaism, Early Christianity and Islam* has appeared (Van Kooten & Van Ruiten:2008). The most significant and fascinating chapter in this collection is the essay by

Ed Noort entitled ‘Balaam the Villain, the History of Reception of the Balaam Narrative in the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets’, wherein Noort seeks to explain the ‘darkening portrait’ of Balaam within the Old Testament reception history of the Balaam story (Noort 2008)

Of particular interest to the student of the Balaam narratives is the discovery of the Deir ‘Alla texts in 1967 at Tell Deir ‘Alla in eastern Jordan (hereafter referred to as “DAT” or *Sefer Balaam*). These texts have revolutionised the study of the Balaam texts by providing an extra-biblical attestation to just such a figure. Accordingly, commentators of the past thirty-five years have had the advantage of reviewing the DAT in making their assessment of Balaam. Several works have emerged which have focused upon the DAT, including Hackett (1980) and Hoftijzer & Van der Kooij (1991). These studies have ordinarily given but scant attention to the Old Testament texts themselves. However, the past decade has witnessed the publication of several significant articles dealing with the Balaam narratives as well as *Sefer Balaam* found at Deir ‘Alla in Jordan. In his insightful study, “Is Balaam Also Among the Prophets”, Meindert Dijkstra attempts to solve the problem of Balaam by seeking answers from *Sefer Balaam*, found at *Deir ‘Alla*. He determines that the account of Balaam found in Numbers 22-24 bears little resemblance to the prophets of the Old Testament. He concludes that the portrait painted in *Sefer Balaam* is “closer to the biography of Old Testament prophets in some ways than is the Balaam depicted in Numbers 22-24.” (Dijkstra 1995:43-64). Michael Barre also grapples with the story of Balaam in Numbers 22-24. He compares it with that of *Sefer Balaam* and comes to the rather startling conclusion that Balaam may have been a non-Israelite Yahwist (Barre 1997:254-266).

We will limit our attention in this survey to just a few of the more significant studies on the Balaam traditions in order to illustrate some of the ways that interpreters have evaluated the different "textures"of the Balaam texts.

2.2 Examples of approaches which explore the Inner-texture of the text.

2.2.1 Martin Noth -- A 'History of Traditions' Approach.

Noth takes it for granted that the Balaam story is 'not a unified whole', but rather a 'juxtaposition of two 'sources' – those of J and E (Noth 1968:171). He bases his conclusion in part on the alternative use of the divine names in the narrative. In particular, Numbers 22 is seen as a 'combination of J and E', with the exception of the episode of the donkey which Noth attributes to the J-narrative, inasmuch as it resembles the episode of the serpent in Genesis 3 (Noth 1968: 172).[5] In assessing the figure of Balaam, Noth observes that 'it is probable that behind Balaam, too, there stands a figure who is, in the last resort, historical' (Noth 1968:172). The problem is that Balaam fills a number of different roles in the Old Testament texts. In Numbers 22, he serves to bless Israel. However in Deuteronomy 23:4b-5, he is claimed to have been hired to curse Balaam, although God 'refused to heed Balaam', and 'turned the curse into a blessing' (cf. Joshua 24:9b-10a). Still, Noth concedes that in the Balaam narrative of Numbers 22 we have 'the acknowledgement of Yahweh by a foreigner, who stood so high in the esteem of Israel's neighbours' (Noth 1968:174).

[5] It needs to be said at this juncture that this writer is reporting Noth's viewpoint – not adopting it. It seems clear to this writer that the Pentateuch evidences a long and complex history of transmission. The Balaam narratives of Num 22-24 evidence this complexity as well. However, attempts to identify the traditions evident within the narratives of Num 22-24, and to attribute them to particular sources has proven to be very difficult to accomplish. To date, there simply is no scholarly consensus on these chapters. Therefore, in this study we will speak more generally of 'pre-exilic' and 'exilic/post-exilic' traditions that are discernible within the text.

2.2.2 Jacob Licht and Robert Alter: The Use of Repetition

A number of writers have noted the use of repetitive words in the Balaam narratives as literary devices which help to focus the reader on important themes and concerns. Jacob Licht and Robert Alter have each provided us with help in this area.

In his book *Storytelling in the Bible*, Licht discusses the function of repetition in the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22. He observes the presence of the following structural repetitions (Licht 1986:71-77):

A1 First delegation, first revelation, Balaam is forbidden to go.
A2 Second delegation, second revelation, Balaam is allowed to go.
  B1 Angel seen by ass, ass leaves path
  B2 Angel seen by ass, ass crushes Balaam's foot
  B3 Angel seen by ass, ass lies down, speaks to Balaam
A3 Angel seen by Balaam, thus third revelation and Balaam is allowed to proceed.

Licht contends that one can clearly see the following formula at work in the narrative: A + A + (BBB) A. Thus we have three repeated elements with the last element expanded to include an additional three elements. Licht sees further repetition in the introductory part of the narrative, where the message to Balak is repeated six times. The two delegations from Balak communicate his words to Balaam, who communicates the same to Yahweh. Although the message is repeated in essentially full form only three times, the basic thrust of the message is repeated six times. Licht notes:

> What I have shown should be sufficient to reveal the richness and intricacy of the network of repetitions and allusions in this piece. The underlying technical principle seems to be that verbatim repetitions are used with discretion and some restraint, and that various repeated motifs are combined to produce an interlocking pattern, consisting mostly of triads. . . A strong, clear pattern has been made to emerge in the outline of the story, but monotony is avoided by the richness of narrative, its sophistication skilfully hidden beneath a seemingly plain exterior. (Licht 1986:73-74)

In Alter's book *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, he suggests that the verb 'to see' (the first word in Numbers 22:2) serves as the main *Leitwort* in the narrative. Balak "sees" what Israel has done to their former opponents, the Amorites. Later, Balaam sees Israel spread out before him on the plain (Num 23:9). The focus on seeing provides a sense of irony as Balaam is unable "to see" what his donkey clearly sees – the Angel of the LORD standing with a drawn sword in the way. Thus, the donkey 'plays the role of Balaam – beholding divine visions with eyes unveiled – to Balaam's Balak' (Alter 1981:106).

Alter also sees repetition at work in the parallelisms pertaining to blessings and curses. Balak seeks to hire Balaam because it is reported that what Balaam curses stays cursed – and what he blesses remains blessed. But Yahweh sets the record straight in Numbers 22:12, where he speaks to Balaam utilising the same two verb stems: ארר and ברך. In Alter's view, this use of repetition strengthens the main point of the narrative – to discuss whether 'language confers or confirms blessings and curses, and with the source of the power of language' (Alter 1981:104-105). The fact that the verb ברך can mean *either* 'blessing' or 'curse' (e.g. Ps 10:3) only serves to increase the tension in the story.

Finally, Alter notes the repetition evident in Balaam's encounter with his donkey. She shies away from the path ahead on three occasions – while Balaam beats her three times in response. He notes the irony of the situation as recorded by the *BeMidbar Rabbah* 20:21 – Balaam needs a sword to kill his donkey, when he was on his way to kill a nation with words alone (Alter 1981:106). Balaam's encounter with the Angel of the LORD, is then followed by three attempts to curse Israel in Numbers 23:1, 14, 29. On each occasion Balak and Balaam build seven altars, to sacrifice seven bulls and seven rams. The repetition of the number seven serves to signal the completeness of the attempt to bring an end to Israel. So,

each time the Moabite king and the Mesopotamian diviner go through the motions as it were, in an effort to demonstrate the pagan world view and its mechanistic understanding of divine power. As the text relates, divine power lies not in correct ritual, but in the 'will of an omnipotent God beyond all human manipulation' (Alter 1981:107). The use of repetition serves to make the point in splendid fashion.

2.2.3 George Coats -- Analysis of the Progressive Flow of the Story-line

In his seminal article, George Coats poses the question of whether Balaam was a 'Sinner or Saint' (Coats 1973:22). At the outset he acknowledges that the overall biblical verdict on Balaam is quite severe. Apart from the account in Numbers 22-24, Balaam is condemned in the strongest possible terms (cf. Num 31:8-16; Deut 23:5-6; Josh 13:22, 24:9-10; Judg 11:25; Mic 6:5; Neh 13:2; 2 Pet 2:15; Jude 11; Rev 2:14). In Coats' view, the problem presented is one of resolving the dissonance created by Balaam's vilification throughout Scripture and the alternative portrait painted in Numbers 22-24. Balaam has not been given a fair hearing, for the Balaam story 'presents Balaam, not as a sinner whose plan for cursing Israel Yahweh foiled by direct intervention, but to the contrary as a saint who intended from the beginning to do nothing other than obey Yahweh's word' (Coats 1973:22). This characterization of Balaam is justified in light of Balaam's 'total dependency on God's word' (Coats 1973:23).

Coats describes Balaam's actions in these terms:

> The purpose of the story as it now stands is not to spin a tale about a foreign diviner who came to curse Israel, but to depict a foreign diviner as a prophet who spoke Yahweh's word and nothing else, regardless of the consequences" (Coats 1973:26).

The employment of such a literary structure is characteristic of *legend* (as defined by Ron Hals), the point of which is to emphasise the actions of a 'hero whose life exemplifies a significant virtue' (Coats, 1982: 56). Seen thus, the Balaam story is about the 'virtue of a

man', not primarily the mighty acts of Yahweh. In Coats' view, the narratives of Numbers 22-24 simply record the obedience of one of the Gentile heroes of Israel.

2.2.4 Arthur E. Zannoni -- The Balaam Narratives as an Example of 'Fable'

Zannoni is sceptical of our ability to know much concerning the *historical* Balaam (although he concedes that the Biblical account of Balaam has reference to a historical figure). In his estimation, the narrative functions as 'probably the best example of a fable that we have in the Bible' (Zannoni 1978: 5). However, such an assessment does not dispose of the central question: How is it possible that a pagan diviner is permitted to serve as a means of God's revelation to humankind? (Zannoni 1978:5) Zannoni does not give an answer. He concludes that the very inconsistencies within the text demonstrate the complexity of various strands of tradition underlying the text.

2.2.5 Shubert Spero and Argumentative Texture

Shubert Spero has noted that the narrative of chapter 22 presents an important question:

> What seems to be the point of this entire narrative which tradition identifies as a self-contained entity called *Parshat Balaam* or *Sefer Balaam*? Considered simply as one of the many dangers which Israel overcame in its journey through the wilderness, it would have been enough, and in a sense even more dramatic, for God to have let an unsuspecting Balaam agree to "curse" Israel and, *then*, when expectations were at their highest, either to silence him or to turn his curses into blessings. Why all of these confusing appearances of God, the talking-ass, the four actual orations of Balaam? (Spero 1985:472)

As Spero reflects on the narrative, he comes to the conclusion that the author of the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22 was trying (among other things) to make an argument against the false prophets of his day who claimed to be on speaking terms with Yahweh:

> It would seem that we have here an attempt to transform Balaam in his own eyes and in the eyes of his contemporaries from a willing manipulator of divine decrees to an unwilling spokesman of the word of God. And, in

> the process, to debunk the false notions of the age and to poke fun at the pretences of the self-serving men who deceitfully claim to have the power to "hear the words of God," "to see the visions of the Almighty" and "to know the knowledge of the most high" (23:14, 16). God is mocking and playing with Balaam, the idolater, even as He mocked and played with Pharaoh, the idolater. (Spero 1985:472)

Spero's focus is on the 'multiplicity of meaning as a device in Biblical narrative'. In his analysis of the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22, he suggests that Balaam is the 'prisoner of his own lies' as he speaks with the emissaries of Balak. His attempts to convince them that God has truly spoken to him fail to communicate because 'the religious vocabulary ('God', 'speak', 'vision') has been corrupted of its original meanings and pressed into the service of a false set of beliefs". (Spero 1985:472). The result is 'exquisite' irony.

Balaam's words in Numbers 22 carry two sets of meaning for two sets of audiences. Spero observes:

> For Balaam and his friends, within the context of the narrative, God's word effectuates a devastating exposé of the falsity of the prevailing concept of the sorcerer and a brief but revelational glimpse of what it is to be a prophet of the living God. For the reader of the Torah, these same words describe how it was that "The Lord thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee because the Lord thy God loved thee" (Deut. 23:6). (Spero, 1985:472)

Thus, Balaam, the one who claims to know and see all, cannot see what his donkey clearly sees. The one who claims to be on speaking terms with the divine powers of the universe is rendered speechless before his strangely articulate donkey. The one who has power to kill by his very words, helplessly blurts out 'If I had a sword in my hand I would have killed you!' (Num 22:29) And after Balaam's three-fold attempt to curse God's people is foiled, and the curses turned into blessing, it becomes clear to Balaam (if not to Balak who thinks that Balaam is playing games) that he cannot manipulate the divine. (Spero 1985:473)

2.2.6 David Marcus -- The Balaam Narratives as Prophetic Satire

David Marcus has written an engaging study entitled *From Balaam to Jonah, Anti-prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible* (1995). Marcus suggests that the Balaam tradition as presented in Numbers 22 serves as a sort of anti-prophetic satire. He notes that Balaam is clearly the 'target of the attack' and that all of the necessary elements of satire are present in a fantastic situation coupled with focused ridicule and parody:

> There is general agreement that this story represents a sharp criticism of the non-Israelite prophet, Balaam. But, in addition, the story contains all the elements that we outlined in the last chapter as necessary for a satire. There is a clearly defined target (Balaam); a preponderance of satiric elements such as fantastic situations, irony, ridicule, parody; and many rhetorical techniques. For these reasons, we maintain that this story constitutes the first example of anti-prophetic satire in the Hebrew Bible. (Marcus 1995: 31)

The presence of these various elements of satire alert the reader to the fact that:

> The purpose of the satire is to belittle Balaam and to expose him to ridicule. Through the satire, it is demonstrated that Balaam, supposedly the best of his profession, is not such an expert at after all. He is no match when faced with real competition like the angel of the Lord. In terms of 'seeing', he is even bested by his donkey. (Marcus 1995: 41)

Marcus does not attempt, however, to ascertain what individual or group of prophets (beyond the lampooning of Balaam himself) the story might be directed at. Rather, the Balaam story is one of the biblical accounts which 'serves the purpose of ridiculing the prophets for behaviour which, to the authors (and readers) of these satires, was considered objectionable and un-acceptable'. (Marcus 1995:8)

2.3 Oral-scribal intertexture – Jonathan Safren and 'reflection' narrative

There are a number of interesting references, allusions, and 'echoes' to other portions of the Old Testament found in the text of Numbers 22. One of the more significant studies of this aspect is that of Jonathan Safren. In his fascinating article, 'Balaam and Abraham', Safren makes a case for seeing the tale of Balaam and his donkey as modelled upon Genesis

22:1-19 (the binding of Isaac) to evoke contrast and comparison, thus serving as a 'reflection narrative'. Safren quotes Zakovitz who defines a reflection narrative as 'one in which the outlines of another narrative are discerned – but in "inverse" form – like the reflection in a mirror' (Safren 1988:106). The reflection story's 'reflected character' and his actions are perceived as the antithesis of the original figure and his actions. Safren's analysis is intriguing as he examines a number of points of comparison. First, he discusses comparisons between setting, characters and plot. The setting of both tales is a journey by donkey: Abraham to Moriah in obedience to God's will; Balaam to Moab in opposition to God's will. Both are zealous in their motivation for their journeys: Abraham to honour God; Balaam to honour himself. In both narratives, the Angel of the LORD reveals himself to the protagonist of the story at the climax of the narrative. Furthermore, it is *only* in these two stories that the Angel of the LORD intervenes and 'reverses' God's intention as it appeared at first to the protagonist. Abraham is moved from action to inaction; while Balaam is moved from inaction to action. Both Abraham and Balaam are 'prophets' – Abraham acts in accordance with God's will, while Balaam attempts to act in opposition to God's will. The donkey in Genesis 22 is a dumb beast left behind with servants, while Abraham plays the primary role in the story. In Numbers 22, the donkey is a key figure while Balaam plays the role of the 'dumb beast'. Safren also notes the use of similar language in the two narratives (e.g. the phrases 'rose in the morning', and 'saddled his donkey'). The key word ראה occurs five times in the binding of Isaac – Genesis 22:4, 8, 13, 14 (twice). It also occurs five times in Balaam narratives – Numbers 22:23, 25, 27, 33. Safren notes that in Genesis, the use of this key word 'points to the sublime' while in Numbers 22 it "underlines the ridiculous". Safren's analysis gives us insight into the intertextual relationship of Genesis 22 and Numbers 22.

2.4 Social and Cultural Texture – Michael S. Moore and Role Theory

In his book, *The Balaam Traditions: Their Character and Development* (1990), Moore utilizes *role theory* as part of his socio-historical study in an effort to compare the accounts of Balaam with those of other magico-religious specialists within the Ancient Near East (Moore 1990:11-12). He examines the Balaam texts in light of three primary role theory variables: *role enactment, role expectations,* and *intra-role conflict.* Moore's basic conclusion is that the Balaam tradition of Numbers 22 manifests a high degree of internal *role strain* within different groups within the Israelite community. In this instance, the tension is between Balaam's roles as diviner/seer and sorcerer/exorcist. Moore sees the tradition in its final form as a reformulation that allowed the recognition and preservation of both role-sets (those of diviner and exorcist) while giving primary attention to the role of Israel's God in the narrative. This served to preserve the theocentric perspective in the understanding of Israel's history (Moore 1990:110-123).

2.5 Ideological Texture – John Greene

In his book, *Balaam and His Interpreters: A Hermeneutical History of the Balaam Traditions,* John Greene undertakes an exhaustive analysis of the hermeneutical traditions concerning the Balaam narratives, both in the Old Testament and in the Deir ‘Alla Text. He concludes that Balaam was a famous ‘monarch/seer reputed to have been an effective diviner’ who actually served as a type for other ‘mantologists’ within the Ancient Near East. (Greene 1992: xi - xii; 162). Greene suggests that:

> Balaam proved to be an entity who was ideal for functioning as a fulcrum for numerous movements, ancient, medieval, and modern, in organizing various facets of the question of the social, religious, and political role(s) of one reputed to have mediated the word and will of the god of Israel” (Greene 1992:169).

His analysis of both the DAT and the biblical traditions is immensely helpful in revealing the dimensions of the problem of ascertaining Balaam's role(s) within the textual traditions.

2.6 The Theological ('sacred') Texture of the Balaam Narratives

2.6.1 Walter C. Kaiser

In an essay entitled 'Balaam, Son of Beor in Light of Deir 'Alla and Scripture: Saint or Soothsayer', Kaiser suggests that we see in the Balaam narratives 'a very complex figure' (Kaiser 1996:101). In fact, we observe Balaam apparently fulfilling various roles at various times in his career – those of seer, oneiromantic, oral-reciter, priest and exorcist/sorcerer. The variety of roles played makes pinning down Balaam's identity and character extremely difficult.

As Kaiser observes: '[w]ill the real Balaam please stand up? Was he a saint or a soothsayer? The answer remains as complex as ever' (Kaiser 1996:105). He suggests that the true character of Balaam is seen most clearly in Numbers 25 where Balaam joins in common cause with the Midianites. If Israel can be led into sin, Yahweh himself will judge his people (Kaiser 1996:105). Kaiser's final verdict reveals the enigma that Balaam has become:

> What was Balaam: a saint or a soothsayer? All the evidence makes a strong case for the fact that he gained his reputation by divination and soothsaying. Somewhere along the line he also appears to have come into contact with Yahwism, for his prayers and protestations have a genuine orthodox ring about them. Consequently, at the peak of his Yahwistic period, he proved to be a most useful and noteworthy instrument in the hands of Yahweh himself. Tragically, his days did not end well, but in an attempt to please all parties he helped those who had originally engaged his services; not by cursing their enemy Israel, but by joining them and giving them malicious advice on how to seduce Israel into attracting the wrath of God. (Kaiser 1996:106)

At the end of the day, one cannot be sure where Balaam's spiritual allegiances ultimately lay. But as Kaiser points out, 'it surely does not look good' (Kaiser 1996:106).

Kaiser's study is representative of many others (Ronald Allen, Gerard Van Groningen, Calvin Seerveld, and John Sailhammer) that see in the Balaam narratives, an expression of God's mighty acts in protecting his people from a danger unseen. From this perspective, the Balaam narratives serve to tell the faith community about the nature and attributes of Yahweh: his faithfulness to his covenant, his promise to bless.

2.6.2 Ronald Allen -- The Theme of Blessing vs. Cursing

In his essay entitled 'The Theology of the Balaam Narratives', Ronald Allen discusses the interaction between *blessing* and *cursing* as one of the central themes of the pericope. From his perspective, the fact of Israel's blessing by Yahweh is the major theme in the *Heilsgeschichte* of the narrative. Israel has been blessed by Yahweh from of old in the Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 12:1-3. Balaam, the pagan prophet, attempts to reverse the curse to earn his mantic fee, but is frustrated at every turn. Yawheh's blessing on His people is irrevocable. Demonic powers have no sway; supernatural means are ineffective; pagan acts are useless in the face of the objective reality of the blessing of Israel (Allen 1981:85). Yahweh's purpose to bless his people flows out of his unchangeable חסד for them. It is his electing love (Exod 19:5-6) that ensures his blessing. Micah refers to the events recorded in Numbers 22, with the admonishment to his audience to remember 'the saving acts of Yahweh' (Mic 6:5). Seen thus, the Balaam narratives become a singular event in the life of people of Israel, and a testimony of his sure purpose to bless his people Israel.

2.6.3 The Scholarship of Baruch Levine

Baruch Levine's second volume on the book of Numbers in the *Anchor Bible* (2000) has made a singular contribution to the study of the Balaam narratives, arriving at some unusual conclusions. His perspective is worth considering at some length. Levine suggests that the Balaam Pericope or *Sefer Balaam* of Numbers 22-24 constitutes a distinct literary unit. It seems clear that there is little connection between the Balaam Pericope and the material which both precedes and follows it in Numbers. In Levine's view, Numbers 22:2 is an editorial insertion to connect the Balaam story with Israel's victory over the Amorites (Numbers 21). He suggests that from 22:3 onward, the Balaam Pericope 'stands apart' from the JE historiography of Numbers (which resumes in Numbers 25:1-5 ff). It is Peor to which Balaam was brought in Numbers 23:28 to curse Israel, and the entire story is told from a Moabite perspective (Levine 2000:137). He suggests the following reasons to consider it a separate composition (Levine 2000:137-138):

1. The Moabite perspective of the narratives.

2. All attempts to assign the contents of the pericope to traditional documentary sources have met with frustration (and a lack of consensus). The overall distribution of the divine names Yahweh and Elohim are inconsistent with the usual designations. The alteration of the names within the narrative make it practically impossible to discern the source tradition from usage alone.

3. Levine thinks it likely that the Balaam pericope utilised existing sources, particularly that of the Elohist (provenance, Northern Israel) in the narratives. The poetic portions draw upon different sources.

Accordingly, in his view, it is most helpful to view the pericope as a separate literary composition which contains its own literary interpolations (e.g. 'The Tale of the Jenny' in Numbers 22:22-35). Levine sees the Tale of the Donkey itself as included primarily to mock Balaam's purported capabilities: 'The Tale of the Jenny would appear to have been written

for the primary purpose of mocking Balaam's capabilities, and may well reflect a later negative evaluation of him' (Levine 2000: 139). Balaam also receives a negative portrayal in Deuteronomy 23:5-6, while Micah 6:5 presents a more favourable viewpoint. Levine thinks that the Tale of the Donkey may possibly represent the negative evaluation given Balaam in Deuteronomy.

Levine notes that the issues surrounding Balaam's name are complex. (See Levine, pages 146-147 for his discussion.) His tentative conclusion is that the author of Numbers 22 deliberately associates Balaam with the Edomites. As for Balaam's *role* within the narratives, the only explicit title as such given to Balaam in the Hebrew Bible is that of קוסם in Joshua 13:22. Levine notes that the Deir 'Alla inscriptions refer to Balaam as a *hzh 'lhn* ("divine seer"). It seems then, that both the Balaam pericope and the DAT portray Balaam as a diviner of some sort.

What are we to make of Balaam's professed obedience to Yahweh's will? Levine is intrigued by the question of why a non-Israelite seer would care what Yahweh thought, much less await his instructions. He wonders aloud whether George Coats was correct in contending that Balaam was the obedient servant of Yahweh (cf. Numbers 22:18 'Yahweh, my God')? If so, when did that relationship develop? The text leaves us in suspense. What is clear is that Balaam is left 'awaiting instructions from the God of Israel, unable to act on his own or any other authority'. (Levine 2000:151)

With respect to the 'Tale of the Jenny', Levine concurs with Rouillard (1985) that the Tale of the Donkey begins with v. 22 (as v. 21 concludes the previous section). It then ends in v. 35b with a postscript that Balaam left home in the company of Balak's chieftains. This serves as a 'hinging' between vv. 21 and 35. The perspective taken of Balaam in the 'Tale of the Jenny' is far different from the rest of the pericope. The pericope assumes that Balaam is

a devoted follower of Yahweh, who will only speak those words that Yahweh places in his mouth. Levine contends that this portrait is also supported by Micah's assessment of Balaam in Micah 6:5.

The anti-prophetic figure of Balaam in the Tale of the Jenny is one of a blind 'seer' who cannot see the spiritual realities that his own donkey is quite capable of seeing. Balaam becomes a comic figure whose lack of discernment is lampooned by the author.

But how can we best understand the process by which the Balaam Pericope received its final or 'received' form? Levine seeks to identify the various circles within Israel for whom Numbers 22-24 spoke, and thus to identify their *Sitz im Leben*. It is Levine's position that 'the principal possibility' is that the Balaam oracles were written in Gilead (where Tell Deir 'Alla is found), and 'where an Israelite community lived for centuries' (i.e. from the 10th century BCE down through the 8th). Is it possible that the Deir 'Alla inscriptions were written by a Transjordanian Israelite?

Levine's thesis posits a Transjordanian source (called 'T') that represented the Israelite community in Gilead, containing not only the Balaam poems, but also the works of the Northern Israelite prophets (pre-8th century) as well as those of the Elohist. Other writings would include the *Sheol Oracle* of Isaiah 14, which Levine believes bears some similarities to Combination II of the Balaam texts (wherein *El* is referred to). Within the Balaam Pericope, the reader finds a series of narratives interspersed with poetic oracles. The poetic portions of Numbers 21 serve as 'proof texts' which lend credibility to the Balaam narratives. Numbers 21:14 refers to the 'Chronicle of the Wars of Yahweh'. And Numbers 21:27-30 attributes the Heshbon Ballad to the המשׁלים (the singers of 'balanced verses'). This much is clear. However, sorting out the literary relationships of the poems and the narratives is far more complex.

Levine's perspective is that is 'highly improbable' that the oracles were written to fit into the narratives. He suggests that the poems existed independently of the narratives – perhaps, even as a collection of sorts. This can be demonstrated by clarifying the particular perspectives conveyed in the poems and the narratives – their themes and diction. Levine's thesis is that the poems derive from a source (or sources) separate from that of the narratives. He contends that 'it will emerge that poems are older than the narratives and from a different environment'. The narratives take up themes first introduced in the poems and 'modulate' them in ways, and project perspectives quite different from those of the poem. (Levine 2000: 210)

2.7 Conclusion

This brief introduction to some of the interpretative approaches taken to the Balaam literature has demonstrated the rich variety of interpretative approaches that have been taken towards the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24 over the years. Certain trends within the history of research are evident.

2.7.1 'History of Traditions' approaches

The 'history of traditions' approach of Noth (and Gray) has been continued in the (more recent) scholarly contributions of Schule and Weise who have ably employed the rigorous exegetical approach so identified with the Wellhausenian tradition (as has Levine). Greene continues somewhat in this tradition, but with the additional project of identifying the ideological utilisation of Balaam within different contexts in the biblical tradition.

2.7.2 Literary critical approaches

The Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24 have also proven irresistible to narrative literary critics such as Licht, Alter and Olson. Marcus has utilised literary critical theory to

demonstrate the function of the Balaam narratives (along with Jonah) as examples of a critique of prophetism.

2.7.3 Social-scientific approaches

Moore has embraced the social-scientific approach in his role-theory analysis of the narratives, using the comparative analysis of prophetic phenomena within the Ancient Near Eastern context to help illumine the biblical narratives. Leson has combined a literary critical approach to Numbers 22-24 in which the Balaam stories are seen as 'folklore', together with the social-scientific analysis of thematic motifs within the narratives.

2.7.4 'Conservative' theological analysis

Meanwhile, 'conservative' scholars such as Allen (1990), Cole (2000) and Harrison (1990) have tended to give little attention to the way in which the various traditions concerning Balaam have come together in the final form of the text. Ashley (1993) is an exception in this regard. Such scholars have, instead, focused their analysis on the theological meaning of the final form of the text.

2.7.5 Reception History analysis

The recently published volume by Van Kooten & Van Ruiten has given evidence to the breadth of studies that are possible within the study of the reception history of the text. Within this approach, Noort's essay is particularly important because of its focus on the intertextual references to Balaam within the Old Testament. It is anticipated that much more work will be forthcoming on the reception history of the Balaam narratives in the years ahead.

2.7.6 The present study – a Socio-rhetorical approach

This writer acknowledges that he is indebted to each of the studies referenced above. Each interpretative approach has served to shed light on the Balaam narratives of Numbers

22-24. No-one undertakes scholarly investigation of any sort without figuratively 'standing on the shoulders' of those who have gone before. So it is with the present study. One might legitimately pose the question: With so many excellent studies of the Balaam narratives, what justification is there for one more?

While each of these interpretative approaches has made a valuable contribution, there has yet to be a full socio-rhetorical analysis of the Balaam narratives of Num 22-24 in which the multiple 'textures' of the text are considered in an integrated fashion. Such a study will combine careful literary & exegetical study with rigorous theological analysis, from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Such a consideration of both the literary and social-cultural dimensions of the text are bound to of value in the theological analysis of both the narratives, and of the redefinition of prophecy which they illustrate. It is our intention to undertake to fulfil this lacuna in the research concerning Balaam.

Chapter 3
The Inner Texture of Numbers 22-24

3.1 Introduction to 'Inner Texture'

Robbins' first book clearly delineating his socio-rhetorical strategy was entitled 'The Tapestry of Texts' (1996a). Combrink has noted that 'the metaphor of weaving. . . that of the text seen as a thick tapestry' enables the interpreter to look at the different textures of the text from different angles (Combrink 2007:97). When interpreters speak of 'inner texture', they refer to those features of the text that reveal the verbal texture of the passage under consideration. The focus is on the text used as an instrument of communication. The interpreter is concerned with features of the text such as the repetition of particular words, the creation of endings and beginnings, the alteration of speech and storytelling, and the way in which the author uses the words to present arguments. Inner texture is found both in the text unit itself, and in the larger text in which it is found. These concerns are often the focus of literary and rhetorical criticism. Robbins notes that 'inner texture concerns relationships among word-phrase and narrational patterns that produce argumentative and aesthetic patterns in texts', which serve to set the context for 'networks of signification' in a specific text (Robbins 1996a:46). It is the 'stage of analysis prior to the analysis of meanings' (Robbins 1996b:7). The 'purpose' of such inner texture analysis is 'to gain an intimate knowledge of words, word patterns, voices, structures, devices, and modes in the text, which are the context for meaning' (Robbins 1996b:7).

Inner texture focuses on the words themselves as 'tools for communication', and looks at the basic sense of the words to see the ways in which they are utilized within the text itself. The purpose of inner texture analysis is to discern the flow of words, word patterns, voices,

structures, devices and modes of communication within the text. We will examine the Balaam pericope found in Numbers 22-24 to explore several of the aspects of inner texture that are visible in the text. Particular attention will be given to the repetition of primary words, and the ensuing textual patterns formed. These patterns serve to help identify the storyline's progression within the narrative. We will also give attention to the way in which text markers serve to delineate 'opening-middle-closing' elements of the narrative. Finally we will examine the argumentative and aesthetic dimensions of the narratives. As Olson has noted, the narratives divide into three main sections: 22:2-40; 22:41 – 24:13; and 24:14-25 (Olson 1996:141-142). We will utilise these broad text units for our inner textual analysis.[6]

3.2 Preliminary issues

3.2.1 What is the relationship between the narratives and oracles within the Balaam pericope?

The Balaam pericope of Numbers 22-24 represents a literary unit that appears to have little connection between the materials that precede it, and which follow it. It stands "self-contained" as one of the most fascinating stories in the Hebrew Bible. Scholars have long puzzled over the relationship between the narratives and oracles within Numbers 22-24. There is a consensus that chapters 22-24 (*Sefer Balaam*) is an independent composition that was eventually inserted into the text of the book of Numbers. In point of fact, there is general agreement that the narratives and the poems were composed independently, and may in fact, reflect the compilation of a variety of sources (Milgrom 1990:467). There is general agreement that the 'Tale of the Donkey' (Numbers 22:22-35) is an interpolation. This view is largely derived from an analysis of the divergence in divine names, and of the apparent narrative inconsistency between Numbers 22:21 and 22:22 (Levine 2000: 139)

[6] The English translation used throughout is the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), emended as necessary.

However, no consensus has emerged as to the *order* in which these compositions came into existence. Which came first: the poems or the narratives? Milgrom has argued that the oracles were composed for the sake of the narratives. As he puts it, 'without the narrative, the poetic oracles would make no sense, and all of their allusions to personalities, nations, and events would be incomprehensible' (Milgrom 1990:467). He suggests a number of reasons for this conclusion:

(1) The oracles make repeated references to the narrative, and in fact, to the prose passages which precede the poetical sections.

(2) In Milgrom's view, the oracles 'keep perfect pace' with the development of the themes of the narrative. (Milgrom 1990:467-478)

However, Milgrom acknowledges the possibility that the poems and the narratives were composed independently, and only later, edited into 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 skilful that the original seams are no longer visible. The redaction is a new artistic creation. (Milgrom 1990:468)

Ashley disagrees, contending that it makes more sense for the narratives to have been composed to provide a setting for the oracles:

> One cannot know for sure whether the oracles and the narratives were composed at the same time. It seems most likely, however, that the narratives were composed to provide a setting for the oracles. No Israelite was present at these events, hence one must posit time for these narratives to have come into Israelite hands. The present text clearly presents Israelite theology to an Israelite audience, whatever the background of the texts that went into it might have been. (Ashley 1993:436).

Levine concurs with Ashley, in part based upon the fact the poems contain archaisms. The narratives were composed to provide a setting for the poems. He concludes that:

> In literary-historical terms, as opposed to textual presentation, it is highly improbable that the Balaam poems were written to fit into the narratives. It is more likely that the poetic orations existed independently of the narratives, perhaps even as a collection. (Levine 2000: 210).

Perhaps, the impasse cannot be satisfactorily resolved. But on balance, it seems more likely that the narratives were composed to provide a context for the oracles. The linguistic data indicates the antiquity of the poetry over against the narratives. Budd suggests that while the orthographic evidence does not require a second millennium provenance for the poems, it is unlikely that they are later than the tenth or early ninth century. As he puts it: 'The date and provenance of the oracles remains obscure, but they are probably old' (Budd 1984: 263).[7]

3.2.2 Is Numbers 22 a unified text, or a melding of two traditions into one narrative account?

Another key question with which the interpreter must wrestle is whether Numbers 22 presents a unified account, or whether it reflects at least two different traditions concerning Balaam that have been forged together into one narrative. Two key issues seem to militate in favour of the latter view: the use of the divine names, and the seeming narrative inconsistency.

3.2.2.1 The Use and Repetition of the Divine Names

Timothy Ashley notes that "the story is full of rich interconnections among its various parts, and these must receive emphasis in due course, since here as elsewhere, one must interpret the text in its final form, not putative fragmentary ancestors of it." (Ashley 1993: 433) While there are "rich interconnections" there are also parts of the story that are puzzling to the reader, and seem to suggest that we have a combining of various traditions into one

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[7] Ashley suggests that while we know very little about their present context, it does seem unnecessary to posit a very late date for the poems: '[B]ut there seems no reason to posit a very late date, certainly no later than the 10th cent. B.C.' (Ashley 1993: 437)

account. One such aspect of the story centres around the use of the divine names in the text. Ashley notes that the divine names occur 51 times. (The LXX has 52 occurrences, inserting *ho theos* in 23:15 where the MT does not contain a divine name.) Only in the story of Balaam's donkey does one of the names seem to take a prominent position. Ashley shows the distribution as follows (Ashley 1993:433).

Table 1: Distribution of the Divine Names in Numbers 22-24

Passage	**יהוה (Yahweh)**	**אלהים (Elohim)**	**אל (El)**	**שדי (Shadday)**	**עליון (Elyon)**
22:2-21; 36-41	**4**	**6**	**0**	**0**	**0**
22:22-35 (Tale of the Donkey)	**11**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**0**
23:1-30	**8**	**3**	**4**	**0**	**0**
24:1-25	**5**	**1**	**4**	**2**	**1**
Totals	***29***	***11***	***8***	***2***	***1***

Traditionally, this has been thought to indicate different source traditions. In verses 2-21, the reader finds the predominant use of Elohim, indicating the Elohist tradition, while in verses 22-35, the reader finds that Yahweh predominates, indicating the Yahwist tradition (Budd 1984:257). (Note as well that the presence of the talking donkey in verses 22-35 is reminiscent of the talking serpent of Genesis 3, a text usually attributed to the Yahwist. Budd also observes that "revelation by night" is a characteristic normally attributed to the Elohist.)

However, Ashley observes that the difference in divine names may be simply a matter of stylistic variation on the part of the author (Ashley 1993: 433). Meir Sternberg has argued as much in *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative, Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading,* and has suggested that the variations were *intentional* on the part of the narrator. The narrator's purpose was to emphasise the distance between the narrator as a true follower of Yahweh and a pagan diviner who is the subject of the narrative. By doing so, the narrator

faithfully reports what Balaam said, but then distances himself from Balaam by employing a different name for God :

> . . . Balaam's portrait as Balak's hireling (Numbers 22-24) assumes an even darker colour with the abrupt report of his execution some chapters later (31:8). Abrupt, because it is hard to understand why he should be put to the sword during the campaign waged against Midian in reprisal for the sin and the plague they had brought on Israel. What has Balaam to do with this affair, and has he not, however, reluctantly, blessed Israel after all? But another surprise lies ahead, in the form of the retrospect that Midian has been guided "by the counsel of Balaam" (31:16); and the second surprise resolves the first, closing the breaches to make the whole sequence intelligible in terms psychology and morality as well as plot. Balaam, we now recognise, has been an enemy all along, even more so than suggested by our previous encounter with him. (Sternberg 1985:315)

Whether the variation in the Divine names represents stylistic variation or different sources may be difficult to resolve conclusively. But there are additional considerations to address in evaluating the unity of the narrative.

3.2.2.2 Narrative Inconsistency in the Tale of Balaam's Donkey

There is another aspect of the story that seems somewhat 'out of place' -- the story of the donkey. Ashley notes that the Tale of Balaam and his Donkey (22:22-35) may be left out entirely, and the story found in 22:2-21, 36-40 will still make complete sense. And there are 'markers' within the text that indicate that the reader is encountering the use of a literary technique known as 'repetitive resumption' (*Wiederaufnahme*). In 22:21, the reader is told that Balaam 'went with the officials of Moab'. The narrative flow then shifts to the Tale of the Donkey. Afterwards, the reader is again told by the narrator that 'Balaam went on with the officials of Balak'. This near repetition of words signifies that a scribal *intratextual* expansion has been made within the text. Van der Toorn explains it in this fashion:

> Where an expansion causes an interruption in the flow of the text, the movement resumes with a repetition of the words found just before the expansion; the inserted text is thereby bracketed by two phrases that are very similar if not identical. (Van der Toorn 2007:130).

Another clue, however, proffered to the reader is the fact that the setting of the narrative has changed dramatically. The location is unknown, and the reader is transported to an almost surreal world in which animals talk, and angels with drawn swords appear. No-one else seems to be around to witness the scene. Milgrom notes the following:

(1) Balak and his entourage have disappeared from the scene.

(2) Balaam is seen traversing cultivated fields with walls – hardly the desert wastes which he would have had to cross to come to Balak from Pethor.

(3) The plot has shifted from Balak's as God's adversary, to Balaam as God's opponent. This seems to be at odds with Balaam's attitude towards Yahweh revealed in 22:13. (Milgrom 1989: 468-469)

While various attempts have been made to reconcile verses 22-35 with the rest of the narrative, it appears likely that the tale of the donkey is an interpolation from another tradition about Balaam. The final editor of the text has inserted it for his own purposes. We will consider what these may have been at some length at a later point in our study. However, regardless of the story's point of origin, Ashley correctly notes that we must make sense of the narratives as they now stand:

> But whatever we may say about its separate origin from the present context (and the grounds cited may be fairly convincing) this story is now part of the Balaam story as a whole and some sense must be made of it where it now stands; indeed, whoever put these chapters together intended that this be done. The very roughness (e.g. between the attitude of God in vv 20 & 22) may be attributed to one author, who left the rough edges and antimonies in the story for his own reasons, as to a redactor who would likely have eliminated them. (Ashley 1993: 454).

At the end of the day, we must take the final form of the text as we find it, and do our best to understand its rhetorical and theological purpose. We will seek to understand the point and purpose of the story as it presently is found in the Old Testament.

3.3 Repetitive-Progressive Texture and Pattern

One of the primary features of inner texture is the repetition of words or phrases in the text under being studied. *Repetitive* texture is found where words are repeated within the text more than once. This can take the form of repeated topics, pronouns, negatives or adverbs. As Robbins notes, 'the repetitive texture of a span of text regularly exhibits initial glimpses into the overall rhetorical movements of the discourse' (Robbins 1996b:8). The study of repetition enables the reader to identify key characters, topics and themes within the text.

Yet another feature of inner texture is found in *progressive* texture and pattern, which flows out of repetitive texture and pattern. Progressive texture and pattern is found when sequences of words and phrases appear throughout the unit in such a way that *progression* and *intensification* occur, revealing the coherence of the text. Robbins observes that 'progressive texture resides in sequences (progressions) of words and phrases throughout the unit' and 'emerges out of repetition' (Robbins 1996b:9, 10). Progressive texture and pattern is important because it serves to advance the narrative flow of the story, thus serving to emphasise the narrator's primary concerns within the narrative. We will seek to discern the presence of both repetitive and progressive texture & pattern within the Balaam narratives of Num 22-24 in an effort to better understand the key themes and flow of the story.

As it happens, Numbers 22-24 is rich in both verbal and structural repetition. We can see this by recognising the use of repetitions within the pericope. Table 2 sets out the word count of primary words in Numbers 22-24, which illustrates the author's key themes as they are evidenced in the repetition of key words. While an examination of the *frequency* of word usage is not the only method of identifying key themes, it can be a help in understanding which *concepts* are important to the author's literary purpose.

Table 2 – Word Count, Primary Words in Numbers 22-24

1. Balaam (55x); Balak (41x); Israel (13x); Moab (12x); Jacob (7x);
2. Yahweh (29x); Elohim (11x); El (8x); Shadday (2x); Elyon (1x)
3. People (10x); Donkey (10x); Angel (10x); Adversary (2x);
4. Oracle (9x); Word (7x);
5. Eyes(s) (5x); Mouth (5x); Hand (4x);
6. Offerings (4x); Sword (2x);
7. Speak/say (60x); Stand (9x); Strike (7x); See (7x); Hear (3x);
8. Curse (11x); Cursed (3x); Bless (5x); Blessed (5x);

From an examination of the repetitions found, it becomes clear that there are particular characters and topics that are repeated over and over again. The narrator introduces the following key characters into the story: Balak, the King of Moab; Balaam, the diviner/exorcist; Balaam's donkey; the Angel of Yahweh; and God (called by various names throughout the cycles). In addition, the people of Israel, called by the phrase "Jacob/Israel" are passive and unknowing spectators of what transpires in the story. The narrator also introduces a number of key *topics* into the narrative. These include the key topics of 'seeing' (and 'hearing'), and of 'blessing' and 'curse'. As the king of Moab, Balak is terrified by what he has heard and seen of the people of Israel. He counsels his counterparts at Midian to join with him in seeking the assistance of Balaam, an internationally known diviner/exorcist. Balak's desire is that Balaam would pronounce an execration or curse on Israel. However, as readers of the story soon learn, Israel cannot be cursed by Balaam, or anyone else. God has announced his determination to bless them.

The themes of 'seeing' and 'hearing' also play a prominent role in the story. Balak 'sees' the people of Israel and is terrified. He sends for Balaam who listens to 'hear' what God will say. In the Tale of the Donkey (Numbers 22:22-35), the irony of the situation becomes clear. Balaam, who claims to 'see' into the future, and to 'hear' the words of Yahweh himself, is unable to *see* the Angel of the LORD, while his donkey is able to see the danger perfectly. Later on in the story, it is Balaam, the man 'whose eye is clear, the oracle of one who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty' (Numbers 24:3b-4a). The role played by these topics and themes is more evident in the discussion that follows. The specific distribution of the repetition of key words can be seen as diagrammed in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

Table 3: Repetition and distribution of key words/topics in Numbers 22:1-40

Verse	**ראה (see)**	**ברך (bless)**	**קבב/ארר (curse)**	**דבר (word)**	**העם (people)**	**מלאך־יהוה (Angel of Yahweh)**
22:2	וירא (and he saw)					
22:3					העם (the people)	
22:5					עמו (people) עם (people)	
22:6		תברך (you bless) מברך (blessed)	ארה (curse) תאר (you curse) יואר (is cursed)		העם (the people)	
22:7				דברי (words)		
22:8				דבר (word)		
22:11			קבה (curse)		האם (the people)	
22:12		ברוך (blessed)	תאר (curse)		העם (the people)	
22:17			קבה (curse)		העם (the people)	
22:19				דבר (tell)		

22:20				תדבר (the word) אדבר (I tell)		
22:22						מלאך־יהוה (Angel of Yahweh)
22:23		ותרא (saw)				מלאך־יהוה (Angel of Yahweh)
22:24						מלאך־יהוה (Angel of Yahweh)
22:25	ותרא					מלאך־יהוה (Angel of Yahweh)
22:26						מלאך־יהוה (Angel of Yahweh)
22:27	ותרא (saw)					מלאך־יהוה (Angel/Yahweh)
22:31	וירא (saw)					מלאך־יהוה (Angel of Yahweh)
22:33	ותראני (saw me)					
22:34						מלאך־יהוה (Angel of Yahweh)
22:35				אדבר (word) הדבר (tell) תדבר (tell)		מלאך־יהוה (Angel of Yahweh)
22:38				הדבר (word) אדבר (speak)		

Table 4: Repetition & distribution of key words in Numbers 22:41 – 24:13

Verse	**ראה (see)**	**ברך (bless)**	**קבב/ארר (curse)**	**דבר (word)**	**העם (people)**	**יעקב ישׂראל (Jacob/Israel)**
22:41	וירא (saw)				האם (people)	
23:3	יראני (reveals)			ודבר (word)		
23:5				דבר(word) תדבר		

				(tell)		
23:7			ארה (curse)			יעקב (Jacob) ישׂראל (Israel)
23:8			אקב (curse) קבה (curse)			
23:9	אראנו (see)				עם (people)	
23:10						יעקב (Jacob) ישׂראל (Israel)
23:11		ברכת (bless) ברך (bless)	לקב (to curse)			
23:12				לדבר (tell)		
23:13	תראה (see, 3x)					
23:16				דבר (word) תדבר (tell)		
23:17				דבר (said)		
23:19				ודבר (speaks)		
23:20		ברך (bless) וברך (blessed)				
23:21	ראה (sees)					ביעקב (in Jacob) בישׂראל (in Israel)
23:23						ביעקב (Jacob) בישׂראל (Isarel) ליעקב (Jacob) ולישׂראל (Israel)
23:25		ברך (bless) תברכנו (bless)	קב (curse) תקבנו (curse)			
23:26				ידבר (says)		
23:27			וקבתו (curse)			
24:1	וירא (saw)	לברך (to bless)				ישׂראל (Israel)
24:2	וירא (saw)					ישׂראל (Israel)

24:5						יעקב (Jacob) ישׂראל (Israel)
24:9		מברכיך (blessing) ברוך (blessed)	ואררך (cursing) ארור (cursed)			
24:10		ברכת (blessed)	לקב (curse)			
24:12				דברתי (tell)		
24:13				ידבר (says) אדבר (say)		

Table 5: Repetition & distribution of key words in Numbers 24:14-25

Verse	ראה (see)	ברך (bless)	ארר (curse)	דבר (word)	העם (people)	יעקב ישׂראל (Jacob/Israel)
24:15					לעמי (to my people) העם (people) לעמך (to your people)	
24:17	אראנו					מיעקב (from Jacob) מישׂראל (from Israel)
24:18						וישׂראל (Israel)
24:19						מיעקב (Jacob)
24:21	וירא (saw)					

3.3.1 Key Verbal Repetitions

3.3.1.1 'See' ראה

Robert Alter has correctly noted the way in which the verb 'to see' serves as the main *Leitwort* in the narrative (Alter 1981:105-106). The verb 'see' appears at least seven times in Numbers 22 (22:2, 22:23, 22:25, 22:27, 22:31, 22:33, 22:41); five times in Numbers 23 (23:9,

23:13 in three instances, 23:21); and four times in Numbers 24 (24:1, 24:2, 24:17, 24:20). It is the fact that Balak 'sees' Israel camped in the plains of Moab that drives him to near despair, and causes him to call for Balaam to come and curse Israel. It is the fact that the donkey 'sees' the Angel of the LORD that causes him to turn aside three times (even as Balaam, ironically, is blind to the danger). It is the fact that Balaam sees the Angel of the LORD standing with a drawn sword that causes Balaam to fall prostrate before him. And it is the fact that Balaam 'sees' that it pleases God to bless Israel, that leads to his seeing an unidentified royal one ('star. . . out of Jacob', 'sceptre. . . out of Israel') who will crush Moab one day. The narrative begins with Balak who sees what Israel has done to the Amorites. It ends with Israel seeing what God will do to bless them.

The use of the word ***see*** in its various forms thus serves to tie the narrative together. Note the author's use of the word ***eyes*** (עין) to reinforce this theme of 'seeing; (22:31, 24:3, 24:4). This use of *sensory inner texture* helps to make it clear that it is Yahweh who 'opens' Balaam's eyes to enable him to see the Angel of the LORD. Balaam is able thus to say as he pronounces his third *mashal* that he is a man 'whose eye is clear' (24:3); one who 'sees' (חזה) the vision of the Almighty with eyes 'uncovered' (גלה).

By an examination of the repetitive use of ראה one is able to clearly view the progressive texture and pattern of *seeing* within the text. Balak sees 'all that Israel had done to the Amorites' (22:2). To Balak, Israel is (rightfully) seen as an adversary that can mean no good thing for Moab. Balaam is approached about serving as a 'secret weapon' for Moab and Midian – one who can pronounce execrations that would effectively cause Israel to cease to be a threat to Balak. But first, Balaam must 'see' what Yahweh will say. In his first vision by night (vv. 9-12), Balaam learns that he is not permitted to curse those whom God has

blessed. The emissaries of Balak return home empty handed. When the second diplomatic envoy comes to negotiate with Balaam (believing him to be holding out for a better deal), he again repeats that he cannot do what they are asking of him (22:18). Nevertheless, he again seeks confirmation of this message from Yahweh, and in v. 20 has his second vision by night. This time he is told to go with the Moabite emissaries, but with the proviso that he does only what Yahweh says to him.

In the Tale of the Donkey (vv. 22-35), the theme of *seeing* intensifies. Here the almost comic actions of Balaam and his donkey illustrate Balaam's inability to see anything clearly. The donkey clearly sees the danger posed by the Angel of Yahweh who stands in the road with drawn sword. Three times the donkey sees what Balaam cannot, and takes evasive action. Three times, Balaam strikes the donkey with his staff for being unable to see the way forward. The irony is delicious. A donkey is able to see clearly what the world-class diviner cannot, at least not until Yahweh opens Balaam's eyes to see (22:31). Yahweh's opening of Balaam's eyes is the turning point of the story. Now that Balaam sees his situation clearly, he is ready to become an instrument in God's hands. The Angel of Yahweh advances the progression of seeing by emphasizing the donkey's ability to see that which Balaam could not (v. 33). The commission to go with Balak's emissaries, but to only say that which Yahweh tells him to say is repeated yet again.

In chapters 23-24, the progression of seeing continues. In 22:41, Balaam is taken to the top of Bamoth Baal, where he can *see* 'part of the people of Israel'. Balaam gives instructions for the sacrifices to be made as an entreaty to Yahweh. He promises to tell Balak whatever Yahweh shows/reveals to him (23:3). The narrator tells us that 'God met Balaam' (presumably, in a vision) and 'put a word' in Balaam's mouth. Balaam then utters his first

mashal in 23:7-10, in which he is able to *see* Israel with clarity for the first time. They are a people whose sheer numbers (v. 10) reveal the blessing of Yahweh upon them.

Balak is furious with this result. He now takes Balaam to the field of Zophim on the heights of Pisgah. He is quick to advise Balaam that he will only be able to *see* a part of the people – not to *see* all of them (23:13). The process is repeated with seven altars and sacrifices. Balaam has his second vision (23:16), and receives a word from Yahweh which he pronounces in his second oracle (23:18-24). Yahweh has not beheld or seen misfortune in Israel – because Yahweh himself accompanies them to bring blessing. Accordingly, no divination or sorcery against Israel can possibly have effect (23:23). Balak is by now, quite beside himself. He takes Balaam for a third time to a new location – this time, the top of Peor. The sacrificial ritual is repeated. And then the narrator tells the reader a most significant fact: 'Now Balaam *saw* that it pleased Yahweh to bless Israel' (24:1). The progression of *seeing* is complete: Balaam is beginning to see what Yahweh sees. In 24:2, Balaam *sees* Israel encamped, 'tribe by tribe'. The spirit of Elohim comes upon Balaam and he pronounces his third *mashal*. Balaam recounts that he is the man "whose eye is clear", who "sees the vision of the Almighty", who "falls down, but with eyes uncovered" (24:3-4). Balaam then uses a series of metaphors to illustrate the extent to which Yahweh has blessed Israel, and the victory and power given to Israel over its enemies (24:4-9). The oracle concludes with an intertextual reference to the Abrahamic blessing of Genesis 12:1-3: Those who bless Israel will be blessed. Those who curse Israel will be cursed.

Balak, having reached the end of his proverbial rope, terminates his contract with Balaam. But Balaam is not finished with the word of Yahweh. He utters his fourth oracle (24:15-19), and pronounces a summary of what he has finally *seen* – with clear eyes, in a vision given by the Almighty. In v. 17, things reach the climax of the progression of seeing

as Balaam *sees* a star coming out of Jacob, and a sceptre out of Israel. A royal one will come forth who will destroy Moab and Edom. Israel's victory and her borders will be assured by the power of Yahweh.

Thus, out of the repetitive use of 'see', the rhetorical progression of "seeing" becomes clear. God has caused Balak to see the people of Israel with appropriate fear and dread – for the Lord has also caused Balaam to "see" Moab's future doom, and Israel's future blessing. Dennis Olson (following Robert Alter's emphasis) agrees that the theme of "seeing" is critical to an understanding of the text. He describes it in the following terms:

> A carefully crafted story with recurring cycles of three scenes or episodes built into its narrative structure. The repeated theme of "seeing" or "not seeing" appears throughout both the narrative scenes and the oracles of Balaam as another means of binding the cycle into artfully constructed unity. (Olson 1996:142)

The repetitive-progressive texture and pattern of 'seeing' serves to underline the narrator's major rhetorical and theological emphases.

3.3.1.2 'Bless' (ברך) and 'Curse' (ארר קבב)

Alter also notes the way in which the words 'bless' and 'curse' function within the narrative to answer the question whether 'language confers or confirms blessings and curses' (Alter 1980: 104-105). The word 'bless' is used three times in Numbers 22 (22:6, 22:12); four times in Numbers 23 (23:11, 23:20, 23:25); and three times in Numbers 24 (24:1, 24:9, 24:10).

The word 'curse' (ארר) is used twice in Numbers 22:12 and Numbers 23:7. The synonym קבב is found seven times: twice in Numbers 22 (22:11, 17); four times in Numbers 23 (23:8, 11, 25, 27); and once in Numbers 24:10. The word 'bless' ברך is found eleven times, in Numbers 22:6, 12; 23:11, 20, 25; and 24:9, 10.

Linafelt has discussed the 'standard euphemism' theory with reference to the prologue of Job (Linafelt 1996:157). This approach recognises the '*Tiqqune Sopherim*' ('the corrections of the scribes'), in which the scribes made editorial alterations to avoid having the text appear to be 'cursing' God. In a number of places the *sopherim* altered the text to read 'bless', rather than 'curse' as a euphemism for what is perceived as blasphemy. Balentine describes it this way:

> The conventional reasoning behind this translation is that the original author (or a later editor) regarded a text that mentioned cursing God as blasphemous and unacceptable. To avoid this situation, the author substituted the word "bless" for "curse." Later readers would be expected to recognize that the original text had been changed and to re-substitute the word "curse" at the appropriate place (Balentine 2006:49).

A commonly accepted passage that illustrates this practise is found in 1 Kings 21:10, 13, in the Naboth story, where ברך is translated 'curse'. [See Christopher Mitchell's extensive discussion of the 'standard euphemism' (1987:162ff.).] Consider also the example of Psalm 10:3b. The psalmist writes: 'those greedy for gain *curse* and renounce the LORD' (NRSV; see also NJB). Here, it is properly translated curse (Craigie 1983:124).

A review, however, of the occurrences of ברך found within the Balaam narratives fails to reveal an instance in which the 'standard euphemism' is being employed. In each case within Numbers 22-24, the use of 'bless' and 'curse' makes narrative sense within the context. Nevertheless, as the use of ברך can mean both blessing and curse (e.g. Psa 10:3), its use throughout the Balaam narratives introduces a sense of heightened ambiguity. Which does Balaam intend to do – bless or curse Israel? God's intentions are clear throughout, and

without repentance. In time, Balaam comes to recognize that he can only bless – not curse Israel.[8]

Thus, the narrator makes it clear that it is God's purpose from the outset to bless his people, and he will use Balaam to accomplish his purpose. Ronald Allen sees the interaction between *blessing* and *cursing* as one of the central themes of the pericope (Allen 1981:85). Yahweh's determination to bless Israel is the main theme in the *Heilgeschichte* of the narrative. Yahweh is intent on fulfilling the promise made in Genesis 12:1-3 to Abraham, rooted in his electing loving-kindness (חסד) toward his people (Exodus 19:5-6). Divination and sorcery can have no power over God's people where he has purposed to bless. So, Micah reminds the people of God of the Lord's unchangeable love (Micah 6:5):

> "O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam, son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal that you may know the saving acts of the LORD."

Thus, the words "curse" and "bless" are key to the understanding of the inner texture of the Balaam narratives.

In much the same way as the progression of *seeing,* the reader of the Balaam narratives will note a progression of *blessing* evidenced in the repetition noted above. In chapter 22, Yahweh flatly tells Balaam that he cannot curse Israel – "they are blessed" (22:12). Rather, he is to say that which Yahweh commands. The Tale of the Donkey does not develop this theme, except indirectly. The focus is, apparently, that Balaam intends to attempt to curse Israel, and so the adversary has come out to oppose him. The tension is resolved with the re-commissioning of Balaam by the Angel of Yahweh. In chapters 23-24, the progression of blessing intensifies as Balaam makes four separate pronouncements of

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[8] Admittedly, the relationship between ברך and ארר is a nuanced one. Care must be taken not to be too dogmatic in particular instances as to the range of meaning.

blessing upon Israel, culminating in his prophecy that a royal one will come out of Israel who will defeat her enemies, particularly her arch-enemies Moab and Edom.

Thus, the progression within the text of *blessing* serves to demonstrate the coherence of the story as it appears in its final form. It emphasizes the author's focus on demonstrating that Balaam was an instrument in the hands of Yahweh to bless Israel. Despite Balak's hopes for Balaam's execrations, at the end of the day, Balaam is only permitted to do what Yahweh instructs him.

3.3.1.3 "Word" (דבר)

Yet another way in which the narrator helps to shape the reader's understanding of the narrative is through the use of repeated questions, which force the reader to seek a particular answer. (This is the same sort of approach utilized by advocates cross-examining a witness. A "leading question" suggests the correct answer to be given.) Many of the questions used by the author of Numbers 22-24 to give substance to *narrational texture and pattern* reveal the use of the term "word" (דבר). Balaam is concerned to make it crystal clear to Balak that he is only able to speak the 'word' that Yahweh has 'put' in his mouth. The words themselves are not 'magical' – their power is directly related to the source of the words communicated by the speaker. Words that have divine origin, have divine effect (Mitchell 1987:179).

The author strengthens the force of the term "word" through the use of narrational texture by developing a pattern of questions that are asked by Balaam. Balaam asks Balak in 22:38: "Do I have the power to just say anything? The word God puts in my mouth. . . that I must say". This query is repeated in 23:12, "Must I not take care to say what the LORD puts into my mouth?" and in 23:26, "Did I not tell you, 'Whatever the LORD says, that is what I must do?" Finally, the question is reiterated by way of summarization in 24:12 where

Balaam reminds Balak: "Did I not tell your messengers whom you sent to me, 'If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I would not be able to go beyond the word of the LORD, to do either good or bad of my own will; what the LORD says, that is what I will say'?"

The questions can be seen in juxtaposition against those *asked* by Balak, who seeks to remind Balaam that *he* (Balak) is the King – and it is by *his* command that Balaam has come. If Balaam serves Balak well, he will reap a great reward. Or so Balak thinks – for Balaam never says a word about the reward or honour (כבד) offered by Balak. In point of fact, Balaam's words are quite to the contrary: "Although Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of the LORD my God, to do less or more." (Num 22:18)

The very use of the term *honour* in 22:17 and 22:37 illustrates Balak's problem. Balaam is constrained to give *honour* to Yahweh, not to seek honour for himself. Balak's remonstrance with Balaam serves to illustrate his powerlessness in the face of Yahweh's determination to bless Israel. (cf. 22:37, "Did I not send to summon you? . . . Am I not able to honour you?", and 23:11, "What have you done to me? I brought you to curse my enemies, but now you have done nothing but bless them.") The narrator skilfully shows that Balaam is not a "hired gun" as Balak may have supposed – but a spokesman for Yahweh, who can speak only that ***word*** which the Lord puts in his mouth.

3.3.1.4 "Strike" (נכה)

Another pattern of verbal repetition that is instructive to the reader is found in the use of the verb "strike". Balaam strikes his donkey on three occasions (22:23, 25 and 27). The author brings out the comic sense of the situation through a series of questions directed at

Balaam by both the donkey and the Angel of Yahweh. The donkey questions Balaam as to what crime he has committed (22:28), and reminds Balaam of his loyalty and past faithful service (22:30). The Angel of Yahweh further questions Balaam about his three assaults on his poor donkey (22:32). The point is that Balaam has absolutely no right to be angry with his donkey, whose only "offence" is that he has loyally tried to protect him. On the other hand, the Angel of Yahweh has every right to be angry with the wayward diviner Balaam (22:32-33). In fact, had the donkey not turned away, the Angel of the LORD assures Balaam that he would have killed him – because his way was "perverse" (ירט) or reckless. The narrator uses the repetition of 'strike' in order to advance the progression of the storyline within the narrative.

3.3.1.5 Conclusion (repetitive-progressive texture)

These examples of verbal repetitive-progressive texture in the Balaam narratives help to craft the story for the reader, and to clarify its focus. By repeating key words (e.g. 'seeing', 'blessing', 'curse') the narrator is able to highlight specific rhetorical emphases within the text and to underscore key themes in the story. In the Balaam narratives of Num 22-24, the repetitive-progressive texture of the themes of *seeing* and *blessing* enable the reader to understand the author's rhetorical focus within the narrative.

3.3.2 Narrational Texture and Pattern

Narrational texture and pattern resides within 'voices' through which words within the text 'speak'. These 'voices' are either those of the narrator, the characters speaking within the text, or their reported speech by the narrator (Robbins,1996b:15.) Narrational texture occurs when the narrator introduces characters who act, speak, ask questions or give commands. Sometimes, a pattern emerges from the alteration of narration and attributed speech, as in The Tale of Donkey (22:22-35). These patterns (which build upon the

repetitive-progressive texture's understanding of the narrative) serve to move the discourse programmatically 'forward' (Robbins, 1996b:15). In the Balaam narratives, the story progresses through a series of 'scenes as if in a play or storyboard. This can be observed by diagramming both the narrative agents in each scene, and the *narrative flow* of the story as it progresses. By paying close attention to the flow of the story, it may be possible to glean a fresh understanding of the rhetorical structure and intention of the narratives.

Table 6 Flow of Narrative Action in Numbers 22-24

Scene I On the Plains of Moab **Num 22:1-6**	1.Narrator introduces problem: Moab (personified) and Balak are terrified of Israel. 2. Balak sends messengers to Balaam to summon him to come and curse Israel.
Scene II In Balaam's Homeland **Num 22:7-21**	1. The narrator describes the visit of Balak's officials to Balaam. 2. The officials present Balak's request. 3. Balaam advises them to wait overnight while he consults with Yahweh. 4. Yahweh meets with him and advises him not to go. 5. Balaam declines. 6. The messengers return to Balak. Balak sends them again, with a larger offer of reward. 7. Balaam reiterates that he can do nothing beyond the command of his God. Nevertheless, he encourages them to wait overnight while he consults with Yahweh. 8. God tells Balaam to go – but to do only what he is told to do. 9. Balaam accompanies the officials.
Scene III En route to Moab **Num 22:22-35**	1. God becomes angry with Balaam. The Angel of Yahweh appears to stop his reckless course of action. 2. Three times Balaam's donkey avoids the Angel of Yahweh who stands with drawn sword. 3. Balaam becomes angry and strikes his donkey. The donkey speaks and asks Balaam to consider why he is taking evasive action. 4. Balaam's eyes are opened and he sees the Angel of Yahweh with drawn sword to oppose him. 5. The Angel of Yahweh tells Balaam that his course is reckless, and that he intended to kill him. 6. Balaam expresses repentance for his actions, and offers to return home. 7. The Angel of Yahweh tells him to go – but to say only what he is told to say.

Scene IV On the Heights Overlooking Moab, Num 22:36 – 24:25	1.Balak entreats Balaam to attempt to curse Israel. 2. On two occasions Balaam offers sacrifices, and prophesies blessing (not curse) on Israel. 3. Balak tells Balaam not to bless or curse them (23:25). Nevertheless, Balaam prophesies blessing a third time. 4. Balak is furious and dismisses Balaam. Balaam responds that he is unable to say anything other than that which Yahweh tells him to say. 5. Balaam prophesies a fourth time (together with three shorter oracles). 6. Balaam and Balak each return home.

Table No. 7, Narrative Agents in Numbers 22-24

Scene I Plains of Moab Num 22:1-6	Narrator	Moab (personified)	Elders of Midian	Israel	
Scene II Balaam's Homeland Num 22:7-21	Narrator	Balaam	Balak	Balak's Officials	God
Scene III On the Way to Moab Num 22:22-35	Narrator	Balaam	Donkey	Angel of Yahweh	
Scene IV On the Heights above Moab Num 22:36 – 24:25	Narrator	Balaam	Balak	Israel	

1. Scene I – on the Plains of Moab (Numbers 22:1-6)

In the first scene, we are introduced to the two main protagonists within the larger narratives: Israel and Moab. The narrator portrays Moab personified and terrified by what it sees of the people of Israel. A purported exchange takes place between Moab and the 'elders of Midian' (who say nothing in the narrative).

The story then shifts to Balak, King of Moab. It is reported by the narrator that Balak sends emissaries to Balaam to attempt to recruit him into assisting Moab in averting the

danger posed by Israel. The narrational pattern in this section consists of the narrator's telling of the story, or of *reported speech*. This scene sets the stage for what is to follow, by identifying the tension within the story. Balak has a crisis – how will he resolve it? Balak's attempts at a solution will present a crisis (unknown) to Israel. What will God do to protect her? Who is this mysterious 'Balaam' to whom Balak is sending messengers? What will *he* be able to do? Can he really 'curse' Israel? How will Israel protect itself from this threat? The reader is drawn into the escalating conflict, and left to ponder the way in it may eventually be resolved.

2. Scene II – In Balaam's Homeland (Numbers 22:7-21)

The action then turns to the emissaries commissioned by Balak to recruit Balaam. Although never identified other than as a group, they approach Balaam (who now becomes an actor in the story) with Balak's request. The dialogue that takes place between the emissaries and Balaam, as well as between Balaam and God proves to be instructive.

The interaction between Balaam and the emissaries is portrayed initially as a negotiation. When Balaam first demurs from the proposed assignment, the emissaries take it that he is holding out for a better financial arrangement with stronger incentives. But the reader becomes aware that Balaam is in no position to negotiate the destruction of Israel. In point of fact, Balaam is able only to say or do what God instructs or permits.

3. Scene III – The Tale of the Donkey (Numbers 22:22-35)

As previously mentioned, many, if not most, scholars see the Tale of the Donkey as an interpolation. And it does appear that the story moves quite effectively from Numbers 22:21 to Numbers 22:36 even if the Tale of the Donkey is removed. But it is likewise clear that the Tale of the Donkey has been woven into the larger narrative as it appears in the final form of the text to advance a particular rhetorical purpose of the final editor. The Tale of the Donkey,

is in some ways, the most enjoyable part of the Balaam narratives. It combines irony, parody and satire in delightful ways to connect with the reader concerning Balaam's apparent blindness and inability to recognise that which his dumb animal is able to see. His humiliation advances the story line for Balaam is, at the end of the day, only an instrument in the hands of Yahweh. The key narrative exchanges can be diagrammed in the following manner:

Table 8, Key Narrative Exchanges between Balaam, Donkey, and Angel of Yahweh

Angel of Yahweh	Donkey	Balaam
22:23 Angel stands in road as adversary	22:23 Donkey sees angel and turns off road into field	
22:24 Angel stands in narrow path as adversary	22:25 Donkey sees angel and scrapes against wall	
22:26 Angel stands in a narrow place as adversary	22:27 Donkey sees angel and lays down	22:27 Balaam is angry and strikes donkey
	22:28 Donkey says to Balaam: 'What have I done?' (to serve this beating)	22:29 'You have made a fool of me'. 'I wish I had a sword in my hand! I would kill you right now!'
	22:30 'Am I not your donkey, which you have ridden all your life to this day? Have I been in the habit of treating you this way?'	22:30 'No" 22:31 Balaam's eyes are opened – he falls on his face before the Angel of Yahweh
22:32 'Why have you struck your donkey . . .' 'I have come out as an adversary because your way is perverse'		22:34 'I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing in the road to oppose me. . . I will return home.'
22:35 'Go with the men, but speak only what I tell you.'		22:35 'So, Balaam went on with the officials of Balak.'

David Marcus has noted that it appears to be a satirical portrayal of Balaam (Marcus, 1995). In doing so, it heightens the reader's sense that something (or someone) greater than Balaam is afoot within the story. The interaction between Balaam and the Donkey (who is a better friend than Balaam deserves), and Balaam and the Angel of Yahweh (who is more patient with Balaam than he deserves), serves to clearly demonstrate that Balaam is only an instrument in God's hands. Thus, the Tale of the Donkey serves as an anti-prophetic satire,

and in doing so, emphasizes that Yahweh's purpose and plan for his people cannot be thwarted by the plans of pagan kings or diviner/sorcerers. His purpose to bless Israel will be fulfilled.

4. Scene 4 – On the Heights Overlooking the Plains of Moab (Num 22:36-24:25)

The end of chapter 22 brings the reader to the heart of the Balaam oracles as they are related in chapter 23-24. The storyline becomes almost comical, as Balak instructs Balaam to curse Israel three times. Yet each time Balaam pronounces only blessing on Israel. His frustration grows to a climax in chapter 24 as Balaam pronounces his fourth oracle, predicting the coming of a royal person who will lead Israel in Moab's defeat. Balak's plans are thwarted completely. He returns to his people in disgust. Balaam appears to leave the story of God's dealings with Israel as well. (Nevertheless, the alert reader will surmise his continued involvement in the events of chapter 25 when Israel turns to worship the Baal of Peor.) We can see their interactions as diagrammed below:

Table 9 Key Narrative Exchanges between Balak and Balaam

BALAK	BALAAM
22:5-6 'Come now, curse this people'	22:13 '. . .the LORD has refused to let me go with you'
22:16-17 '. . . I will surely do you great honour. . . come, curse this people for me.'	22:18 'Although Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of the LORD my God, to do less or more.'
22:37 'Did I not summon you? . . . Am I not able to honour you?'	22:38 'I have come to you now, but do I have power to say just anything? The word God puts in my mouth , that is what I must say.'
23:11 'What have you done to me? I brought you to curse my enemies, but now you have done nothing but bless them?'	23:12 'Must I not take care to say what the LORD puts into my mouth?'
23:25 'Do not curse them at all, and do not bless them at all.'	23:26 'Did I not tell you, "Whatever the LORD says, that is what I must do?"'
24:10-11 'I summoned you to curse my enemies, but instead you have blessed them these three times. Now be off with you! I said, "I will reward you richly," but the LORD has denied you any reward.'	24:12 'Did I not tell your messengers whom you sent to me, "If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I would not be able to go beyond the word of the LORD, to do either good or bad of my own will; what the LORD says, that is what I will say?"'

The key narrational pattern revealed in scene 4 is Balaam's reiteration that he is unable to say anything beyond that which Yahweh has put in his mouth. This ties Scene 4 to Scenes 2 and 3, where Balaam tells first the servants of Balak, and then Balak himself this very axiom. From beginning to end, the Balaam narratives focus on what God wants to say by way of blessing concerning Israel. At the end of the day, the only actions or commands that have real effect are those of Yahweh.

3.3.3 Opening-Middle-Closing Texture and Pattern

Robbins observes that 'open-middle-closing texture resides in the nature of the beginning, body, and conclusion of a section of discourse' (Robbins 1996b:19). The sub-textures that we have considered to this point (repetition, progression and narration) work together to create this type of texture/pattern in a given text unit. The goal of the interpreter is 'to discern the persuasive effect of the parts, how they work together, in relation to the persuasive nature of the entire text' (Robbins 1996a:50-51). Key questions in the analysis of this sub-texture involve the analysis of 'the function of the parts of a text in relation to the entire text' (Robbins 1996a:51). Attention is paid to the topics that are the focus of the beginning of a text, and the topics that concern its ending. Are the same, or do new topics replace those previously introduced? At the end of the day, Robbins notes that:

> Close analysis of repetitive-progressive texture and opening-middle-closing texture can be the initial steps in close reading that prepare the interpreter for detailed analysis of narrational, argumentative and aesthetic texture' (Robbins 1996a:50).

The narratives of Numbers 22-24 open with the narrator's setting of the stage for the story. The Israelites are camped out upon the plains of Moab across from Jericho. Balak, King of Moab *saw* all that Israel had done to the Amorites. The narrator then personifies the people of Moab and describes them using sensory/aesthetic language (e.g. 'in great dread',

'overcome with fear'). Moab *speaks* to the elders of Midian in a panic of the (supposed) threat which the Israelites pose to their safety and security. Ronald Allen has pointed out that their fear was in large unnecessary, inasmuch as Israel had been told by God that they would not receive any of Moab's territory (Deuteronomy 2:9). (Allen 1981:80) Balak sends messenger to Balaam in an attempt to enlist him in the defence of Moab and Midian. The opening part of the narrative sets the stage for what follows.

In verse 7 the opening act begins. The story is related by the narrator who is "off stage". The story builds in intensity until the mid-point/climax when Balaam is confronted by the Angel of the LORD in verse 22. The tension is then resolved as Balaam is sent on his way with the stern admonition that he is to speak only what he is given to say (22:35). The story ends with Balaam relating his conditions of service to Balak as they observe the people of Israel from a distance (vv. 38-41). The narrator's skilful telling of the story serves to drive home the author's point: nothing and no-one will come between Yahweh and his people. Even a world class diviner such as Balaam is rendered speechless before him.

As noted previously, Dennis Olson sees three (3) major cycles in the Balaam narratives (cf. Wenham). He suggests that the narratives can best be seen in the following manner:

Cycle 1 Numbers 22:1-40 Balaam's three encounters with God in response to Balak's summons to curse Israel.

Cycle 2 Numbers 22:41-23:12 (Balak's three attempts to curse Israel are foiled by the three blessings of Balaam, who can only "speak" that which the Lord tells him.)

Cycle 3 Numbers 24:14-25 (Balaam's fourth and climactic oracle of blessing for a distant future beyond the present generation of Israelites.)

Olson (borrowing Robert Alter's focus on the word "see") writes that the narratives present: 'A carefully crafted story with recurring cycles of three scenes or episodes built into its

narrative structure. The repeated theme of "seeing" or "not seeing" appears throughout both the narrative scenes and the oracles of Balaam as another means of binding the cycle into artfully constructed unity.' (Olson 1996:142)

3.3.4 Argumentative Texture and Pattern

Argumentative texture and pattern involves the investigation of multiple kinds of inner reasoning within the discourse of either a logical argument (assertions backed up by rationale) or qualitative argument (where the images and descriptions contained in the text compel the reader to accept their veracity). Logical arguments make assertions and present rationales or evidential support for the assertions. These may take the form of presenting 'opposites and contraries' (or converse arguments) that help to make the point (Robbins 1996b:21). Qualitative arguments utilize the 'quality of the images and descriptions' to encourage 'the reader to accept the portrayal as true and real' (Robbins 1996b:21). This often involves the use of analogy or example to help drive home the rhetorical point. Robbins notes that '*Argumentative* texture appears when interpreters use rhetorical resources of analysis in the context of repetitive-progressive, opening-middle-closing and narrational texture' (Robbins 1996a:58-59).

Within the Balaam narratives, there are a number of logical arguments presented, the two most significant of which have to do with the themes of 'blessing/cursing' and 'prophetic speech'. These arguments help to emphasize the themes of 'blessing and cursing' within the flow of the narrative.

3.3.4.1 Argument regarding 'blessing and cursing'

This argument can be structured as follows:

Premise 1: Yahweh is sovereign over Israel as her God. (Num 23:8, 12)

Premise 2: God has determined to bless Israel. (Num 22:12)

Converse: God has determined not to allow Israel to be cursed.

Conclusion: Therefore, Israel cannot be cursed. (Num 23:23)

Within the narratives, it is repeatedly made clear that Yahweh has determined to bless Israel. Accordingly, Balaam is told (22:12) that he is *not* to curse them – because they are blessed. This works itself out in the story as Balaam accepts (a bit ambiguously) Balak's commission to pronounce execrations against Israel. The entire episode of the Tale of the Donkey is intended to make abundantly clear that Balaam is not free to do whatever he pleases. Rather, he must speak only what God commands, or risk being split from 'stem to stern'. In the poems which follow, he emphasizes the theme of Israel's blessedness in each of his four oracles, specifically stating that curses, execrations, divination and sorcery have no effect against a people under God's protection.

3.3.4.2 Argument regarding 'prophetic speech'

This argument falls into the category of an enthymeme which is an informal argument which posits an un-stated rule. It can be outlined in this manner:

Premise 1 (un-stated rule)	Prophets speak God's words (not their own) to humankind as God's spokesperson.
Premise 2:	Balaam speaks the words that God puts in his mouth.
Conclusion:	Balaam is God's spokesperson.

This argument underscores the nature of a spokesperson of Yahweh – she or he is a person who speaks only that word which God puts in their mouths. Given that Balaam is now identified as God's spokesperson, then another syllogism follows:

Premise 1: Balaam is God's spokesperson.

Premise 2: Balaam has predicted Israel's victory over Moab.

Conclusion: Moab will be defeated.

Thus, the author makes it clear through the use of argumentative texture that not only will Balak's machinations against Israel not succeed, but that Moab itself is doomed to destruction (24:17). In the sense that Moab represents paradigmatically the enemies of Israel, God's people are assured that God's promised blessing will result in the destruction of their enemies.

The author also makes a qualitative argument within the narratives of Num 22-24. In particular, the portrayal of Balaam and the donkey in Numbers 22 serves as a rhetorical example of a wayward prophet who must learn obedience to the will of Yahweh. The repetitive-progressive texture of 'seeing' and 'not seeing', and emphasis on 'blessing' rather than 'curse' serves to advance the rhetorical focus of the narratives. This use of a qualitative argument by example continues throughout the remainder of the narratives in Num 23-24 as Balaam steadfastly refuses to speak anything other than the word that Yahweh places in his mouth.

3.3.5 Sensory-Aesthetic Texture and Pattern

Robbins observes that the sensory-aesthetic texture of a text is found 'in the range of senses the text evokes or embodies' in the areas of thought, emotion, sight, sound, touch and smell (Robbins 1996: 29-30). This manifestation of this texture may differ depending upon the genre of the text that it is contained within. The key point is that sensory-aesthetic texture serves to provide tone and colour to the discourse, helping to make it more vivid to the reader. Combrink notes that '[T]his texture may underline dimensions of a text that highlight the tone and colour of the repetitive, progressive, narrational, or argumentative texture of a discourse' (Combrink 2003:26). Robbins notes that the interpreter can search for this type of texture by looking for the mention of sensory organs such as eyes, nose, ears, tongue, mouth, etc., as

well as the actions associated with these sensory organs. Another approach is for the interpreter to look inside the text for 'zones' of sensory-aesthetic texture (Robbins 1996b:30).

In his book *The New Testament World, Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (rev), Bruce Malina articulates a 'three zone model' of the makeup of human beings: zones of emotion fused thought; self-expressive speech; and purposeful action (1993:74-75). In Malina's categories, the zone of emotion fused thought represents the eyes, heart, eyelids, and the accompanying activities of these organs, including seeing, knowing, understanding, thinking and remembering. It involves such things as thought, intelligence, the mind, wisdom & folly, will, affection, love, hate, sight & blindness, and emotion. Robbins notes that it covers 'the areas we refer to as intellect, will, judgment, conscience, personality thrust, core personality, affection, and so forth' (Robbins 1996b:30).

The zone of self-expressive speech is focused on the mouth, ears, tongue, lips, etc., and the activities associated with these organs such as speaking, hearing, saying, praising, listening, blessing, cursing, disobedience and so on. It covers the areas that have to do with revelation, speech communication and listening. The zone of purposeful action places its focus on the hands, feet, arms, fingers, legs and accompanying activities such as doing, acting, coming/going, walking, sitting, standing, etc. It would encompass the realm of action, gestures, work, action, and behaviour (Robbins 1996b:31).

Robbins suggests that this model can serve as a useful taxonomy in examining the text (Robbins 1996: 30). Even a cursory examination reveals that there is a wide range of sensory-aesthetic texture within the Balaam narratives. The author of the Balaam narratives of Num 22-24 utilizes all three categories of Malina's taxonomy in conveying the narrative. It is evident that reflection on repetitive-progressive texture, and the narrative flow serve to emphasize the presence of sensory-aesthetic texture in particular ways. Some of the most

important of these can be outlined in the following way as we examine particular zones of 'emotion fused thought', 'self-expressive speech' and 'purposeful action' throughout Numbers 22-24.

Table 10: Key words and concepts representing zones of 'emotion fused thought', 'self-expressive speech', and 'purposeful action' within Numbers 22-24

Verse	Eye	Nose	Mouth	Hand	Hears	Sees	Knows
22:7				בידם (hand)			
22:21		ויתר־אף (his nose burned)					
22:23				בידו (in his hand)			
22:27		ויתר־אף (his nose burned)					
22:28			פי (mouth)				
22:29				בידי (hand)			
22:31	עיני (eyes)			בידו (hand)			
22:34	בעיניך (eyes)						
22:36					וישמע (heard)		
22:38			בפי (in mouth)				
23:5			בפי (in mouth)				
23:12			בפי (in mouth)				
23:16			בפיו (in mouth)				
23:27	בעיני (in his eyes)						
24:1	בעיני (in his eyes) פניו (face)						
24:2	עיניו (his eyes)						

24:3	העין (eye)						
24:4	עינים (eyes)				שׁמע (hears)	יחזה (sees)	
24:9				כפיו (hands)			
24:15	העין (eye)						
24:16	עינים (eyes)				שׁמע (hears)	יחזה (sees)	וידע (knows)
24:17						אשורנו (see him)	

The zone of "emotion-fused thought" focuses on the eyes, heart, eyelids, pupils, etc., and is concerned with the concomitant processes of knowing, understanding, remembering, choosing and feeling. Its concerns are the affections of the heart, and the blindness of the mind to truth.

The juxtaposition of God's anger ('his nose became hot') and Balaam's anger ('his nose became hot') serves the narrator's purpose in highlighting the theme of the blessing of Israel. The evocative idiom used to express the kindling of God's anger (חרה אף) in Numbers 22:22 is also used of Balaam in Numbers 22:27 (and later, Balak in 24:10). God's anger is directed at his servant Balaam whose course is, apparently, a 'reckless' one before the Lord. Balaam's anger is directed at his servant, the donkey, who is only attempting to save Balaam's life. It is in recognising that God's anger is righteous, and his own anger is unrighteous, that Balaam comes to better understand his role in the story. Balak's anger is kindled in response to Balaam's blessing of Israel in frustration of his plan to defeat her. The author thus underscores that only God's anger is righteous in the story, and makes a veiled allusion to the story of another reluctant prophet, Jonah, whose anger was inappropriately focused on his personal comfort, rather than on God's eternal purposes (Jonah 4:9).

The same thing is true of the theme of 'seeing/not seeing' in the Tale of the Donkey. Balaam's 'eyes', which are normally able to perceive all mysteries cannot behold what his simple donkey is able to plainly see. It is only when Balaam's eyes are 'opened' (22:31) that he perceives his peril. It is only as Balaam submits to the sovereignty of God with respect to his "commission" that he can again say 'the oracle of the man whose eye is clear. . . who sees the vision of the Almighty' (24:3-4). The sensory-aesthetic texture of the story focusing on emotion-fused thought beautifully develops the themes of the narrative.

The zone of 'self-expressive speech' addresses the mouth, ears, tongue, lips, throat and teeth. It is concerned with the actions of speaking/saying, hearing/listening, calling, crying, questioning, recounting, instructing, praising/blessing, obedience/disobedience and swearing/cursing. Within the context of the story, the author uses the sensory-aesthetic texture of the zone of self-expressive speech to underscore the main theme of the pericope: God's purpose to bless Israel, and protect her from being cursed. As Balaam brings himself into alignment with the purposes of God, he is able to hear God aright, and to obediently speak words of praise to Yahweh and blessing for Israel. In this, he finally approaches the character of his donkey, which although a "dumb" animal, nonetheless speaks truth to Balam. The zone of 'purposeful action' focuses on the hands, feet, arms, fingers and lets. Its concerns have to do with acting, walking, standing, sitting, coming/going, intervening, and touching. In the Balaam narratives, these purposeful actions are revealed particularly in several key 'purposeful' actions taken by the characters.

Much of the Balaam pericope is concerned with 'coming' and 'going'. Israel arrives at the plains of Moab. Emissaries go to Balaam with Balak's entreaty. Balaam first tells the men to 'go' back to their own land – then relents, and comes with the emissaries to meet Balak. While he is going to meet Balak, Balaam encounters the Angel of Yahweh, who has

"come out" and taken his stand in the road to oppose Balaam (22:32). Only after Balaam has re-oriented his purpose with that of Yahweh's is he permitted to go on his way. Balak comes to meet Balaam, and together they go off to build altars and offer sacrifices from the high places in order that they might see Israel receive her just deserts. As each attempt ends in failure, Balak tells Balaam to come to yet another vantage point from which (hopefully) Balaam's efforts will, presumably, be more efficacious (23:27). At the end of the story, Balak's purpose is deemed to have been thwarted, and both Balak and Balaam each return to their own place (24:25). Balak's efforts to halt Israel on the march into the land promised to Abraham, are brought to failure by the Divine Warrior who confronts Balaam.

Within the Balaam pericope, the use of sensory-aesthetic texture serves to heighten and clarify the author's main rhetorical concerns in a literary-artistic fashion. The use of the three zones of emotion-fused thought, self-expressive speech and purposeful action serve to clarify and underscore the main themes of the text.

3.4 Conclusion

Our examination of the inner texture of the Balaam cycle has revealed some fascinating aspects of the narrative. It appears that the narratives were composed to provide a setting for the (older) oracles. Thus, Numbers 22 represents a melding of two traditions into one account in its final form. The repetitive resumption seen in 22:21 and 22:35b reflects an insertion into the main storyline, as does the narrative inconsistency within the Tale of the Donkey.

The presence of repetitive-progressive texture and pattern plays a key role within the narrative. The repetition of ראה presents a repetitive progression of 'seeing' and 'not seeing'. Balak sends for Balaam because of his ability to 'see' what is going to happen, and to influence the future through the pronouncement of execrations. Balaam receives visions

from Yahweh by night. But at the end of the day, Yahweh alone is the source of revelation through his דבר that is placed within the mouth of his prophet. The Tale of the Donkey serves to clearly show what happens when prophets try to go their own way. Balaam is made an object of prophetic ridicule and satire as his donkey is able to see what the 'world-class' diviner cannot see. As Balaam submits again to speaking only that word which Yahweh places in his mouth, he is re-commissioned to be Yahweh's servant.

It is significant that the words emphasized within the repetitive-progressive texture of Numbers 22-24 is linked closely to that found in the key Pentateuchal passages pertaining to the definition of a prophet. The paradigmatic call of Moses to be Yahweh's prophet in Exodus 3:3 ff., focuses on the use of the word ראה. Moses turns aside to 'see' the 'great sight' – why the burning bush is not consumed (Exod 3:3). Yahweh then 'sees' that Moses has turned aside in order to 'see' the burning bush. Yahweh's call of Moses to be his prophet is in direct response to having 'seen' the misery of his people (Exod 3:7, 9). Yahweh will send Moses as a demonstration of his intention to bless his people by bringing them up out of Egypt and into a land 'filled with milk and honey' (Exod 3:8, 10). Moses is to 'say' to the Israelites all that Yahweh commands him. In Numbers 12:8, the reader is told that Yahweh speaks with his servant Moses פה־אל פה ('mouth to mouth'), as he does with no-one else. It is in Deuteronomy 13:2 that the people are warned that if a prophet or diviner of dreams should appear, working מופת או אות ('signs and wonders'), and telling them to worship and serve other gods, they are not to listen to him. Rather it is the קול ('voice') of Yahweh that they are to hear and obey (Deut 13:5). Those prophets who speak treason against Yahweh are to be put to death (13:6). Likewise, in Deuteronomy 18:18, the people are told

that Yahweh will raise up a prophet 'like Moses' and will 'put my דבר into his mouth', and that word, the prophet will דבר ('speak'). Any prophet who speaks a 'word' that Yahweh has not commanded is to be put to death (Deut 18:20). The emphasis on 'seeing', 'mouth' and 'word' serve to link the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24 to the narratives of Exodus 3, Numbers 12 and Deuteronomy 13, 18.

The narrational texture and pattern found in the story reveals the 'voices' heard within the text. In the first scene (Num 22:1-6) these voices include Balak and the elders of Midian. In the second scene (22:7-21), the story focuses on Balak, Balaam and Yahweh. The officials sent by Balak play a minor role as messengers between the primary characters. The repeated insistence of Balaam that he is able to say only that which Yahweh puts in his mouth serves to reinforce the emphasis on the 'word of Yahweh' within the narratives. In scene three (Num 22:22-35), the Tale of the Donkey focuses on the narrative exchanges between Balaam, the Donkey and the Angel of Yahweh. This is the height of story-telling artistry within the text as Balaam is confronted with his own physical and spiritual blindness. The narrator beautifully emphasizes the fact that Balaam is nothing apart from the word that Yahweh places in his mouth. Now chastened, Balaam recommits himself to the service of Yahweh.

Scene four (22:36 – 24:25) takes the reader to the interaction between Balak, Balaam and Yahweh. Balak entreats Balaam three times to curse Israel. It is here that the repetitive-progressive use of ברך and ארר reveals the key rhetorical theme of the narratives in Num 22-24. Three times Balaam receives the word of Yahweh and is commanded to pronounce blessing. As Balak's anger grows at the oracles of blessing pronounced, just so Balaam's wonder grows at both the people of Israel and their God. He even expresses the desire to share their fate (23:10). Balak 'fires' Balaam, but even this abrupt action fails to stop the

oracles of blessing (24:15ff). Balaam must speak the 'word' that Yahweh places in his mouth.

The patterns of opening-middle-closing texture also plays off of the repetitive-progressive and narrational texture to reveal a story comprised of three cycles focused around the theme of 'seeing' and 'not seeing' (Olson 1996:142). Within the narratives, argumentative texture and pattern reveals that the story contains logical argument in which the author 'proves' that Israel cannot be cursed (because Yahweh is sovereign and has determined to bless Israel), and that 'prophets' can only speak what God tells them to say.

The presence of sensory-aesthetic texture and pattern as the focus on 'eyes' and 'mouth' serve to emphasize the connection on 'seeing' (as well as 'knowing') only that which Yahweh reveals. It further emphasizes that the prophet is able to speak only the 'words' that Yahweh places within the prophet's mouth. Throughout the text sensory-aesthetic texture serves to highlight each of the foregoing sub-textures, as zones of 'emotion-fused thought', 'self-expressive speech' and 'purposeful action' are each present. Taken all together, the study of the inner texture of the Balaam narratives reveals a rich, carefully crafted literary masterpiece.

Chapter 4
Intertexture

Our study of the inner texture of the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24 has focused on the study of particular types of inner texture involving repetitive-progressive texture, narrational, open-middle-closing, argumentative and sensory-aesthetic texture. The analysis centred on the texture of the words themselves. The reader is searching for patterns that emerge from within the text itself. These words form the building blocks of the text and are foundational to the examination of the other aspects of the text. In the study of intertexture, the reader takes the results of her study of inner texture, and looks to see if those words are related in any way to the language of other texts. The interpreter is, therefore, engaged in 'entering the interactive world of the text' (Robbins 1996b:41).

In examining *intertexture*, the interpreter is focused on the way in which the text represents, references and uses phenomena in the world 'outside' the text being interpreted. She seeks to study the interaction of the language of the text with material and physical objects, historical events, texts, customs and values, roles, institutions and systems (Robbins 1996b:40). Combrink notes that the 'major goal of intertextual analysis is to give careful attention to the way that phenomena outside the text have been configured and reconfigured in the text' (Combrink 2003:28).

There are a variety of kinds of intertexture. 'Oral-scribal' intertexture focuses on the way that a text utilises (whether explicitly or not) *language* appropriated from other texts, through 'recitation, re-contextualization, reconfiguration, narrative amplification, and thematic elaboration' (Robbins 1996b:40). 'Cultural' intertexture draws on the 'insider' knowledge of oral or literary traditions that is common to a given culture and picks up on

references, allusions and 'echoes' of a text within that knowledge base (Robbins 1996b:59-60). 'Social' intertexture interacts with that shared knowledge that is common to members of a culture concerning social roles, institutions, codes and relationships (Robbins 1996b:62).[9] 'Historical' intertexture addresses events which have occurred in particular social locations, and the sort of data that corroborates such events (Robbins 1996b:63).

4.1 Oral-Scribal Intertexture

When a text uses (either explicitly or implicitly) language from other texts, the reader encounters oral-scribal intertexture. Robbins notes five basic ways in which texts use language from other texts: recitation, re-contextualisation, reconfiguration, narrative amplification, and thematic elaboration.

4.1.1 Recitation

'Recitation' is found where a text replicates the content of a speech or narrative found in either a written or oral source in the exact words, or in different words (Robbins 1996b:41). This may be in the form of a 'photocopy' of the text, in which the exact words are used. Or it may involve the replication of the text with one or more changes in wording. It can even involve the *omission* of language in order to give the word-string the force of a proverb or maxim (Robbins 1996b:41). The recitation can also take place using words that are different from the original source, but which convey essentially the same message. This can take the form of a summary of a larger text unit. (Robbins 1996b:43). Based upon our study of the narratives of Numbers 22-24, there do not appear to be any instances of *recitation* as a form of intertexture.

[9] While the social intertexture of Num 22-24 could be addressed in this chapter on intertexture, we will examine it in the following chapter on social and cultural texture.

4.1.2 Re-contextualisation

Re-contextualisation differs from recitation in that the words of one text are replicated in another without 'explicit statement or implication that the words 'stand written' anywhere else' (Robbins 1996b:48). An instance of re-contextualisation can be found in Num 23:24, and 24:9, 17, as the Balaam poems re-contextualises the language found in Jacob's blessing in Gen 49:9-10. This can be demonstrated as follows:

Table 11 Comparison between Genesis 49:9-10, and Numbers 23:24; 24:9, 17

Genesis 49 (speaking of Judah)	**Numbers 23-24 (speaking of Israel)**
Gen 49:9 'He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion, like a lioness – who dares rouse him up?'	Num 23:24 'Look, a people rising up like a lioness, and rousing itself like a lion'
	Num 24:9 'He crouched, he lay down like a lion, and like a lioness; who will rouse him up?'
Gen 49:10 'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet'	Num 24:17 '...a star will come out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel'

By drawing the comparison between Jacob's blessing of Judah, the narratives in Numbers emphasise the fact that (all appearances to the contrary), Yahweh's promises to the Patriarchs will be fulfilled. Israel will ultimately prevail through the leadership of the 'royal one' who will reign over the peoples.

4.1.3 Reconfiguration

Reconfiguration involves the recounting of a situation in such a way that a previous event serves as a foreshadowing of the event (Robbins 1996b:50). There does not appear to be any instance of reconfiguration involving the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24.

*4.1.4 Narrative Amplification*Where a text or composition contains recitation, re-contextualisation, and reconfiguration, it produces 'narrative amplification' (Robbins 1996b:51).

4.1.5 Thematic Elaboration

Thematic elaboration is found where a theme or issue is raised early in a narrative, and elaborated upon throughout the narrative through the use of rationale, argument from the opposite, analogy, example or authoritative testimony (Robbins 1996b:42).

Within the Balaam narratives of Num 22-24, the primary type of oral-scribal intertexture appears to be that of re-contextualisation.

4.2 Cultural Intertexture

'Cultural' intertexture represents that 'insider' knowledge which is common to any culture. Members of the culture share a common knowledge base and understanding. When a reference or allusion is made to another text, the members of the audience understand. A 'reference' is a 'word of phrase' that points to a character/personage or tradition known to members of that cultural tradition. An 'allusion' presupposes a literary tradition, but which does not explicitly quote from the textual tradition. An 'echo' is the use of a word or phrase that 'evokes' some concept within the cultural tradition (Robbins 1996b:58-60).

Lyle Eslinger has noted that: 'taken as a book, the Bible is littered with self-referential allusions' (1992:47). There are a number of interesting references, allusions, and 'echoes' to other portions of the Old Testament found in the text of Numbers 22, including Genesis 2-3, 22; Exodus 1-2; 1Samuel 3, 1 Kings 13, 22 and 2 Kings 1.

4.2.1 Numbers 22 and Genesis 22

We have previously noted that Safren makes a compelling case for seeing an intertextual relationship between the Tale of the Donkey in Num 22, and the binding of Isaac

in Gen 22. The similarities move the reader to contrast and compare the two stories, such that the Tale of the Donkey serves as a ‘reflection narrative’. Safren (quoting Zakovitz) defines a reflection narrative as ‘one in which the outlines of another narrative are discerned – but in “inverse” form – like the reflection in a mirror’ (Safren 1988:106). The reflection story’s ‘reflected character’ and his actions are perceived as the antithesis of the original figure and his actions. Safren’s analysis is intriguing as he examines a number of points of comparison which reflect intertextual allusion. (See also Novick, 2007.) The intertextual allusions may be seen as follows:

Table 12 – A Comparison of Genesis 22 and Numbers 22

Genesis 22	**Numbers 22**
Abraham undertakes a journey by donkey.	Balaam goes on a journey by donkey.
Abraham goes in obedience.	Balaam goes in disobedience.
Abraham is motivated by zeal for God.	Balaam is motivated by the prospect of gain.
The Angel of Yahweh reveals himself moving Abraham from *action* to *inaction.*	The Angel of Yahweh reveals himself, moving Balaam from *inaction* to *action.*
Abraham ‘rose early in the morning’ and ‘saddled’ his donkey’.	Balaam ‘rose early in the morning’ and ‘saddled his donkey’.

Safren notes that the setting of both tales is that of a journey by donkey: Abraham journeys to Mt. Moriah in obedience to God’s will; Balaam to Moab in opposition to God’s will. Both manifest zeal arising from different motivations. Abraham evidences zeal for God, while Balaam evidences his greed and his zeal for unrighteous gain.

In both narratives, the Angel of the LORD reveals himself to the protagonist of the story at the climax of the narrative. Furthermore, it is *only* in these two stories that the Angel of the LORD intervenes and *reverses* God’s intention as it appeared at first to the protagonist.

The Angel of the LORD moves Abraham from *action to inaction*; while Balaam is moved from *inaction to action*. Safren notes the use of similar language in the two narratives. For example: Numbers 22:21a ('And Balaam rose in the morning. . .'), and Genesis 23:3a ('And Abraham rose early in the morning.' Both expressions are in tandem with 'and saddled his donkey'. However, the verbs used are slightly different – קום is used in Num 22:21; שׁכם in Gen 22:3. In addition, each protagonist is accompanied by two servants.

Safren also notes that the word ראה occurs five times in the binding of Isaac – Gen 22:4, 8, 13, 14 (twice), and it occurs five times in Balaam narratives – Numbers 22:23, 25, 27, 33. In Genesis, the use of this key word 'points to the sublime' while in Numbers 22 it 'underlines the ridiculous'.

The word sword also appears in Genesis 22:6, as well as in Numbers 22:29, 31 (although the words used are slightly different.) In Genesis 22:10, Abraham raises his knife, or מאכלת while in Numbers 22:23, the Angel of Yahweh raises his sword חרב. In Safren's view these verbal correspondences reflect intertextual allusion in the form of a 'reflection narrative' in which the 'inverse' relationship between Abraham and Balaam is portrayed. Marcus notes that 'on the basis of these thematic and linguistic links, the reader is able to draw the appropriate contrasts between Abraham and Balaam with the result being that Balaam is ridiculed and Abraham is venerated' (Marcus 1995:39).[10]

4.2.2 Numbers 22 and Exodus 1

Given the emphasis within the Old Testament on the fulfilment of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, one would expect to find narratives which speak of the

[10] The use of 'tables' can be instructive in demonstrating the relationships between two texts. However, the reader must exercise caution as such depictions inevitably serve to over-simplify the ambiguities found in these texts.

continuation of Yahweh's blessing in the face of opposition. Sailhammer has noted an interesting correspondence between Numbers 22 and Exodus 1 (Sailhammer 1992:405-409). His point is that the Balaam narratives 'play a strategic role in the overall message of the Pentateuch'. The theme is set in Genesis 1, where God's purpose was to bless his people (Gen 1:28). Even after the fall, the LORD provided a means of blessing for humankind (Gen 3:15).[11] The Abrahamic covenant of Genesis 12 underscores God's purpose to bless all nations through his people. Seen from this perspective, the Balaam narratives powerfully emphasize God's purpose to bless Israel. Those who bless Israel will find blessing, those who curse Israel will find cursing (Gen 12:3).[12] The comparisons between the two sets of narratives can be seen as follows:

Table 13 – A Comparison of Exodus 1-2 and Numbers 22-24

Exodus 1-2	**Numbers 22-24**
Pharaoh is a powerful king.	Balak is a powerful king.
Israel is portrayed as a mighty nation.	Israel is portrayed as a mighty nation.
Pharaoh is worried about Israelite growth.	Balak is worried about Israelite growth.
Pharaoh tries three times to destroy Israel.	Balak tries three times to curse Israel.
God blesses each time in response.	God blesses each time in response.
God reverses Pharaoh's intentions.	God reverses Balak's intentions.
Moses is announced as Israel's deliverer.	A royal one is predicted as Israel's deliverer.

[11] Admittedly, Genesis 3:15 is a difficult verse to unpack. Its immediate reference is only to the woman and her seed. However, some commentators have inferred from the text that it has broader implications for all of humankind (Wenham 1987:79-81).

[12] The key question presented is whether נברכו (niphal) should be translated as a passive ('be blessed'), middle ('find blessing') or reflexive ('bless themselves'). Wenham notes that the general sense of the niphal is 'medio-passive' which would best allow for either 'be blessed' or 'find blessing'. However, even if one reads it as reflexive, it can still be argued that there will be blessing for all of humankind that uses Abraham's name in blessing one another. For in blessing Abraham's name, they themselves will find blessing. In the final analysis all 'families' will find blessing in Abraham (Wenham 1987:277-278).

Both Pharaoh (Exod 1) and Balak (Num 22) were powerful kings, who feared the growth of the people of Yahweh. Pharaoh observed their growth and complained that the Hebrews posed a threat to Egypt's national security (Exod 1:9-10). As a result, Pharaoh began to seek to oppress (at first) and then, exterminate the people of God. In like manner, Balak feared for his own kingdom. In Numbers 22:2-3, the narrator observes that Balak (and all of Moab) was terrified because of the reports of Israel's victories over the Amorites. Thus, both kings become concerned about the operation of the Abrahamic blessing to multiply God's people. Just so, both become obsessed with their destruction.

Pharaoh attempts three times to destroy God's people by setting slave masters over them (Exod 1:11-14); instructing the Hebrew midwives to kill all of the male offspring (Exod 1:15-21); and by decreeing that all Hebrew male children be thrown into the Nile (1:22). Each time God not only foils Pharaoh's attempts, but in response brings blessing and fruitfulness upon his people (Exod 1:20).

Balak attempts to have Balaam curse Israel on three occasions (Num 23:1-12; 23:13-26; 23:27-24:9). Each attempt results in a increasing crescendo of blessing for Yahweh's people (see 23:11-12, 25-26; 24:10). Balak finally explodes in anger and exclaims 'I summoned you to curse my enemies, but instead you have blessed them these three times.' (Numbers 24:10)

Interestingly, Sailhammer notes that there is a thematic correspondence between Pharaoh's attempts to curse Israel and the blessings pronounced by Balaam. If in the first instance, Pharaoh had hoped by oppression to inhibit the growth of Israel, his hope was futile, for as Balaam observes: 'Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number the dust-cloud of Israel?'

In the second instance, Pharaoh hopes to put to death the male children of Israel. But we read in Exod 1:19 that the Hebrew midwives told Pharaoh that his order failed because of the remarkable ‘vigour’ of the Hebrew women. This seems to be paralleled in Balaam’s observation ‘Look, a people rising up like a lioness, and rousing itself like a lion’ (Num 23:24). Finally, in Pharaoh’s third attempt he seeks to cast the seed of Abraham into the waters to drown. But Balaam prophesies that ‘Water shall flow from his buckets and his seed shall have abundant water’ (Num 23:7). The reversal of curse into blessing is complete!

This is demonstrated convincingly in Sailhammer’s observation of the interesting correspondence between the announcement of the birth of Moses the royal deliverer of God’s people in Ex 2, and Balaam’s prophecy in Numbers 24:17 of the royal one who will come to defeat all of the enemies of God’s people. He notes that this makes sense inasmuch as Moses is elsewhere portrayed as a ‘figure of the coming king’ (Deut 33:5) and prophet (Deut 18, 34). Later writers would see Moses as one who prefigured the person of Messiah (Hos 2:2). (Sailhammer 1992:406-407)

4.2.3 Genesis 2-3 and Numbers 22-24

In his stimulating article, *Beastly speech: Intertextuality, Balaam’s Ass and the Garden of Eden*, JSOT 64.1, pages 33-55, (December 1994), Savran makes a compelling case for seeing significant parallels between Numbers 22-24 and Genesis 2-3. In point of fact, Savran sees Numbers 22-24 as a *reworking* of the themes of blessing and curse in Genesis 3, presented through intertextual allusion. We have already observed that the themes of ‘blessing’ and ‘curse’ are central to the understanding of the Balaam stories. (In our discussion of ‘sacred texture’ we will discuss the theological rationale for this emphasis in light of the postexilic experience of the refugees upon their return to Yehud.) These

comparisons between Genesis 3 and Numbers 22 can be diagrammed in the following manner:

Table 14 – A Comparison of Genesis 3 and Numbers 22

Genesis 3	**Numbers 22**
A talking serpent.	A talking donkey.
God's servant's obedience is tested.	God's servant's obedience is tested.
A divine listener hears the discussion between human and animal.	The 'Angel of Yahweh' hears the discussion between human and animal.
The snake intends to deceive and lead Eve astray.	The donkey intends to speak truthfully and lead Balaam to obedience.
The snake understands what is 'at stake' better than the human.	The donkey understands better what is 'at stake' better than Balaam.
The snake's deception leads to expulsion and the threat of an angel with a sword.	The donkey's truthfulness leads to deliverance from an angel with a sword.
The snake's actions cause God to pronounce a curse.	The donkey's actions cause God to foil Balak's plan, and pronounce a blessing.

His point of departure is the observation that Genesis 3 and Numbers 22 are the only narratives in the Old Testament which have as a character, an animal who uses human speech. Savran observes that the donkey and the snake "speak in a surprisingly natural manner, without the formulaic speech patterns common to personifications of nature in the Bible" (Savran 1994: 37). Neither of the animals offers any explanation for their ability to speak in the voice of a human, nor do their (lone) human counterparts seem remotely surprised by their ability. (Savran notes that the *ease* with which they enter into conversation is in sharp contrast with the extraordinary nature of their respective conversations.) Interestingly, the text tells us that the Lord had "opened the mouth" of Balaam's donkey,

while we are told nothing of how the serpent came to have the gift of human speech. Both narratives "back up" the claim of animal speech by having a divine person listening in: Yahweh himself in Genesis 3, and the Angel of Yahweh in Numbers 22.

The snake and the donkey begin their conversations with interrogatory statements, but 'with different rhetorical intent' (Savran 1994: 38). The snake asks 'Has God really said?' engaging in a deliberate misquotation of Yahweh's words, with the intention of deceiving the woman. The donkey, on the other hand, attempts to honestly communicate a clear and present danger that confronts Balaam. Both animals lead their human counterparts 'astray': the serpent, figuratively leads the woman into rebellion against God, and the donkey, literally leads Balaam off of the road in order to avoid the consequences of Balaam's (apparent) rebellion against God. The snake's words lead to spiritual death for the woman. The donkey's words lead to life for Balaam.

Interestingly, both animals seem to exhibit a deeper understanding of 'the relationship between the human and the divine' than do their human counterparts. (Savran 1994:40) The snake's successful deception by means of a question of the woman leads to her and her husband's mortality and expulsion from the garden, and the posting of an angel with a fiery sword at the entrance to the garden.[13] The donkey's successful intervention on behalf of her master by means of two questions leads to the saving of his life from an angel with a drawn sword. Savran makes the following observation:

> All these elements taken together – the nature of animal speech, their roles in relation to the humans in the story, and the threat of the angel with the sword – suggest that the Balaam story be read in complement with the story of the Garden of Eden. The garden story establishes, through a series of curses, an interlocking chain of desire and domination that sets man, woman and the

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[13] Admittedly, this is a disputed point. Was death a part of the created order for human beings (as well as plants and animals), or was death for humankind introduced in the fall? The emphasis in Genesis 3:19 on 'you are dust and to dust you will return' (עפר אתה עפרואל־ תשוב) would seem to support the notion that death (spiritual and physical) entered into the world for humankind after the fall (Wenham 1987:89).

> natural world at odds with one another. By contrast, the Balaam account describes the frustration of Balak's desire to curse and to dominate Israel, reflecting a harmonious relationship between Israel and God. (Savran 1994: 41)

One of the most significant themes discussed in both passages is that of blessing and curse. The snake undoes paradise by his deception, leading to the execrations pronounced in Genesis 3:14-19. For the first time, enmity enters into the world between humankind and God, between humankind and the earth and its creatures, and between human beings as well. The expulsion from the Garden symbolises the final character of these events. Humankind is now consigned a life of 'wandering and vulnerability' (Savran 1994:41).

The story of the Donkey and Balaam, however, seems to point in a different direction. Despite Balak's entreaties to Balaam to curse Israel, the encounter between Balaam and the divine points to a different result. Balaam will speak only the word that God puts in his mouth – and that word will not consist of curses, but of blessings. Israel, who has been wandering in the wilderness following the Exodus, now anticipates divine blessing and protection.

Savran also notes the interesting fact that the homophone נחשׁ is found in both the Genesis account (Genesis 3:1ff), and in Numbers 23:23, writing: "What do divination as represented by Balaam and 'serpent speech' as spoken by the נחשׁ have in common?" (Savran 1994: 51) Savran suggests that the counsel of the snake in Genesis 3 portrays an attempt to 'control the divine by human means'. The serpent succeeds in effecting the change of the woman and the man from 'obedient creatures' to creatures in rebellion. The Balaam cycle *reverses* the process. In this case, the donkey is the obedient character, and Balaam the rebel. But through his encounter with the donkey, Balaam is transformed into a willing participant in the blessing of Israel (Savran 1994:51).

4.2.4 Numbers 22 and 1 Kings 13

It has been recognized that the narrative of the 'lying prophet' of 1 Kings 13 seems to have an intertextural reference or allusion to the Balaam narratives (Angel 2005:31-39.) [See also David Marcus' fine discussion of 'the Lying Prophet', (Marcus 1995:67-91).] The points of comparison can be seen as follows:

Table 15 – A Comparison of 1 Kings 13 and Numbers 22

1 Kings 13	**Numbers 22**
The 'man of God' is seen as a powerful prophet.	Balaam is seen as a powerful prophet.
The 'man of God' is invited to come to King Jeroboam for a reward.	Balaam is invited to come to King Balak for a reward.
The 'man of God' refuses to disobey God's command not to go with him saying *'If you give me half your kingdom, I will not go in with you'*	Balaam refuses to disobey God's command not to go with Balak saying, *'Although Balak were to give me his house full of gold and silver, I could not go beyond the command of the LORD. . .'*
The 'man of God' is enticed by an old prophet to disobey God's command not to eat or drink.	Balaam is enticed by Balak to disobey Yahweh's command not to go.
The 'man of God' on a journey with a donkey is met and killed by a lion for his disobedience to Yahweh's command. (Lion serves as an instrument of judgment.)	Balaam, on a journey with a donkey, is met by the Angel of Yahweh and threatened with death for disobeying God's command. (Donkey serves as an instrument of grace.)

In both stories, a powerful prophet is urged to disobey the command of Yahweh. In the case of 'man of God', he is given strict instructions to return home without eating, drinking, or returning the same way that he had come. As he prepares to depart, he is approached by the 'lying prophet' who urges him to come and dine with him. At first, he declines, but is later persuaded to disobey God's command. The old prophet who had lied to

the man of God then prophesies that because of his disobedience, he will not come to his ancestral tomb. A donkey is saddled for him, and he begins his journey home. However, at the end of the story, the prophecy is fulfilled, as the man of God has a close (and fatal) encounter with a lion who then kills him for his impertinence. However, the lion does not touch either the man's body, or the donkey. [Marcus notes that the lion's behaviour is comparable to that of Balaam's donkey (Marcus 1995:75).]

Balaam is also on a journey by donkey, and apparently, is on a collision course with the Angel of the LORD and a very sharp sword. He has also previously refused to go to Balak to engage in a campaign to curse Israel, and has similarly been enticed (by the offer of riches) to go in defiance of God's command. However, he repents, and is shown mercy (although he is seriously humiliated in the process). [For an interesting structural analysis of the 1 Kings 13 story, see 'The Interface between prophecy as narrative and prophecy as proclamation' (DeVries 2004:213-218).]

4.2.5 Numbers 22 and 1 Kings 22/2 Kings 1

It has been observed that an intertextual relationship also exists between Balaam and Micaiah in 1 Kings 22 (Douglas 1993). Balak's calling of Balaam 'echoes' the calling of other prophets by kings. Notice the points of comparison:

Table 16 – A Comparison between 1Kings 22 and Numbers 22

1 Kings 22	**Numbers 22**
The King of Israel calls for a prophet to ensure success in battle.	King Balak calls for a prophet to ensure success in battle.
Micaiah predicts only failure for Israel	Balaam predicts only failure for Moab.
The King of Israel's refusal to listen spells disaster for Israel.	Balak's refusal to listen spells disaster for Moab.

Douglas also suggests a possible comparison between Numbers 22 and 2 Kings 1, in the narrative concerning Elijah and King Ahaziah. The similarities can be viewed in this fashion:

Table 17 – A Comparison of 2 Kings 1 and Numbers 22

2 Kings 1	**Numbers 22**
Ahaziah (of Israel) sends for Elijah for help against Moab.	Balak (of Moab) send for Balaam for help against Israel.
Elijah twice refuses to come.	Balaam twice refuses to come.
Elijah's eventual intervention brings ruin to Israel.	Balaam's eventual intervention brings ruin to Moab.

It appears that there is an intention by the author to draw comparisons between Balaam and Micaiah, (as well as with Elijah).

> The calling of Balaam by King Balak echoes other callings of great prophets by kings in the Bible. Balaam resembles the prophet Micaiah who always prophesied evil to the King of Israel (1 K.22.9). There is the close similarity between the beginning of Balaam's dealings with Balak and the beginning of Elijah's dealings with King Ahazia, also at war with Moab (2.K.1). In both cases the bad king sends his messengers to the prophets who twice refuses to go with them. When, the third time, he does go, the king who sought to employ him, comes to a disastrous end. The story also has perverse echoes of Elisha's delivery of the King of Moab into the hands of Israel (2 K.3.16). Can Balaam be read as a structural opposite of Elisha? (Douglas 1993:415)

Douglas' suggestions are worth pondering as possible examples of cultural intertexture.

4.2.6 1 Samuel 3 and Numbers 22

It is interesting to consider the relationship between 1 Samuel 3:1-20 and Numbers 22. Both narratives speak of the calling of a prophet by Yahweh, but with significantly different results. Samuel will become the transitional figure that bridges the period between the Judges and the monarchy, and will himself transition from a judge to a seer/prophet

advisor to royalty. Balaam's career will take a slightly different course. The points of comparison between these two narratives can be diagrammed in the following manner

Table 18 – A Comparison of 1 Samuel 3 and Numbers 22

1 Samuel 3	**Numbers 22**
Samuel is called to be a prophet of Yahweh.	Balaam is called to be a prophet of Yahweh.
Yahweh comes in dreams by night *three times,* finally evoking Samuel's response the fourth time to Yahweh's call.	Yahweh comes in dreams by night *two times,* finally evoking Balaam's response on the road to the Angel of Yahweh's warning.
Samuel is seen as a trustworthy prophet of God.	Balaam is seen (eventually) to be an 'anti-prophet' of God.

In 1 Samuel 3, we find the call of Samuel to be a prophet of Yahweh. Yahweh comes to Samuel *by night* on three occasions through the medium of dreams. Confused, Samuel turns to Eli to see if he is wanted. The fourth time, Samuel responds to the call of Yahweh, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.' Marcus notes that Samuel's call exhibits the 'three-four pattern' (Marcus 1995:38). The reader is then told that as Samuel grew, Yahweh was with him and let "none of his words fall to the ground". The narrator takes pains to inform the reader in verse 20 that '[a]ll Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD.'

Balaam is also visited by Yahweh at night on repeated occasions through the medium of dreams. It is only after his encounter with Yahweh's angel that Balaam appears to him on the road to Moab that he yields to Yahweh's purpose and plan. Whereas Samuel was commended for his 'recognition' of Yahweh's call, Balaam is rebuked, while his donkey is commended (Marcus 1995:38). Just as with Samuel, it is Yahweh who puts his words to speak in Balaam's mouth. Balaam pronounces a decree of judgment upon Moab that cannot

be rescinded, just as Samuel pronounces a decree of judgment upon Eli's house that cannot be revoked. Yet Samuel is within the Old Testament, the epitome of a faithful prophet of Yahweh, while Balaam becomes lampooned and satirised in Numbers 22 as a sort of 'anti-prophet'. Samuel's life will be devoted to proclaiming the words of Yahweh, while Balaam will meet with an apparent 'bad end'. Marcus suggests that the reference is an intentional one, used to parody Balaam (Marcus 1995:38).

While one wants to be careful avoid a sort of interpretative 'midrash' on the narratives of the Old Testament, the study of cultural intertexture can be of great help in understanding the narrative flow of a passage.

4.2.7 1 Kings 17 and Numbers 22

A correspondence can also be observed between the narratives concerning Elijah in 1 Kgs 17 and Balaam in Num 22 (Hall 2003:340-348). Balaam, a powerful seer and 'prophet' is portrayed in Numbers 22:22-35 as a vulnerable and somewhat bumbling man, who is outshone by the discernment of his burro. Elijah, the consummate prophet of Yahweh, the one who single-handedly defeats the prophets of Baal, is shown to be a vulnerable man as well, who must depend ravens for his food (1 Kings 17:5-6). Both appear to be invulnerable, while in reality, both are totally dependent upon the goodness of Yahweh.

Table 19 – A Comparison of 1 Kings 17 and Numbers 22

Elijah in 1 Kings 17	**Balaam in Numbers 22**
Elijah is a powerful prophet of Yahweh who single-handedly defeats the prophets of Baal, in a demonstration of power.	Balaam is portrayed as a powerful diviner and sorcerer who is able to determine the fortune of nations by his execrations.
Elijah is a vulnerable man who, at the point of exhaustion, is dependent upon ravens for food.	Balaam is a vulnerable, bumbling man who is dependent on his donkey to see dangers in the road ahead (the Angel of Yahweh with drawn sword).

Elijah appears to be nearly invulnerable, while all the while he is totally dependent upon Yahweh's good and gracious provision.	Balaam appears to be nearly invulnerable, while all the while he is totally dependent upon Yahweh's good and gracious provision.

The similarities between these two passages and biblical 'prophetic' figures are intriguing. And yet it is the dissimilarities that the comparison is intended to evoke. For Elijah remains totally devoted to Yahweh, while the verdict on Balaam's motives remains a mixed one.

4.3 Historical Intertexture

According to Robbins, historical intertexture 'concerns events that have occurred at specific times in specific locations' (Robbins 1996b:63). In seeking to understand historical intertexture, the interpreter examines such issues as the multiplicity of the data (i.e. whether there more than one account of this event) and the nature of the data (e.g. is it taken from historical inscriptions, annals, etc. or from literary discourse). The interpreter must engage as well, in an evaluation of whether the information concerning the event(s) involving people places and institutions, is taken solely from Jewish & Christian sources, or whether it is drawn from a larger context (Robbins 1996b:63). In studying the historical intertexture of the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24, there are a number of key sources of historical intertexture. These include the book of Numbers itself (as the setting for the narratives of chapters 22-24); the other references to Balaam within the Old and New Testaments; the Septuagint (LXX) and Samaritan Pentateuch; and the Balaam texts from Deir 'Alla in Transjordan. Each of these provide insight into the historical intertexture of the Balaam narratives themselves.

4.3.1 Introductory matters concerning the authorship and date of Numbers

Within the synagogue tradition, the fourth book of the Pentateuch is entitled במדבר or 'in the wilderness' (Noth 1968:1). The book of Numbers derives its English name from the LXX title *Arithmoi,* and the Vulgate's *Numeri* (Sackenfeld 1995:2). These titles are derived from the two census lists of Numbers 1 and 26. These two census lists mark the boundary between the older generation of the wilderness wandering, and the new generation that will enter the land. The way in which faith is passed on from the older generation to the new is a primary theme of Numbers (Olson 1996:4). Jacob Milgrom has noted that an astonishing variety (fourteen in all) of literary genres are displayed within the book of Numbers: narrative (4:1-3), poetry (21:17-18), prophecy (24:3-9); songs of victory (21:27-30), prayer (12:13), blessing (6:24-26), lampoon/parody (22:22-35), diplomatic communiqués (21:14-19), civil law (27:1-11), cultic law (15:17-21), oracular decision (15:32-36), census list (26:1-51), temple archive (7:10-88), and travel itinerary (33:1-49). (Milgrom 1989:xiii).

It is a work rich in theological importance that plays an 'indispensable' role within the Pentateuch as a whole (Noth 1968:11). Numbers tells the story of a people on a journey through the wilderness (Olson 1996:1), who are engaged in moving from 'bondage to freedom' (Sakenfeld 1995:1). Above all else it is a story about 'the promised yet ever surpassing loyalty of the God who refuses to let go of the people, no matter how rebellious they may be' (Sakenfeld 1995:2).

Although the text itself is anonymous, both Jewish tradition and conservative scholarship have ascribed the authorship of Numbers to Moses. Numbers 33:2 asserts that Moses 'wrote down their starting points' at the command of Yahweh (cf. other passages which attest to Moses 'writing' in Exodus 17:14; 24:4; 34:27 and Deuteronomy 31:9, 22). R. K. Harrison's discussion and defence of substantial Mosaic 'authorship' or 'influence' is

fairly typical of this viewpoint (Harrison 1990:21-23). Harrison opts for a pre-exilic date contending that 'the canonical form of the book is true to life in the Bronze Age, depicting a bustling, sometimes threatening wilderness milieu in which a frequently harassed Israelite leader struggled to cope with the growing pains of a self-willed nation' (Harrison 1990:22). Such authors normally work from the theological presupposition that the text is 'authoritative', and refers to historical events (Ashley 1993:3-4). More recent conservative scholars such as R. Dennis Cole have opted for a more nuanced approach that takes the complexity of the history of the literary development of the book of Numbers into account (Cole 2000:29-35).

Critical scholarship has historically worked from the position associated with Julius Wellhausen in his ground-breaking work, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (1878), that the Pentateuch is composed of a series of written documents commonly referred to in the following manner: J (Jahwist), E (Elohist), D (Deuteronomist), P (Priestly), dating from the time of the monarchy (J), to the post-exilic period (P). The demarcations between each source tradition are determined on the basis of literary, theological, and linguistic criteria (e.g. the use of the divine names, the presence of doublets). It is generally understood that the final form of the text was edited at the hands of a redactor (P) in the post-exilic period (Ashley 1993:4). For a recent and detailed overview of the history of Pentateuch scholarship, the reader is referred to Jean-Louis Ska's *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch* (English translation, 2006).

The 'Documentary Hypothesis' has undergone a long process of refinement, and has proven foundational in the development of other approaches to the study of the Pentateuch (e.g. Gerhard von Rad's form-criticism, and Martin Noth's tradition-historical approaches) It has, of late, come under some criticism as the differentiation of sources has proven to be far

more complex than Wellhausen believed. Some have even argued for a different approach, contending that a ‘fragmentary’ (Whybray) or ‘supplementary’ (Van Seters) hypothesis view makes better sense of the evidence.

With respect to the book of Numbers, much of the text has been understood to represent the work of a Priestly editor, although large blocks of material represent the Jahwist and Elohist source traditions, e.g. Numbers 22-24. For a recent, detailed analysis, the reader is directed to Richard Elliott Friedman’s work, *The Bible with sources revealed, a new view into the five books of Moses* (Friedman 2003:239-308). Although the prevailing view is that Numbers, in its final form, is a post-exilic work, there are some who have contended that the Priestly materials in Numbers are actually pre-exilic (i.e. the time of the united monarchy) on the basis of the laws, institutions and priestly vocabulary (e.g. Y. Kaufman, J. Milgrom). [See Milgrom’s discussion in his commentary on Numbers in the *JBS Torah Commentary* (1990: xxxii – xxxv).]

At the end of the day, it seems clear that the material in Numbers has a long tradition of association with the figure of Moses in the Old Testament. It seems equally clear that there is a long history of transmission of the text, and that to speak of ‘Mosaic authorship’ is to impose an anachronism that fails to come to grips with the process of textual development and transmission in the Ancient Near East. (See Karel van der Toorn’s recent work, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible,* 2007, particularly pages 27-49, and Jeffrey Tigay’s essay, ‘The evolution of the Pentateuchal narratives in the light of the evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic’, in *Empirical models for Biblical criticism,* 1985.)

While the account of events recorded in the Pentateuchal traditions have obviously passed through a long period of transmission, and have undoubtedly been ‘shaped’ by

editorial hands to reflect particular perspectives, this is not to say that that they are 'fictional' accounts. Ian Provan has noted that the text can, in point of fact, 'testify truthfully':

> Like a portrait, a biblical narrative is in one sense a fabrication, because it consists of word on paper and not the actual past. Nevertheless, these words on paper, like paint on canvas, can accurately represent the historical past. (Provan, Long and Longman 2003:85-86).

As John Bright has said concerning the figure of Moses: 'Though we know nothing of his career save what the Bible tells us, the details of which we have no means of testing, there can be no doubt that he was, as the Bible portrays him, the great founder of Israel's faith' (Bright 1981:127). This viewpoint (i.e. that the Old Testament can testify 'truthfully' about historical events) poses no problem, if one holds as a theological presupposition that God has overseen the development and transmission of the final form of the text. Perhaps, Ashley has said it best (Ashley 1993:7):

> It seems best to take the materials of the text itself as offering some clue to the sources and composition of the book. Moses may be seen as having a key role in the origin of some of the material in Numbers, though we have no way of knowing how much of it goes back to him. Much of what is in the book bears marks of antiquity, but there are also undoubted signs of a long period of transmission. The book probably went through a more complex history of transmission than is recoverable. . . I believe that, through all the complexities of the transmission of the text of Numbers, God was at work to bring to his people the final form of the text. Inspiration should not be limited to any one stage in the composition of the biblical text (e.g. the earliest) as opposed to other stages. The Church and the Synagogue confess the whole OT text as God's Word, not just one stage in its composition.

While we can never be certain, there are compelling reasons to consider the possibility that the text of Numbers reached its final form during the postexilic period, perhaps even under the editorship of the scribe Ezra, under a mandate from the Persian authorities to codify a Jewish 'national law' (Van der Toorn 2007:249). A reading of Erza 7:25-27, reports that Ezra was given the task of developing a codification of the laws of Israel under a Persian administrative policy of encouraging autonomous local government. This policy was

apparently applied to all of the nations under Persian oversight and control. For example, the *Demotic Chronicle* indicates that King Darius ordered the codification of the laws of Egypt in 518 (Van der Toorn 2007:249). The law 'book' that Ezra read to the assembled people of Israel in Nehemiah 8 has variously been identified with Deuteronomy, or with the Priestly materials. Nevertheless, it is plausible that it was in fact the entire Pentateuch as Van der Toorn contends:

> The identification of Ezra's law book is a topic of ongoing scholarly debate. It has been strongly put forth that the law that was "in the hand" of Ezra was in fact Deuteronomy, or the Priestly Code, or a document now lost to us. None of these solutions satisfies. It was Ezra's mission to implement a national law; to that end he had to fuse partisan documents (such as Deuteronomy and the Priestly Code) into a higher unity, which ultimately resulted in the Pentateuch, or the five books of Moses. The veneration of the Pentateuch by the Samaritans forces us to posit its acceptance well before the schism with Judaism occurred. The work must have been composed and published before 400 B.C.E.; 450 is a plausible date. His work on the Pentateuch compares to the editing of the *Gilgamesh Epic*. . .Ezra did the same for the Law of Moses. Whether he did so in person, or as supervisor of an editorial committee hardly matters. His name is attached to the edition; the Pentateuch is as much the Book of Ezra as it is the book of Moses. (Van der Toorn 2007:250)

While Ska takes issue with the notion that the law code of Ezra 7 was the Pentateuch, he does agree that: 'the Persian authorities created a favourable situation for the composition of a document that became the "identity card" of the Postexilic community' (Ska 2006:225). In fact, he suggests that the Pentateuch 'came to be' as a result of the internal needs of the postexilic community (Ska 2006:225). The 'returnees' from exile were faced with the task of building a new community within the Persian province of Yehud (cf. Charles Carter's fascinating book, *The emergence of Yehud in the Persian period: a social and demographic study,* 1999.) They faced an internal theological crisis as they wrestled with the meaning of the Exile and the destruction of the Temple for their faith in Yahweh. They also faced

opposition from hostile elements that had remained in Palestine during the exile, as well as political opponents from neighbouring provinces (e.g. Samaria).

How could a 'reborn' Israel come to exist in such conditions? In order to forge a new unified people, it was necessary for the leaders of the Postexilic community (e.g. Ezra, Nehemiah, et. al.) to 'define the conditions of membership'. This was done on the basis of 'blood ties' (established by genealogies in Genesis), and a 'social contract' found in the Covenant.

> The internal justifications are therefore dominant. The purpose of the texts. . . is to present the importance of ties to the past. . . Instead of letting itself be assimilated or become just another province in the vast Empire, Postexilic Israel wanted to safeguard its identity. . . Israel survived as a faith community united above all by its religious traditions and institutions, not as an independent nation. The origin of the Pentateuch is to be explained in this context. (Ska 2006:225-226).

Ska notes that J. P. Weinberg's theory of 'Citizen-Temple Community' (*Burger-Tempel-Gemeinde)*, also posits a postexilic date for the composition of the Pentateuch in its final form. [14] According to this theory, the citizen-temple-community serves as the institutional focus within Israel during the Persian period, functioning much like a bank/commercial centre to which the offerings prescribed in Ezra 7:15-18 would be directed for administration (Ska 2006:226-227). The 'Citizen-Temple-Community' would form the 'backbone' of Israelite community in the land, and would focus its attention on the 'Law of God'. Thus, the 'Law' and the Temple would be the two 'institutional pillars of Postexilic Israel' (Ska 2006:228). The Pentateuch would serve to both clarify the issue of 'membership' in the community, and to provide the authority structures necessary to its success. (This would serve to help explain the insistence on separating aliens from the people of Israel in

[14] Weinberg, J P 1992. *The Citizen Temple Community.* JSOT Sup 151, JSOT: Sheffield.

Nehemiah 13:23-30. If so, then the condemnation of Balaam in Nehemiah 13:2 as a foreign 'pretender' makes perfect sense.)

Charles Carter has noted that Daniel Smith has also considered possible 'reconstructions' of the social settings entailed in the exilic and postexilic periods. His suggestion is that minority populations, when confronted by exile and enslavement have four (4) basic responses or 'survival' strategies available to them: structural adaptation, split in leadership, new rituals and the creation of 'hero' or 'folklore' literature. The first two coping mechanisms address the issue of leadership of the exiled community, and the struggle for new leadership as a means of dealing with oppression. The development of 'new rituals' and the creation of 'folklore' literature, address the issues of identity formation and maintenance:

> Although these four strategies allowed the exiles to adapt to the crises of the destruction of Judah and the deportation to Babylon, their implications were felt well into the postexilic period. The exiles developed, and to some extent, maintained a particular religious and social identity as a result of their experience. This identity, developed out of oppression and a minority status, in turn caused conflict with the Judeans who had remained in the land between 587/586 and the return of the exiles. (Carter 1999:49)

Carter (following Smith) suggests that this conflict between the *golah* that went through the 'purifying' experiences of the exile, and the 'unclean' Judean population is reflected in the narratives of Ezra, Nehemiah, and in particular, Haggai (e.g. Haggai 2:10-14). Such perspectives would play a large role in the theological focus of the book of Numbers, and of the Balaam narratives.

4.3.2 The Structure of the Book of Numbers

A number of approaches to the structuring of the book of Numbers have been taken. Martin Noth observed that 'from the point of view of its contents, the book lacks unity, and it is difficult to see any pattern in its construction' (Noth 1968:1). Other commentators have been more optimistic at the reader's ability to discern a plan and purpose to the book. The

traditional approach focuses on the three main geographic locations: at Mt. Sinai (1:1 – 10:10); in the vicinity of Kadesh-Barnea (10:11 – 19:22); and on the plains of Moab (20:1 – 36:13). (Ashley 1993:2) Ashley has modified this structure slightly around the themes of 'orientation' (1:1 – 10:10), 'disorientation' (10:11 – 22:1), and 'new orientation' (22:1 – 36:13), with transitional travel narratives in 10:11 – 12:16, and 20:1 – 22:1 (Ashley 1993:8-9). Olson has proposed a structure that focuses on the two census lists, and the two generations represented by them (Olson 1996:5).

Numbers 1 – 25 The old generation of rebellion
Numbers 26 – 36 A new generation of hope

(cf. Olson, *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New,* 1985.)

Knierim also finds a two part structure, choosing to mark the division at Numbers 1:1 – 10:10, 'The Legend of the Organization of the Sanctuary Campaign', and 10:11 – 36:13, 'The saga of the campaign itself' (Knierim & Coats 2005:9). However, what is compelling about Olson's division is the manner in which it accounts for the literary emphases of the text of Numbers. This can be seen in his structural analysis which reveals a mirroring of themes within the narrative as follows (Olson 1996:5-6):

Table 20 – Dennis Olson, Analysis of the Structure of the Book of Numbers (Olson 1996:5-6)

Numbers 1-25 ***The Old Generation of Rebellion***	**Numbers 26-36** ***The New Generation of Hope***
1 – A census is taken of 12 tribes.	26 – A census is taken of 12 tribes.
3 – A census is taken of the Levites	26 – A census is taken of the Levites
5 – legal discourse involving women	27 – legal discourse involving women
7, 15 – lists and laws concerning offerings	28, 29 – lists and laws concerning offerings
9 – celebration of Passover	28:16-25 Instructions for future celebrations of Passover

10:8-9 – law concerning the priests blowing the trumpets to sound the alarm for holy war	31:6 – priests blow the trumpets to sound the alarm for holy war against Midian
13 – list of spies from each of the twelve tribes chosen to spy out the Promised Land	34 – list of tribal leaders from each of the twelve tribes chosen to divide the Promised Land
13-14 – the spy story and Israel's rebellion which leads to the death of the old generation	32:6-16 – the spy story of Num 13-14 is recalled as a lesson for the new generation
10-25 – scattered geographical notations about places Israel journeyed in the wilderness	33 – a summary of places Israel journeyed in the wilderness, including notations of Aaron's death at Mt. Hor (20) and the defeat of King Arad (21)
18:21-32 – provision for the Levites	35 – provision for the Levitical cities
21:21-35 – victory over Kings Sihon and Og and the capture of the land east of the Jordan	32 – the assignment of the land captured from Sihon and Og east of the Jordan River to the three tribes of Reuben, Gad and Mannaseh
25:17-18 the Midianites cause Israel to sin and God commands Israel to punish Midian	31 – holy war against the Midianites to punish them for what they did in chapter 25

The correspondences adduced above make it evident that Numbers is a carefully crafted book which systematically develops its key theological themes throughout. It is significant as well that the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24 serve as the 'hinge' or 'fulcrum' between the two sets of narratives/generations. In point of fact, we can say that the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24 serves as the 'hinge' between the first and second halves of the book of Numbers. They are the narratives which serve to unite that which comes before Numbers 22, and that which follows subsequent to Numbers 25. The message of hope for Israel in the Balaam poems serves as a call to courage to a new generation facing similar challenges in the exilic and early post-exilic periods. God's faithfulness to those who seek to 'walk in his ways' becomes their encouragement to faithfully follow him in aftermath of Israel and Judah's apostasy.

4.3.3 References to Balaam in the Old Testament

There are a number of literary narrations which make reference to Balaam in the Old Testament apart from Numbers 22-24, found in Numbers 31:8, 16; Deuteronomy 23:4; Joshua 13:22 and 24:9; Nehemiah 13:2 and Micah 6:5.

(1) Numbers 31:8, 16

The author(s) of Numbers 31 take great pains to vilify Balaam. In verse 8 we are told that in addition to executing the kings of Midian, they 'also killed Balaam son of Beor with the sword'. The explanation is given in v. 16 where the Priestly narrator tells the reader that Balaam was really behind Israel's immorality and apostasy in Numbers 25 in worshiping the Baal of Peor: 'These women here, on Balaam's advice, made the Israelites act treacherously against the LORD in the affair of Peor, so that the plague came among the congregation of the LORD'. (It is odd that Numbers 25 makes no mention whatsoever of Balaam in the description of events at Baal Peor.)

(2) Deuteronomy 23:4

> Yet the LORD your God refused to heed Balaam; the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loved you.

The Deuteronomic authors make passing reference to Balaam in an unflattering aside concerning Moab. The people of Moab are excluded from the assembly of the Lord 'to the tenth generation'. Two reasons are given for this: that they failed to aid Israel on its journey, and that they hired Balaam to curse Israel. The author strongly implies that Balaam actually attempted to curse Israel, but that Yahweh converted the curse into blessing. (Again, the surprising lack of corroborating evidence within Numbers 22-24 is apparent.)

(3) Joshua 13:22

> Along with the rest of those they put to death, the

> Israelites also put to the sword Balaam son of Beor, who practiced divination.

Here, we are given an account of Balaam's execution for practising divination. Was he unjustly put to death? Divination was clearly against the Mosaic law where it was considered a capital offense (cf. Lev. 19:26). Balaam, however, was not an Israelite. Yet, given Balaam's knowledge gleaned from his encounters with Yahweh, that "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, no divination against Israel", the writer wants us to understand that Balaam should have understood the dangers of attempting to curse God's people. What is confusing about this perspective, of course, is that Numbers 22-24 makes no mention of Balaam attempting to curse Israel. However, for the author of Deuteronomy, the law is the law and must be enforced!

(4) Joshua 24:9

> Then King Balak son of Zippor of Moab, set out to fight against Israel. He sent and invited Balaam son of Beor to curse you. But I would not listen to Balaam; therefore he blessed you; so I rescued you out of his hand.

In Joshua 24, the narrator continues the vilification of Balaam. In this version, Balaam seeks a curse from Yahweh, who refuses and causes Balaam to bless Israel instead, thus delivering Israel out of Balak's hand.

(5) Judges 11:25

> Now are any better than King Balak son of Zippor of Moab? Did he ever enter into conflict with Israel, or did he ever go to war with them?

This intertextual reference occurs as part of a speech attributed to Jephthah in which he seeks to remind the Ammonites of God's prior actions on Israel's behalf in an effort to dissuade them from a military incursion into Israel's territory.

(6) Nehemiah 13:2

The author of Nehemiah makes it clear that no Ammonite or Moabite were permitted within the assembly of Israel because of their failure to come to Israel's aid with 'bread and water', and because of their hiring of Balaam to curse Israel. As in the account found in Deuteronomy, the text in Nehemiah records that 'our God turned the curse into a blessing'.

(6) Micah 6:5

> O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the LORD.

Within Micah's prophecy, Balaam is portrayed in a manner akin to his portrait within the main Balaam cycles in Numbers 22-24. The narrator alludes to Balaam's 'answer' of refusal to curse Israel, and of the blessing from Yahweh mediated through the person of Balaam. Balaam is remembered within this text as a true servant of Yahweh.

We will examine each of these Old Testament references again in much greater detail in connection with our study of the Sacred Texture of the Balaam narratives. It is enough at this point to note that within the historical intertexture of the Balaam narratives are varying portraits of Balaam which are puzzling in view of their conflicting perspectives. We will later suggest an explanation for the differing perspectives.

4.3.4 The Samaritan Pentateuch

Our concern in this study has been with the MT. However, it is worth noting that the Samaritan Pentateuch serves as a form of intertexture for Numbers 22-24. An extended comparison between the MT and the Samaritan Pentateuch is beyond the scope of this study. However, there are a few differences that require a brief comment in passing.

In Num 22:22, the MT reads אלהים in speaking of ‘God’s’ anger, by the Sam has יהוה which seems to form a better parallelism with the ‘Angel of Yahweh’. Cole notes that this would also serve to bring the phraseology into conformity with expressions of Yahweh’s anger in Num 11:1, 12:9 and 25:3 (Cole 2000:389). In Num 24:17, the MT reads וקרקר (‘destroy’), where the Sam emends to וקדקד (‘skulls’), which better maintains the parallelism with crushing the ‘foreheads of Moab’ (פאתי or ‘corners’ of the head).

4.3.5 The Septuagint (LXX)

Just as the Samaritan Pentateuch serves as a form of intertexture, so does the Septuagint (LXX). An exhaustive survey of differences between the MT and the LXX is beyond the scope of this study.[15] Most of the differences are minor in character. However, there are a few significant differences which bear mention in passing.

In at least two places, the translator of the LXX seems to reveal a distaste for the figure of Balaam. In Num 22:18 the LXX changes the apodosis to read το ῥημα κυριου του θεου (‘the word of the Lord God’) rather than the MT’s אלהי יהוה פי (‘word of Yahweh, my God’). Wever notes that this is ‘the first indication of the translator’s antipathy toward the diviner Balaam’ (Wever 1998:370). In Numbers 22:22, one finds that the LXX changes the MT’s יהוה מלאך to read ὁ ἀγγελος του θεου to distance the God of Israel from Balaam (Wever 1998:372). [The only place where the LXX uses τω ἀγγελω κὑριου is in Num 22:34. The reason for this variance is unclear.]

[15] For a careful study, see Wevers, John William 1998. *Notes on the Greek text of Numbers*. Atlanta: Scholars Press.

One of the more interesting variances is found in Num 24:16 where the LXX reads ἀνθρωπος ('person') where the MT reads שֵׁבֶט ('sceptre'), and interpretative rendering which identifies the sceptre with an individual royal figure (Wevers 1998:413).

4.3.6 New Testament References to Balaam

The references to Balaam found in the New Testament epistolary discourses are without exception, serious indictments of the pagan diviner as an enemy of God's people. His character is brought into sharp relief through the New Testament's assessment.

> 2 Peter 2:15-16 They have left the straight road and have gone astray, following the road of Balaam son of Bosor, who loved the wages of doing wrong, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.
>
> Jude 1:11 Woe to them! For they go the way of Cain, and abandon themselves to Balaam's error for the sake of gain, and perish in Korah's rebellion.
>
> Revelation 2:14 But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel, so that they would eat food sacrificed to idols and practice fornication.

All three references cited above give an unqualified condemnation of Balaam's character. Peter tells us that Balaam "loved the wages of doing wrong". Because of this he was rebuked by a "speechless donkey" who "spoke with a human voice". Jude seems to identify Balaam's error as unrestrained greed. And in Revelation 2:14, the church at Pergamum is warned that some of their members hold to the "teaching of Balaam", which seems to be a reference to idolatry and sexual immorality.

The portrait painted in the New Testament as a whole is one of a pagan diviner who pursued the acquisition of wealth rather than truth. Despite his genuine encounters with

Yahweh, Balaam is seen as one who turned away and conspired with Balak to lead God's people into sin.[16]

4.3.7 Sefer Balaam – The Deir Alla' Text

4.3.7.1 Introduction to the Deir Alla' Text

The discovery H. J. Franken in 1967 of *Sefer Balaam* at Tell Deir 'Alla in Jordan, has been of inestimable importance to the study of the Balaam narratives. The *Deir 'Alla Texts*, (hereafter *DAT*) as they came to be known consisted of twelve (12) "fragment-combinations" inscribed on plaster, apparently at one time on some sort of stele within a sanctuary, long since destroyed by fire and earthquake. They were found at Tell Deir 'Alla close to the River Zerqa (known in the Bible as the "Jabbok"). This is the area known in the Hebrew Bible as the Valley of Succoth, in the Gilead of Biblical times (Levine 2007:141). Seow notes that the texts have been dated 'to the eight century B.C.E. on archaeological and palaeographic grounds, as well as on the basis of radiocarbon testing' (Seow 2003:207). Levine suggests that the DAT are "younger" than the Biblical orations (which reflect the situation prior to Mesha's military incursions in the mid-9th century), while the DAT may well reflect the period of Moabite military adventures in central Transjordan (Levine 2007:84).

The condition of the text(s) has made decipherment extremely difficult. Charred, covered with dirt, and in places smudged almost beyond recovery, the ink on the plaster has "run" in places, making it extremely difficult to ascertain the letters. Furthermore, the use of an almost entirely consonantal text has made the determination of the exact meaning of the characters which remain a challenging task (Hoftijzer 1976: 10-12).

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[16] Although it falls outside the focus of our socio-rhetorical study of the Balaam cycles (fitting more within the study of the 'reception history' of the narratives) it is worth noting that Balaam is excoriated within Jewish tradition. For an in-depth study of Balaam in Rabbinic tradition, one may consult Judith Baskin's *Pharaoh's Counsellors: Job, Jethro and Balaam in Rabbinic and Patristic Tradition* (Baskin 1983). Also helpful is G. Vermes' *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (Vermes 1961).

The identity of the person(s) who made the inscription is unknown. In point of fact, even the identity of the language has eluded scholars. Levine has noted that 'there is increasing agreement among scholars that these texts are written in a local, or regional Canaanite-type language akin to classical Hebrew, but with some Aramaic-like features' (Levine 2007:83). Seow has described it as written in a 'Northwest Semitic' language, apparently a 'local Transjordanian dialect, with some features akin to Aramaic, but other features closer to Hebrew and other "Canaanite" dialects' (Seow 2003:208). Weippert has concluded that it is most likely a 'peripheral language which is not yet Aramaic, but which is about to become Aramaic' (Weippert 1991:163).

Two of these known as the "first combination" and the "second combination" have been the subject of careful study. Jacob Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij worked tirelessly for many months to make sense of the 8th century Old Aramaic consonantal text(s). (JoAnn Hackett later devoted her doctoral dissertation to further reconstruction of the texts.) In the first combination, Hoftijzer notes that there is an interesting correspondence between the Balaam texts found in the Old Testament and that found at Deir 'Alla. Taking into account the differences between them (e.g. the *DAT* shows no affinity with Israelite religious practice), he observes that:

> If one combines the biblical data with those of Deir- 'Alla, one must
> conclude that for a considerable period of time the figure of Balaam
> took up a prominent position in a specific religious tradition in Transjordan.
> (Hoftijzer 1976:13)

What is most interesting about the Deir 'Alla inscriptions is the manner in which they appear to be consistent with the Old Testament account in Numbers 22 by establishing Balaam's notoriety outside of the Biblical accounts. In Combination I of *Sefer Balaam* we read:

> The account of [Balaam, son of Beo]r, who was a seer of the gods. The gods came to him in the night, and he saw a vision (2) like an oracle of El. (Hackett 1980: 29)

The vision which Balaam receives is so disturbing that he is found fasting and crying by the people over all that the gods intend to do. (Hackett 1980:29) The second combination is so fragmentary that it is difficult to make sense of the text. (Hackett 1980: 30) The extant text of Combination II makes no explicit reference to Balaam. Levine is correct in asserting that the DAT and the Balaam narratives in the Hebrew Bible clearly appear to refer to the same individual and literary figure (Levine 2007:83). The key point is that we are afforded a snapshot of Balaam dating back to at least the end of the 8th / beginning of the 7th century in Transjordan. The portrait given enables us to get a glimpse of the way in which he was perceived in his own cultural milieu.

4.3.7.2 Approaches to the DAT and the Balaam Tradition of the Hebrew Bible

A number of scholars have made an attempt to relate the DAT to the portrait of Balaam given in the Hebrew Bible. In his article, "Is Balaam Also Among the Prophets," Dijkstra addresses what he describes as "the puzzle of Balaam" (Dijkstra 1995:43). He analyses *Sefer Balaam* from Deir 'Alla in Jordan and concludes that the portrait of Balaam given in that text shows a closer resemblance to Old Testament prophets such as Ezekiel than the picture of a pagan diviner painted in Numbers 22-24. He determines this on the basis of comparisons of the text of *Sefer Balaam* with some of the prophecies of Ezekiel:

> Ezekiel is certainly not dependent on Balaam, but both prophets may have used common strategies to bring across their message. Communication followed established patterns of dramatic expression and word use. If a book can be written about the common characteristics of Ezekiel and Elijah-Elisha, it should not be impossible to draw parallels between Balaam's prophecy and Ezekiel's, both being called to announce a prophecy of doom in a certain historical situation. Other events in Ezekiel career can be compared with those

> described in the wall text: the refusal of an oracle (Ezek 14:3; 20:1-3, 31); the collecting of a crowd to hear the divine word (Ezek 33:30-33); the confrontation and debate about the prophecy (Ezek 12:21-25, 27-28; 18:1-4, 19-20, 25-29; 20:32-33; 33:10-11). (Dijkstra 1995:63)

In reaching this conclusion, Dijkstra appears relies on the DAT, rather than the text of Numbers 22-24 in assessing the character and work of Balaam.

Michael Barre has also analysed the available texts pertaining to Balaam and concludes that he has been given a bad report within the Old Testament:

> The Deir 'Alla inscription reveals Balaam as he was viewed by Israel's neighbours in the eight century BCE. Various details regarding the function and character of Balaam find their closest parallel in the Balaam story of Numbers 22-24. Both present him as a seer and one who received revelations from God at night. In addition, both portray him as a man of integrity, hardly the way he was remembered in the greater part of biblical literature. (Barre 1997:260)

Barre questions just why a non-Israelite seer should be presented in such a favourable light as in Numbers 22-24. His assessment is that it is the author's intention to demonstrate Yahweh's sovereignty over the nations and over those who would claim the power to manipulate the powers of darkness. Just as Yahweh is able to make a dumb donkey to speak, just so he is able to speak through a pagan diviner. Balaam finds himself unable to do anything except that which Yahweh commands – to bless God's covenant people rather than to curse them (Barre 1997:264).

4.3.7.3 Implications for our study of the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24

It is clear that the DAT establish that Balaam was a literary figure well known within the area of Trans-Jordan. Ashley notes that when considering texts as 'fragmented and unsure in linguistic, cultural, and religious contexts as these, one must be cautious in the extreme about claiming that they demonstrate this or that parallel with the biblical Balaam

stories' (Ashley 1993:439). Nevertheless, he observes that there are a number of significant similarities between the two accounts (Ashley 1993:440):

(1) Both the biblical and Deir 'Alla Balaam cycles existed in oral form before they were memorialised in writing, and both are very old.

(2) The role sets attributed to Balaam of seer/diviner and exorcist are similar in both Balaam cycles.

(3) The divine names used within the stories (i.e. *'il* and *El*) and the divine intermediaries (*saddayin* and *sadday*) are similar.

(4) In both stories, Balaam receives visions 'by night', after which Balaam 'rose up' to present his message.

Baruch Levine has also reflected on the relationship between the Balaam texts from Deir 'Alla and the biblical Balaam accounts. He suggests that the Balaam inscriptions at Deir 'Alla (dated through carbon 14 and archaeological analysis at c.a. 800 BCE) were likely on display throughout most of the 8th century BCE, probably until the Assyrians invaded Transjordan in 734 BCE. Levine concludes that the Israelites constituted a major component of the population in the Sukkoth Valley. It is *possible* that the Balaam inscriptions from Deir 'Alla are of Israelite authorship, 'notwithstanding their mythological character' and they may well reflect the views of some of the Gileadite Israelites. In Levine's thinking, there appears to be 'strong literary affinities with biblical literature', particularly the biblical Balaam poems. The DAT suggest that Balaam was memorialised for having saved his land and his people in the Valley of Sukkoth from some past calamity. Willoughby 1992, ABD 1:203-212 relates it to the earthquake of Amos 1:1 (cf. 5:18-20) and remembered in Zecharaiah 14:4-5 may be the very event remembered.

Levine contends that 'it is reasonable' to hold out hope and hypothesise that the four Balaam poems which praise Israelite power and hold out no hope whatsoever to the Moabites (and Edomites?) or the Amalekites reflect the same realities as the Heshbon Ballad, preserved in Number 21. Levine suggests that Numbers 21 was written in the 1st half of the 9th century BCE in the period preceding Mesha's campaigns to retake N. Moab from the Israelites (during early 9th century, Omri and his successors took measures to consolidate Israelite hegemony in N. Moab – to fortify and guard N. Israel's frontier from Aramean expansion.

The Mesha Stele (Moabite Stone) records the devastation of N. Moab having happened before Mesha came to power and set about liberating Moab. Levine thinks that this is precisely what is portrayed by the fourth Balaam oracle: 'To put it simply, it is likely that the fourth Balaam poem correlates contextually with the Heshbon Ballad' (Levine 2000: 232) His conclusion? The first two poems are set in the 1st half of 9th century BCE – the period preceding Mesha's campaigns. If Levine is correct, the Balaam poems antedate the Balaam inscriptions at Deir 'Alla by more than ½ century. Levine writes:

> If the biblical Balaam poems celebrate Israelite power in Moab during the reign of Omri and his successors before the middle of the ninth century BCE, the Balaam inscriptions from Deir 'Alla may memorialise the sparing of Gilead from Mesha's reconquest, begun in the early forties of the ninth century. (Levine 2000:232)

Levine's point is that the Balaam poems, *Sefer Balaam*, and the Balaam narratives all deal with aspects of the same historical narratives/events. His conclusions are fascinating, although, at the end of the day, one cannot be certain of them given the paucity of evidence. Ashley is correct in his assertions that one should be careful in drawing too many conclusions or parallels from what is admittedly, a limited data set. Nevertheless, the evident similarities between the two text cycles are amazing. Both texts present Balaam as a seer/diviner who sought to use his powers in obedience to *El*, and as a means of blessing to the people he

served. The DAT afford a remarkable glimpse at an 8th century tradition concerning this literary figure from a location very near to the biblical setting of the Balaam story cycle. As Michael Barre observes:

> The Deir 'Alla inscription reveals Balaam as he was viewed by Israel's neighbours in the eight century BCE. Various details regarding the function and character of Balaam find their closest parallel in the Balaam story of Numbers 22-24. Both present him as a seer and one who received revelations from God at night. In addition, both portray him as a man of integrity, hardly the way he was remembered in the greater part of biblical literature. (Barre 1997:260)

One can only wish that additional texts concerning this mysterious figure might yet come to shed light on the biblical narratives. The *DAT* provide a unique historical intertextual reference to the Balaam traditions of the Old Testament.

4.4 Conclusion

The study of a text's intertexture builds on the key concepts and themes identified within its inner texture. The study of the intertexture of the Balaam narratives reveals a number of unexpected treasures to the reader. The presence of oral-scribal intertexture presents the re-contextualisation of the blessing given to Judah by Jacob (Genesis 49:7, 10) within the Balaam poems of Numbers 23-24, as the themes of strength and royalty are developed within the context of the Balaam narratives.

The study of 'cultural intertexture' enables the reader to observe the intertextual connections and inner-biblical allusions that exist between Numbers 22 and a number of other passages including: Gen 3, 22; Exod 1-2; 1 Sam 3; 1 Kgs 13, 17, 22; and 2 Kgs 1. These illustrate a rich treasure of inner-biblical allusion, focusing on the themes of blessing/curse (Gen 3, Exod 1-2); calling and faithfulness to Yahweh (Gen 22, 1 Sam 3) and the role of faithful/unfaithful prophets (1 Kgs 13, 17, 22 & 2 Kgs 1).

Our study of 'historical intertexture' reveals the way in which Balaam is referred to in texts scattered throughout the Old Testament. Apart from the largely positive reviews afforded to Balaam within Numbers 22-24 (the Tale of the Donkey excluded) and Micah 6:5, he is 'panned by the critics' reporting on his performance within Numbers 31, Deuteronomy 23, Joshua 13 & 24, and Nehemiah 13. The portrait found in the New Testament in 2 Peter 2:15, Jude 11, and Revelation 2:14 is even darker. By this point, Balaam is reckoned a 'villain' (Noort 2008). The Balaam inscription found at Deir 'Alla presents a largely sympathetic view of Balaam, consistent with the primary Balaam text of Numbers 22-24.

Having completed our consideration of the inner texture and intertexture of the Balaam narratives, we can begin to formulate a preliminary understanding of the rhetorical strategy of the author of Numbers 22-24. The presence of repetitive resumption illustrates that the Tale of the Donkey is an interpolation into the main Balaam story found in Numbers 22-24. Within the main thrust of the Balaam story (minus the Tale of the Donkey), the focus is on Balaam as the 'word of Yahweh' prophet that steadfastly refuses to do anything other than Yahweh's will, and to say anything other than Yahweh's words. The message is that Yahweh will fulfil his promise to the Patriarchs, and will surely bless Israel despite threats from abroad. The people of Jacob/Israel are blessed – they cannot be cursed. Moab (always a thorn in Israel's side) will meet its defeat at Yahweh's hands.

The insertion of the Tale of the Donkey into the main narratives/poems adds a dimension to the total narrative effect. The redactor(s) work skilfully to weave the Tale of the Donkey into the larger story. As Ashley observes, we must deal with the story as it is found in its final form (Ashley 1993:433). So, the attentive reader will want to know: Why on earth is the donkey there? We have observed that the structure of the book of Numbers is, in actuality, constructed around chapters 22-25. The Balaam stories form the 'hinge' or

'fulcrum' of the book. The focus of the book is to draw a contrast between the old generation and the new generation. The old generation failed to walk in the ways of Yahweh, and paid a terrible price for its rebellion. The new generation faces a future that is as yet unclear: will it bring 'blessing' or 'curse'? The very ambiguity of the word ברך reinforces this question, as it can mean either 'blessing' or 'curse' (cf. Psa 10:3). What will the future bring? What are the 'conditions' necessary to Israel's receipt of Yahweh's blessing?

The focus on 'seeing' (ראה) and 'not seeing' serves to alert the reader that the true state of one's circumstances are not always what they appear. For all intents and purposes, Balaam represents a world-class diviner who appears to be on 'speaking terms' with Israel's God. He sees the future with 'clear eyes' and pronounces what will be. Balak, who is anxious to know what the outcome will be between Moab and Israel turns to Balaam for his expertise. The Tale of the Donkey serves to illustrate in undeniable fashion the fact that Israel's destiny is the hands of the Divine Warrior, the Angel of Yahweh. Balaam can only see what Yahweh allows – and only speak the word that Yahweh puts in his mouth. Israel cannot be cursed – it can only be blessed.

In the next chapter we will examine the social and cultural location of both the implied author and implied reader of the Balaam narratives. What seems clear is that the Balaam narratives were written to accompany the much-older poems. The final form of Numbers 22-24 most likely came into being during the exilic or early post-exilic period. The people of Israel had experienced the judgment of Yahweh through the aggression of first Assyria, and then Babylon. Their isolation from the land of the promise during the exile had only served to heighten the question: Will Yahweh's promise to bless Abraham's

descendants portend blessing or curse for us and our children? If they were to anticipate blessing, what would be required of them in order to receive it?

The answer afforded by the authors of the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24 was clear. God would bless his people in the years to come. Despite their experiences in the Exile, theirs would be a hopeful future (Jer 29:11). The way forward would be found in eschewing the patterns and practices of the 'old generation' of the late monarchy, and in returning to the pure worship of Yahweh, by observing his תורה. If the community were to survive during the exile and beyond, it would need to walk carefully in the ways of Yahweh. Formerly, the role of prophet was defined broadly enough to include the diviner (cf. the gloss of 1 Sam 9:9). This would no longer be permitted. Priests (as guardians of the cult) would join forces with prophets to form a new identity for the people of Yahweh – one focused on the teaching and application of the תורה.

Within the narratives, Balaam represented the old order of things that was passing away – the diviner who somehow stood in relation to the 'word of Yahweh' prophet. While they could be used as an instrument of Yahweh in pronouncing blessing upon the people, diviners could no longer be tolerated within the prophetic tradition of Israel. A person like Balaam must, at the end of the day, be discredited. He must be shown to be an unfaithful prophetic figure, who plays a beneficent role in Israel's history, only because of Yahweh's gracious decision to use him. Through the ridicule and satire of the Tale of the Donkey, the role of the seer/diviner within Israel is firmly and inexorably placed outside of Israel's prophetic tradition. As for Balaam, the reader cannot be sure – but the intimation is given that he will likely meet with a bad end one day. Irregardless, for the reader of the late exilic/early post-exilic period, the message is clear – Israel will experience Yahweh's

blessing, *provided* her people are faithful in their observance of תורה. The new generation in the land will have a 'hopeful future' (Jeremiah 29:11), provided that they walk in the 'ways of Yahweh'. And in such a context, it becomes clear that diviners and seers will have no place in Israel's future.

Chapter 5
Social and Cultural Texture

Social and cultural texture takes the interpreter into the realm of sociological and anthropological discourse. At stake is not simply the *intertexture* of a text, but its social and cultural nature as a text. In analysing social and cultural texture, interpreters seek to answer a fundamental question: *What kind of a social and cultural person would one be who lives in the "world" of a particular text?* Interpreters seek to identify specific social topics, cultural topics and "final cultural" categories.

5.1 Social Topics

Bryan Wilson has developed a typology of sects which suggests that religious persons manifest a social response along one of seven (7) different lines: conversionist, revolutionist, introversionist, Gnostic-manipulationist, thaumaturgical, reformist, and utopian (Wilson, quoted in Robbins, 1996: 72-73). Applying this taxonomy to the Balaam narratives, the interpreter can observe that Balak and Balaam each reflect a *thaumaturgical social response* to their individual contexts. As Robbins describes it:

> The thaumaturgical response focuses on the individual's concern for relief from present and specific ills by special dispensations. The request for supernatural help is personal and local, and its operation is magical. Salvation is immediate but has no general application beyond the given case and others like it. Salvation takes the form of healing, assuagement of grief, restoration after loss, reassurance, the foresight and avoidance of calamity, and the guarantee of eternal (or at least continuing) life after death. (Robbins 1996: 73)

Balak seeks as King of Moab to avoid what he perceives to be as certain disaster for his people by seeking the aid of Balaam. There is some ambiguity about the social overlap between Balaam's roles as both diviner and exorcist. But it is clear that Balak expects that Balaam is in a position to approach the divine and solicit aid for Moab's need. The elaborate

rituals involved in the sacrifices offered (23:2; 23:14 and 23:30) make it clear that the anticipation is that Balaam can not only tell Moab's future – but that he can in some sense guarantee it.

5.2 Balaam's Name, Homeland and Social Location

5.2.1 Balaam's Name

The meaning of Balaam's name has long been a subject of controversy. It may possibly come from the root בלם meaning to 'swallow up' (Holladay, ed. 1988:41). If so, it would nicely fit as a pun with Numbers 22:4, 'as an ox *licks up* the grass.' Stefan Timm's view is that it comes from the Aramaic root meaning to 'be eloquent' (Timm 1989). It is also possible that Balaam's name is a pun on the nifal form of the root meaning 'to confuse'. Balaam would then be the 'confuser'.

5.2.2 Balaam's Homeland and Social Location

The question of Balaam's homeland has long been perplexing. The key question is what to make of the text in Numbers that describes his name and point of origin. The text speaks of Balaam having come from "Pethor, which is on the Euphrates in the land of Amaw. The LXX says only that he came: επι του ποταμου γησ υιων λαου, or from the river of the land of the sons of the people. In Numbers 23:7, it is said that Balak brought him from "Aram. . . from the eastern mountains". Therefore, two key questions present themselves to the student of the Balaam narratives:

(a) What is the meaning of פתורה?

Jo Ann Hackett observes that the biblical tradition offers a number of possible options concerning the meaning of Pethor (Hackett 199:569):

(i) To understand Pethor as Pitru on the upper Eurphrates, located some 10-12 kilometers south of Carchemish on the Sagur River, a tributary of the Euphrates.

(ii) To take the term as referring to Balaam as an interpreter of dreams from the root *ptr*.

If Balaam were from the upper Euphrates, this would accord with the account in Numbers 23:7 (cf Deut 23:5, English version 23:4) that he had come from Aram (Naharaim). This region is not the Mesopotamia of the entire region between the Euphrates and the Tigris, but the most northern portion of that area, reaching from the Khabur River to the Orontes. Specifically, it refers to: "the region around the bend of the Euphrates, south of Carchemish, past the ancient city of Emar, and downstream to Tuttul at the confluence of the Balikh and Euphrates (Baker and Arnold, eds. 1999:92-93). If so, then he would have had a journey of some 640 kilometers from Pethor to Moab, a trip of at least 20 days (Milgrom 1990:186).

(b) What is the meaning of the phrase בני־עמו?

There appear to be two difficulties with the identification of Pethor with Pitru. First of all, it seems to be far too distant to explain the description of Balaam departing on his trip on a donkey accompanied by only two servants (though this may only reflect an economy of detail). Secondly, Numbers 22:5, which speaks of him as being from the land of the *bene-'ammo,* בני־עמו or land of 'Amaw' (possibly 'land of his people', Numbers 24:14), may refer to Ammon.

In his helpful study, 'Whence comes Balaam? Num 22, 5 revisited', *Bib* 73 (1992): 32-61, Scott Layton has reinterpreted this to refer to 'Ammon', and concluded that Balaam came from Deir 'Alla in Ammon. He understands *ptr* (פתורה) to be an Aramaic *nomen agentis* that functions as a title for Balaam to identify him as a diviner or interpreter of

dreams. The word 'ammo in Numbers 22:5 thus functions as a linguistic variant of 'ammon. The "river" referred to in Numbers 22:5 identifies the Jabbok in Ammon near Deir 'Alla as Balaam's home. This obviously has the advantage of identifying his location of origin with the location of *Sefer Balaam* from Deir 'Alla in Jordan.

However, Layton's findings do not resolve the identification of Aram in Numbers 23:7. The MT clearly says ארם. The LXX (which reflects an earlier textual basis than the MT) speaks of Balaam εκ Μεσοποταμιασ which would clearly seem to exclude Ammon as a possibility, but that would fit nicely with Pitru. At the end of the day, the Ammon hypothesis, while intriguing, is not sustainable. Balaam is probably best understood as hailing from the area near Pitru, Northern Syria/Mesopotamia. [Noort observes that if Balaam really were from Ammon as suggested by the DAT, then the writer's decision to place his social location as Pitru would be a move calculated to emphasize the fact that Balaam was a 'foreigner'. (Noort 2008:22).]

5.3 Social Intertexture

Social intertexture addresses the dimensions of *social knowledge*, that which is common to all persons within a give social context (Robbins 1996b:62). This can involve the knowledge of social roles (e.g. a shepherd, slave, diviner, prophet or priest); social identity (an Israelite, a Moabite; a Nazarite); social institutions (e.g. a temple, shrine, household, market); social codes (e.g. shame/honour codes), and social relationships (e.g. patron, friend, enemy, and family). While social intertexture can be approached under the study of a text's intertexture, we have chosen to consider under the social and cultural texture of the text.

5.3.1 Social Roles – What was Balaam's Occupation?

In the narrative of Numbers 22-24, Balaam's occupation is never referred to by name. He is never called a נביא. In fact, the only time that Balaam's occupation is referred to is found in Joshua 13:22, which refers to Balaam as one who was put to death because he 'practiced divination' or הקוסם. In the narrative, Balak summons Balaam because he believes that he can curse (ארר) the people of Israel. Balaam is indeed taken by Balak to Bamoth-baal; to the top of Pisgah; and the top of Peor. At each location sacrifices (seven bulls and seven rams) are offered. In the narrative itself, however, Balaam does not curse the people of Israel. Rather, he finds that all he can do is to bless (ברך) them. The portrait painted is a confused one. How is the reader to make sense of it all?

Joseph Blenkinsopp notes that 'with the exception of an inscribed potsherd from Lachish, written shortly before the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. . . the Hebrew Bible is our sole direct source of information on Israelite prophecy' (Blenkinsopp, 1995: 119). Within the Hebrew Bible, there are numerous terms used to describe what might have been understood as prophetic activity. While we will look at this in more detail later in our study, a brief overview may be helpful at this point.

***Nabi* נביא**

The most commonly used term in the Hebrew Bible to describe a prophet is *nabi*. The term seems to have some sort of association with the Akkadian verb *nabu* ('to name, call'), and may have the active sense of a 'speaker, herald, preacher', or a passive sense of 'one who has been called' (Koehler-Baumgartner 2001:661-662).

In the Old Testament, it is used broadly to refer not only to prophets *per se*, but to almost any significant figure in leadership. So, the term is used not only of Moses, the prophet *par excellence* in Levitical terms, but also of Abraham (Genesis 20:7); Aaron (Exodus 7:1); Miriam (Exodus 15:20), and Deborah (Judges 4:4). The Mosaic prophet is defined in Deuteronomy 18:18 as one who speaks only that which the Lord has put in his/her mouth: 'I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command'.

It is worth noting that the term is sometimes used in conjunction with other descriptors. For example, Gad is referred to not only as a *nabi*, but also as a *hozeh* (2 Samuel 24:11). And when Saul goes in search of Samuel to ask for help in locating his livestock, we are told that what had formerly been referred to as a *nabi*, is now referred to as a *ro'eh*, or seer (1 Samuel 9:9).

What is most interesting is the fact that of the fifteen 'prophets' to whom written books are attributed, few of them ever use the term *nabi* to describe themselves. In only three (3) cases, Habakkuk, Haggai and Zechariah, is the term found in the superscription of the book. The term is used of Isaiah (37:2, 38:1, 39:3), and Jerermiah (1:5), and only in passing of Ezekiel (2:5).

In point of fact, many of the so-called biblical 'prophets' reject the application of the term to themselves. Amos explicitly rejects that he is a *nabi* (Amos 7:14) while Micah seems to intentionally contrast his own authority and power with that of the *nabi* and *ro'eh* of his own day (Micah 3:5-8). And Zechariah makes the term *nabi* a term of opprobrium (Zechariah 13:2-5). None of the references to Balaam in the Old Testament refer to him as a *nabi*. However, it is worth noting that he refers on several occasions to that fact that he can

only speak that which the Lord has placed in his mouth: ‘The word God puts in my mouth, that is what I must say’ (Numbers 22:38c).

***Ro’eh* רואה**

The *ro’eh* or *seer* was one who was gifted with the ability to see that which was hidden from ordinary eyes. From 1 Samuel 9, we can infer that the seer was normally paid a fee for his services, and seems to have been based in a particular locale. Although Balaam is never referred to in the Hebrew Bible by this terminology, it is interesting to note that the narrator makes much of the verb ‘to see’, in both positive and negative ways.

***Hozeh* חוזה**

Blenkinsopp has noted that it is difficult to distinguish the *hozeh* or ‘visionary’ from the seer. And in fact, within the Hebrew Bible, they were sometimes bracketed together (cf. Isaiah 30:10). Likewise, no great attempt was made to distinguish the *hozeh* from the *nabi* (cf. 2 Kings 17:13; Isaiah 29:10, Micah 3:7). (Blenkinsopp, 1995:125). Amaziah refers to Amos as a *hozeh*, while Amos retorts that he is most definitely <u>not</u> a *nabi* (Amos 7:12-15). This would seem to indicate that these words functioned almost interchangeably within ancient Israel. (See also the example of Gad who is called by the biblical author a *hozeh*, while Nathan is referred to as *nabi*.)

***Qesem* קסם**

In Deuteronomy 18:10, the reader is told that those practising divination were not permitted in Israel. Divination is included in the list of prohibited practices, including soothsaying, augury, and sorcery. As previously noted, in the Old Testament, the only vocational designation ever given to Balaam is that of *qesem*, found in the Joshua 13:22 account. However, it is important to note that nowhere in the record of Numbers 22-24 are

we told that Balaam ever accepted a fee for divination, nor does he appear to have functioned as a diviner within the story.

Nahash **נחשׁ**

In Numbers 24:1 we are told that Balaam did not go to 'look for omens' as he apparently had at other times. The term *nahash* often refers to the practise of divination or the seeking of omens. However, it could also be understood as referring to 'bewitchment, magic curse' (Holladay 1988:235). It is used in this fashion in Numbers 23:23 ('There is no enchantment against Jacob. . .'). In this instance, then, the author may be telling the reader that Balaam is no longer seeking to curse Israel – but rather, to seek a *word* from the LORD.

5.3.2 Towards a resolution – 'role sets'

As we have observed, there were a number of different terms used in the Old Testament that might have application to Balaam. The key problem is that the narrative itself (Nu. 22-24) makes no judgment on the matter. This has led some to surmise that Balaam was someone entirely outside of Israel's prophetic context. Christopher Mitchell has concluded that Balaam is best understood as a Mesopotamian *baru* (Mitchell 1987:91). In a fascinating study entitled *The Balaam Traditions, Their Character and Development* (1990), Michael Moore suggests that the Balaam cycles are best understood as reflecting an *intra-role conflict*. Balak *expects* Balaam to serve as a sorcerer/exorcist (מכשׁפה), while Balaam sees his role as that of one who receives oracles (רואה). Moore understands the final form of the text as an attempt to allow the recognition and preservation of both *role-sets* (diviner/seer and sorcerer/exorcist) while placing the primary focus on Israel's God. For the present, we will

need to hold these possibilities in tension, as we seek a clearer understanding of the text, and of the role that Balaam plays in the story.

5.4 Cultural Topics: The Role of Honour in Numbers 22

Victor Matthews and Don Benjamin have discussed the place and role of *honour* in the social context of ancient Israel (Matthews 1993: 143-145). The concept of 'honour' serves as a 'pivotal value' in ANE culture, and accordingly, plays an important role in the Balaam narratives. As Bruce Malina observes:

> Honour, is, then a claim to worth *and* the social acknowledgement of that worth. For a person in a society concerned with honour, there is a constant dialectic, a thinking back and forth, between the norms of society and how the person is to reproduce those norms in specific behaviour. . . . The right and title to worth is the right to status, and status (one's set of rights and obligations) derives from the recognition of one's social identity. Consequently, one who is in society depends upon his honour rating, which situates the person on the status ladder of the community.
>
> Thus a person's claim to honour requires a grant of reputation by others before it becomes honour in fact. . . So the problem of honour for the person claiming it resolves about how, by whom, and on what grounds others will judge and evaluate a person's actions as worthy of repute. (Malina 1993:32-33)

(See also Bruce Malina and Jerome Neyrey's fascinating study 'Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterrean World', pages 25-65 in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, Jerome Neyrey, ed., Peabody, Massachusetts, Hendrickson, 1991.)

Malina observes that honour in the ancient world was a limited commodity. One could either have it *ascribed* by virtue of position, or one could *acquire* honour in a challenge and response interaction. Through this 'social tug of war' one would contend with other non-family members for their honour (Malina 1993:34).

'Ascribed honour' is that which is obtained either through kinship or endowment – not through their own effort or personal achievement. It can be bestowed on a person by a king.

And it appears that this is Balak's intention when he repeatedly says to Balaam through his messengers: 'Do not let anything hinder you from coming to me; for I will surely do you great honour' (Numbers 22:16b-17a). Balak repeats this in 22:37 when he says to Balaam: 'Am I not able to honour you?' Balak is offering to give a grant of ascribed honour to Balaam in return for his services.

In evaluating their interaction, it is important to recognise the cultural distance between the world of the Ancient Near East and that of the contemporary European context. From the European perspective, we understand others in terms of an apriori commitment to individualism. Individuals are presumed to be able to make their own choices, according to their own goals and desires, without regard to others. The promotion of individual freedom and choice are paramount values. It was not so in the Ancient Near East (any more than it is today within highly traditional cultures). In the ancient world, 'individual' actors were understood in terms of *dyadic* relationships to others within their clan, tribe and nation. Their social status and role was not self-determined, but group-determined. Rather than looking to one's achievements to validate one's choices, the dyadic person looks to the group for information and affirmation about who she or he is. They are, as Malina and Neyrey note, 'strong group persons', whose 'psychological ego reference' is directed towards some group (Malina and Neyrey 1991: 72-74). Within this dyadic relational context, one finds a principle of reciprocity in relationships. These contracts of reciprocity are unwritten, informal and essentially unenforceable, but for the shame to be incurred if one fails to keep up one's obligation. Malina describes it this way (speaking of the world of the New Testament):

> Perhaps the most significant form of social interaction in the limited-good world of the first century is an informal principle of reciprocity, a sort of implicit, nonlegal contractual obligation, unenforceable by any authority apart

> from one's sense of honour and shame. By means of this principle of reciprocity, the honourable person selects (or is selected by) another for a series of ongoing, unspecified acts of mutual support. This is what George Foster calls the "dyadic contract". He defnines it as an implicit contract informally binding pairs of contractants rather than groups (recall that "dyad" means a pair, a twosome). In our limited-good world, such contracts can bind persons of equal status (colleague contracts) or persons of different statuses (patron-client contracts). (Malina 1993: 100-101)

Such dyadic contracts are often initiated by the rendering of a positive challenge – an invitation to a meal, the receipt of an honour, etc. that will then serve to bind the recipient in an 'on-going reciprocal relationship'. Failure to embrace the reciprocal nature of the relationship would be unthinkable. While Malina's work focuses on the 1st century Mediterrean world, the principles elucidated ring true for the world of the Ancient Near East (as, indeed, they do for the world of traditional cultures today in Africa and elsewhere).

Balak's interaction with Balaam could thus be understood as a dyadic colleague contract imposing reciprocal obligations on two parties of somewhat equal status and rank. While Balak is a king, and Balaam only a diviner, the latter's international reputation and unique skills place him in a position of apparent parity. Some scholars have even contended that they were in a position of actual parity. John Greene has argued that Balaam was in fact a priest-king, who was in a social standing of parity with Balak:

> A careful reading of the Numbers 22-24 material, as well as the Balaam account from Deir 'Alla, suggests that the historical Balaam was more than a shadowy figure who possessed the ability to effectively curse people until he met Israel. There is the suggestion that Balaam was a monarch! Shedding more light on this issue is a recent work which studied communication techniques in the ancient Near East (hence ANE) for an extended period. It demonstrates that Balak's message to Balaam (Numbers 22:5-7; 15-17) is cast in the form of one equal communicating with another king! (Greene 1992: x-xi)

Greene contends that the Balaam of Numbers 22-24 may be none other than King Bela of Genesis 36:32. (The difference in names is only the final *mem*.) He thus concludes that: '[i]t

seems likely that underlying the numerous accounts of Balaam was a monarch who was famous for his abilities as a diviner – and who, like the others, became a legend: in his time and. . . well beyond' (Greene 1992: xi).

However, there is another dimension as well. Within the context of the narrative, their interaction may also be analysed as a *challenge-riposte* relationship, as Balaam pursues a sort of *acquired* honour. In such a case, the person seeking a claim of honour bases it upon their socially recognized achievements. A challenge-riposte describes a type of social communication by which the challenger (herein Balak) sends a symbolised message (his offer to reward Balaam with silver and gold) in a public context. The public nature of the challenge ensures that the receiving individual will respond, since to fail to do so would be to lose face, and therefore, one's honour. As Malina and Neyrey point out:

> Because it is a serious matter and honour demands that only equals play, the receiver must judge whether he is equal to the challenger, whether the challenger honours him by regarding him as an equal, or whether the challenger dishonours him by implying equality when there is none, because the receiver is either of a higher level or a lower level." (Malina and Neyrey, 1991: 31)

They suggest that such a challenge involves three stages (Malina and Neyrey, 1991: 29-30):

> (a) a *challenge* in terms of some action (word, deed, or both) on the part of the challenger.
>
> (b) the *perception* of the message by both the individual to whom it is directed and the public at large; and
>
> (c) the *reaction* of the receiving individual and the evaluation of the reaction on the part of the public (and the rendering of a 'verdict' on the contest).

Balak repeatedly sends for Balaam with the entreaty: 'Am I not able to honour you?' (22:17, 37). His words serve both as an invitation and *command*, or challenge. If Balaam accedes to the request, then Balak stands to gain face and respect with his people. Should

Balaam refuse, then Balak will lose face, and his credibility as the king-protector of his nation. Balaam as well stands to gain and potentially lose much in the encounter. Although the text does not specify that the challenge message was delivered to Balaam in a public forum, it seems apparent that the arrival of the emissaries of a foreign king would have been noted by the community in which Balaam lived.

Any action taken by the receiver of the challenge constitutes a *riposte.* It can be either an acceptance of the challenge message, or a refusal to act (stated in either a positive or negative manner). Balaam's initial refusal to come is perceived as a challenge to Balak's position and authority. His failure to offer to do anything serves as a message ascribing dishonour to Balak. Balak, ignoring the implied dishonour, continue the challenge and responds with yet more important emissaries and the promise to bestow even more honour upon Balaam.

When, in the story Yahweh causes Balaam to prophesy only blessing for Israel, thereby thwarting Balak's plans, his inevitable loss of face is evidenced by his explosion of anger at Balaam in Numbers 24:10-11. Balaam has 'broken' his social contract with Balak. He has failed to keep his obligations under the dyadic colleague contract, and has not reciprocated as Balak expects. As such, he incurs a loss of honour. At stake is not merely the lost promise of reward, but the shame brought upon Balak by Balaam's failure to carry out his mission.

5.5 Social and Cultural Setting of the Implied Author and Implied Reader

5.5.1 The Social & Cultural Location of Numbers 22-24, and the 'Tale of the Donkey'(Num 22:21-35)

We have tentatively suggested that there is evidence of a prophetic 'redefinition' or reinterpretation that takes place within the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24. Two

different portraits of Balaam are presented which reflect two different stages in the development of the 'definition' of a prophet. The first stage is pre-exilic, and represents a situation in which the Old Testament authors did not make a strong distinction between prophets and 'seeing prophets' (diviners/seers), as evidenced by the gloss found in 1 Samuel 9:9. Diviners are numbered among the leadership of Israel in Isaiah 3:2. (In reflecting on the pre-exilic milieu, the Chronist refers to Samuel as both prophet and seer.) Bosman notes that Deuteronomy 13:1-2 'reflects a pre-exilic view of prophecy that allowed for the overlapping with divination – i.e. the performing of signs and wonders' (Bosman 1996:14). This overlap becomes impossible after the redefinition of prophecy takes place, pitting divination and prophecy against one another in Deuteronomy 18 (Bosman 1996:14).

The second stage of prophecy represents an exilic/early post-exilic time frame. The period after the fall of Samaria, and before the fall of Jerusalem was a time of great tension. Ed Noort has suggested that a decided shift takes place during the years 722-586 BCE, in which a 'thoroughly principled condemnation of all forms of queries to God – apart from the word-of-God prophet' begins (Noort 2008:19). Those who understood the times were able to see what had already happened to Israel, and to anticipate what might be coming for Judah. The prophets were the voice of opposition, calling for obedience to Yahweh's commands, and to the realisation of justice and mercy within the community of the people of God. Theirs was not a popular message. Accordingly, both prophets and prophecy were generally discounted within this milieu as people were no longer hungry to hear the Word of Yahweh (cf. Hosea 9:7). As Barton notes:

> For pre-exilic Israel, the classical prophets were eccentrics, strange and alarming figures who broke through the mould of accepted beliefs and values but who in the process, changed the values and altered the national religion scarcely paralleled in the ancient world. (Barton 2007:269).

Under Assyrian (and later Babylonian) social, cultural and religious domination, a reaction occurred towards the divinatory practices (among other religious practices) that were common within these two empires. Such practices threatened the very means by which the community of Israel was able to receive the Word of Yahweh through the words of his prophets. As a result, during the exile, prophets and priests (between whom there had never been any great distinction) banned together to stand against the proliferation of divinatory practices. Bosman notes that this new alliance presents an interesting example of 'patronage', in which the priests (acting as patrons) extend recognition and authority to the prophets (who act as clients) by recognising them as numbered among the religious officials of Israel (Bosman 1996:14). Their counsel must be heeded (e.g. Deuteronomy 18:15 'you must listen to him'), provided, however, that they speak only what Yahweh commands them to speak. In return, the prophets eschew and condemn divination and sorcery (Bosman 1996:15).

From their vantage point, the prophetic laws of Deuteronomy 18 served to provide a Deuteronomic redefinition of prophecy from one which was inclusive of divination (Deut 13:1-2), to one which portrayed Moses as the paradigmatic prophet, and the explication & application of Torah as the main business of prophetic pronouncement (Bosman 1996:10). This redefinition provided a critique of the prolific diversity of divinatory practices extant within Babylonia, as well as guaranteed the priests their central role in the religious life of Israel as intermediaries.

The change marks what Barton has referred to as 'the point at which prophetic utterances cease to be the spring from which a living and continuous tradition flows and become instead a closed container in which the unalterable words of the prophets are preserved' (Barton 2007:270). Barton suggests that this process, begun during the exile, reaches its climax during the early post-exilic era or 'age of Ezra' (Barton 2007:270-271).

Van der Toorn concurs that the process of redefinition begins at some point within the exilic context, as the 'Torah' edition of the book of Deuteronomy comes to the fore (Van der Toorn 2007:158-159). From the perspective of the editor of the 'Torah' edition of Deuteronomy, prophecy becomes the 'Israelite answer to the divinatory practices of the heathen nations' (Van der Toorn 2007:158). The 'prophet like Moses' of Deuteronomy 18:15 refers not to a single figure but to 'one in a succession of prophets' – that is, those who serve as 'extensions of the priests who possess the Torah' (Van der Toorn 2007:159).

During the exile (and early post-exilic era) the centralization of the cult led to a renewed critique of the manifestations of divination which had resisted a centralised authority. So, priests and prophets joined together to ensure the stability of the socio-political-religious community, and placed the focus on the exposition and application of the Torah to the realities of life within the exilic and post-exilic contexts. As noted, divination was reinterpreted out of the picture of legitimate prophetic activity as ecstatic utterance gives way to the teaching of the Torah. Nevertheless, the older picture was not wiped from the slate entirely. For example, in the writings of the Chronist, one can see that the community continued to utilise both definitions of prophecy in a sort of creative tension. This creative tension maintained the priority of the Word of Yahweh prophet and the emphasis on the exposition and application of the written Word of the prophets and the Torah as the primary focus of prophetic activity. Nevertheless, the remembrance of seers and diviners within the memory of the community was not wiped clean from the slate. Rather, these conflicted definitions continued to co-exist after a fashion. This can be seen as follows:

Table 21 A description of prophetic activity by prophet in 1-2 Chronicles

Verse in Chronicles	Prophet's name	Description of Prophetic Activity
1 Chr 17:1	Nathan	נביא
1 Chr 29:29	Samuel	ראה
1 Chr 29:29	Nathan	נביא
1 Chr 29:29	Gad	חוזה
2 Chr 9:29	Nathan	נביא
2 Chr 9:29	Iddo	חוזה
2 Chr 12:5	Shemaiah	נביא
2 Chr 12:15	Shemaiah	נביא
2 Chr 12:15	Iddo	חוזה
2 Chr 13:22	Iddo	נביא
2 Chr 18:6	---	נביא ליהוה
2 Chr 21:12	Elijah	נביא
2 Chr 25:15	(un-named)	נביא
2 Chr 25:16	(un-named)	נביא
2 Chr 26:22	Isaiah	נביא
2 Chr 28:9	(un-named)	נביא ליהוה
2 Chr 29:25	Gad	חוזה־המלך
2 Chr 29:25	Nathan	נביא
2 Chr 32:20 2 Chr 32:32	Isaiah Isaiah	נביא נביא
2 Chr 35:18	Samuel	נביא
2 Chr 36:12	Jeremiah	נביא

A review of the descriptive terminology used of prophets within 1-2 Chronicles reveals that the Chronist utilises different words for the same individual (e.g. Samuel, Iddo). While the use of נביא predominates, there is a continued usage of both ראה and חוזה. This would seem to indicate that there is a desire, even after the 'redefinition' process to continue the memory of both traditions. In part, this may be due to the Chronist's respect for the earlier traditions of Samuel/Kings. However, it may also serve to illustrate the dynamic nature of biblical prophecy. Bosman suggests that this 'reflects a post-exilic trend to

incorporate this type of religious practicioner within the central religious and political power structures' (Bosman 1996:16).

Within the story of Balaam in Num 22-24 we see this at work as well. The 'positive view' of Balaam evidences a pre-exilic viewpoint that accepted diviners as functioning within the definition of prophetism. The Tale of the Donkey serves to lampoon Balaam as a sort of wayward 'unseeing prophet' who must learn that only 'Word of Yahweh' prophets need apply. The text of Num 22-24 leaves *both portraits* intact because both portraits were *already circulating* within Israel.

The question of just 'when' this process of re-evaluating the portrait of Balaam takes place is difficult to place with certainty. As we have already observed, the re-definition of prophecy most probably takes place either in the late pre-exilic period (Noort), or within the Exilic period (Bosman, Van der Toorn, Barton). Barton notes that the redefinition may not have represented a 'point' in time, so much as a process that began in the exilic period and continued into the early post-exilic period (Barton 2007:270-271). The incorporation of the Tale of the Donkey (Num 22:21-35) into the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24 could have taken place *either* during the exilic or early post-exilic periods. Dozeman suggests that it may well have been the early post-exilic period if, in fact, the Priestly writers are responsible for the incorporation of the Tale of the Donkey. If so, then the positive portrait of Balaam as a word-of-Yahweh prophet represents the pre-priestly (pre-exilic) version, and the negative representation of Balaam represents the priestly re-interpretation during the early post-exilic period. Dozeman notes that this would accord well with the verdict on Balaam found in Numbers 31:8 which associates Balaam's end with that of the Midianite kings: 'The death of both the Midianites and Balaam in the priestly account of holy war in chapter 31 lends support to this hypothesis' (Dozeman 1998:179). In one sense, it is not necessary for us to be

too dogmatic about the exact timing. The concerns of the priests during both the exilic and early post-exilic periods were similar – to centralize religious authority under their supervision. The question of carefully defining just who was an Israelite, and of encouraging strong adherence to the provisions of the Torah were concerns that 'overlapped' both eras in Isarel's history.

How then, can we understand the social and cultural context that gave rise to this development? A brief overview of the social and cultural context in the pre-exilic, exilic and early post-exilic periods will assist us in this undertaking.

5.5.2 The Pre-exilic Social and Cultural Context

The fall of Samaria and the destruction of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BCE, demonstrated beyond question that the warnings of Amos and Hosea had been well founded. The refugees from the north and supporters of Hosea had a tremendous impact in stirring up reform movements within Judah. These movements found their culmination in the reforms of King Hezekiah in the 8th century, and of King Josiah in the 7th century, as many posed questions that were critical to Judah's future: How could Judah avoid the same fate that had befallen Israel? What changes needed to be implemented in Judah's social and religious life in order that they might be blessed by Yahweh?

The author of 2 Kings 18 tells us of Hezekiah's efforts at reform. Hezekiah is credited with having destroyed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the sacred poles devoted to Asherah. In addition, he destroyed a bronze serpent (attributed to Moses) called Neshutan, which had become a snare to the people of Judah (2 Kgs 18:4). The author of 2 Kings describes Hezekiah as a man who trusted in Yahweh. Hezekiah attempted to ensure that Yahweh would only be worshipped at places sacred to his name, and to ensure that idols were not used in cultic worship (Albertz 2002:95).

As important as these reforms were, they were relatively short-lived. Hezekiah's heir, Manasseh would reign for 55 years, and undo many of the reforms of his father's reign. Manasseh rebuilt the high places, erected altars to Baal, and erected an Asherah pole. He introduced the worship of constellations, of Molech, and engaged in the practice of sorcery, divination and the consultation of spirit mediums (2 Kgs 21:3-6). His reign was one of unmitigated disaster for Judah.

Nevertheless, as the power of Assyria began to wane (ca 640 BCE), a renewed effort at reform began to develop, led by a coalition comprised of the Jerusalem governmental bureaucracy under Shaphan; the priesthood under Hilkiah; a number of the Judean rural nobility ('people of the land') together with some prophetic support (e.g. Huldah, Jeremiah). This coalition was able to place Josiah on the throne (1 Kgs 21:24) and to guide the boy king into the ways of Yahweh as he came of age. The story of the finding of the 'book of the law' within the temple by Hilkiah is recorded in 2 Kgs 22:8. While it is not entirely clear, it seems that this book consisted of an early version of the material in what became known as the book of Deuteronomy.

The reforms that were enacted under Josiah's rule (ca 622 BCE) would have far reaching effects. These reforms were motivated by the recognition of God's judgment on the northern kingdom of Israel, and the desire to avoid a similar fate. A new identity would be sought for Judah, one focused on the worship of Yahweh. Their rallying cry of the community would be the words of Deut 6:4 'שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל'. Their desire was to cleanse the Temple of Jerusalem of all subsidiary cults and foreign religious influences (which had become pervasive during the period of Assyrian domination), to centralise the worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem, and to integrate family worship into the worship of Yahweh

The author of 2 Kings records that Josiah destroyed all of the articles in the temple intended for the worship of Baal and Asherah (2 Kgs 23:4ff). He banished the worship of the constellations, burned the Asherah pole and destroyed the altar to Molech (2 Kgs 23:5-6, 10). Since the Assyrians had abandoned their possessions in the former northern kingdom of Israel, Josiah also went to Bethel in the north and destroyed the sanctuary there (2 Kgs 23:15), and did the same throughout the territory of the former Northern Kingdom (23:19).

The scope of the reform movement under Josiah's leadership is reflected in the provisions of Deuteronomy 12-26. The adoption of the Deuteronomic laws would impact not only the religious life of Israel, but also its social life in profound ways. The sabbatical year (Deut 15) would require the release of debt every seven years. The triennial tithe was to be dedicated to the care of the poor (Deut 14:28f.). The people of God would learn what it meant to 'walk in the ways of Yahweh' (Deut 26:17). In point of fact, faithfulness to God's covenant would be reflected in their treatment of alien, the orphan and the widow (Deut 26:13). After enduring economic oppression by the wealthy for generations, this was, indeed, good news for the poor. No longer were there to be social divisions between rich and poor among the people of God. It was a marvellous theological vision.

However, after the death of Josiah in battle at Megiddo in 609 BCE, Judah became a vassal state once again: first to Egypt, and then, in 603 BCE to Babylon. These developments broke apart the Reform coalition that had supported Josiah's reforms. The priesthood had achieved its primary objectives – the reform of the cult. The officials associated with the family of Shaphan had defected to the opposition during King Jehoiakim's reign (Jer 36). Jeremiah himself became disillusioned by the realisation that the upper classes had not really embraced the social reforms of Deuteronomy (Jer 5:4f.).

Jehoiakim's political policies of vacillation and intrigue against Babylon led to Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem in 597 BCE, and the first Judean deportation (which included Jehoiachin and Ezekiel). The political and religious elite fractured into two parties who were bitterly opposed to one another (Albertz 2002:99). The 'Nationalists' led by the priestly family of Hilkiah sought deliverance from Babylon in seeking a political alliance with Egypt. They strongly opposed Jeremiah's counsel to submit to Babylon's rule as God's judgment (Jer 28:2-4). Their commitment was to their 'Zion Theology' – the belief that Yahweh would never allow Jerusalem and the Temple to fall. The 'Reform' party remained centred around Shaphan's family. They were 'pro-Babylon' and supported Jeremiah who contended that submission to Babylonian rule was the only way to avoid disaster. The Nationalists were able to win over King Zedekiah, whose intrigues against Babylon led to Nebuchadnezzar's eventual crushing of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 586 BCE (2 Kgs 26). Nevertheless, the Deuteronomic theology was not dead. It would become the theology of the community of God's people in exile in Babylon.

5.5.3 Judah in Exile in Babylon

The biblical accounts of the Exile tell us differing accounts of the impact of the deportations on Judah. Jeremiah 52:28-30 indicates a total of 4,600 deportees from each of the three deportations: 3,023 Judeans in the first deportation (597 BCE); the second deportation, 832 Jerusalemites (586 BCE), and in the third deportation, 745 Judeans (582 BCE). The author of 2 Kings 24 gives two figures for the same group. In v. 14, the reader is told that 10,000 persons in total were deported, including 'all' officials, warriors, artisans, and smiths – only the 'poor' remained. Then in v. 16, the reader is told that the Babylonians deported 7,000 warriors and 1,000 artisans & smiths.

Scholars have normally taken Jeremiah's figures to be closer to the actual number, although it is difficult to be certain (Blenkinsopp 2002:416). What does seem to be clear is that the exile did not completely 'depopulate' Judah. It has been suggested that at most, the deportations involved 10% of Judah's population. This would mean a total deportation of some 20,000 persons out of an estimated population of 200,000 (Blenkinsopp 2002:417). Those taken into exile most likely represented the 'elite' of Judean leadership. If so, then the author of Kings is hardly overstating the case when he reports that Nebuchadnezzar carried away 'all Jerusalem' (2 Kgs 24:14). The fact that the Babylonians left some of the peasantry (דלת הארץ), behind to continue farming the land and tending the vineyards, indicates that the entire infrastructure of Judah was not destroyed. In fact, it seems as if the willingness of the Benjaminites to accept Babylonian rule led to the territory of Benjamin being largely spared the destruction visited upon Jerusalem. The town of Mizpah would be chosen for the centre of the Babylonian administration of Judah (Blenkinsopp 2002:425).[17]

There is, however, considerable debate as to what remained of the Judean infrastructure after the Babylonian campaigns. Barstad is representative of those scholars who believe that the economic life of Judah continue apace during the exile. He writes that:

> Obviously, we should not belittle the several deportations. What we must renounce, however, is the claim that these deportations affected life in Palestine the way earlier generations of scholars believed. The Judah left behind by the Babylonians was not a desolate and empty country lying in ruins until the Jews miraculously arrived back under Cyrus. After the fall of Jerusalem, Judah made up another cog in the great economic wheels of the Neo-Babylonian empire, and life went on after 586 pretty much in the same way that it did before the arrival of Nebuchadnezzar's armies. (Barstad 2003:14)

[17] It is even possible that some sort of sanctuary was installed at Mizpah (Blenkinsopp 2002:425).

If this were the case, it would help to explain the resentment of those still in the land at the return of the refugees from Babylon.[18]

However, such an assessment may be far too optimistic. As Fried notes, ‘the notion that life went on as before, unchanged, greatly underestimates the role of both temple and palace’ (Fried 2003:22). The capital city of Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed. All of the political and religious leadership that mattered was in exile in Babylon. No organized community remained in the form of political, social or religious institutions. There is no biblical evidence that any of the priesthood or itinerant prophets remained in the land. Economic life was reduced to the barest essentials of maintaining life, except, perhaps, in the territory of Benjamin surrounding Mizpah, that became the centre of Babylonian, and later Persian provincial administration (Oded 2003:67-69). A population of uncertain size remained and provided a measure of continuity – but one which was decidedly impoverished compared with the situation prior to the deportations.

It may be best not to be too dogmatic about the level of economic activity that continued after the Babylonian campaigns. The archaeological evidence is simply not sufficient to allow for more than careful speculation at this point (Stern 2004:274). However, it does seem clear that life did not continue on as if the deportations and destruction of Jerusalem had never occurred. The Exile had a profound psychological and theological impact on the people of Israel.

The reality of the Exile required a thorough re-evaluation and re-interpretation of Judah’s theological understanding. The ‘Zion Theology’ which had maintained for so long that Yahweh would never allow his holy city of Jerusalem to fall to its enemies, had been thoroughly discredited, destroying the hopes and dreams of the ‘Nationalist’ party. However,

[18] Blenkinsopp notes that ‘we should not underestimate the resilience of a population afflicted in this way and its ability to restore some semblance of normality in a remarkably short time’ (Blenkinsopp 2002:418).

the members of the so-called ‘Reform’ party struggled as well to interpret the meaning of the events that they were experiencing. (Jeremiah records that some of the Jews of the Egyptian diaspora maintained that these disasters had occurred as a *result* of the reform efforts of Josiah. It was the failure to continue the offering of the sacred cakes to the ‘Queen of heaven’, etc., that had brought about the destruction of Judah (Jer 7:18). However, the reform theologians were able to demonstrate that it was the failure of God’s people to obey his commands that had led to these political disasters. The theology of the earlier prophets who had spoken in opposition to the policies of the monarchy, now became the foundational basis for the faith of the exiles.

Those living in the Exile struggled to understand their relationship and identity as a people now that they were no longer in the land promised by Yahweh to the Patriarchs. This cognitive dissonance would give rise to the reinterpretation of the events of the Exile and of the prophetic role. The reforms begun by Hezekiah, and later continued by Josiah under the influence of the Deuteronomic theologians would have a profound impact on shaping the theological understanding of Israel’s identity. A focus on following תורה and on observing the Sabbath and the festival of פסח would serve to keep their identity alive within the family unit (Albertz 2002:105). While it is difficult to speak with any certainty about worship in the Exile, it would seem clear that they were permitted to continue their worship of Yahweh. That scribes and priests were still being trained is evident from Ezra 7:6. When Ezra sought to recruit cult personnel for the restored Temple in Jerusalem, he sought them from the priestly community at Casiphia (Ezra 8:17). Some sort of early synagogue liturgy may also have been present, with the singing of laments as a regular feature of corporate worship (e.g. Ps 137). In a foreign environment, the community would have stressed the observance of

dietary laws, etc. as a means of preserving their ethnic/religious identity (Blenkinsopp 2002:429). For as they anticipated the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer 29:10), they began to ask themselves a key question: As we prepare to enter the land *a second time*, how can we be sure that this time, we will experience God's blessing, and not his judgment?

A theological consensus developed that the Exile had befallen them because of their failure to observe the commands of God (Deut 28:15ff.). In fact, God had been gracious to them even in judgment. The Babylonians treated them as settlers or colonists – not as slaves. They were allowed some measure of self-administration and some, at least, prospered economically within the new setting as tenant farmers, fisherman, and estate managers (Blenkinsopp 2002:427). Thus, the Exiles lived self-consciously as the people of Israel, according to the תורה and waited patiently for God to fulfil his promise to restore them to the Land as promised by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 29:10).

5.5.4 The Social and Cultural Context after the Exile

Jerusalem was destroyed in 597/586 BCE by the Neo-Babylonians under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar II (604-539 BCE). The period of the exile would last until the establishment of the Persian Empire under Cyrus in 539 BCE. The Persian ascendancy would last for two hundred years. During that period, a significant number of Jews would return to Judah from Babylonia as part of a new Persian imperial policy which encouraged the maintenance of the cultural and religious identity of its subject peoples as a means of preserving Persian hegemony. As part of this policy, the Temple itself would be rebuilt in order to encourage the worship of Yahweh by Jewish returnees (Grabbe 2002:441). Albertz notes that it was by no means certain that the 'return' would occur, as many of the exiles were content enough with their lot in Babylonia. The return promised them a long, arduous trip and an uncertain economic future back in the land of Judah (Albertz 1994:444). Moreover,

those prospective returnees who still favored the Nationalist party were skeptical of the concessions to Persian authority that would be required of the returnees. (Albertz 1994:444).

What is significant is that the monarchy was not restored. The province of 'Yehud' now existed as a political subdivision of the satrapy, 'Beyond the River' (alongside of the province of Samaria). It was a small backwater of the greatest empire of the day. However, Yehud was granted limited political autonomy, and the freedom to worship after its own traditions, in exchange for its payment of taxes and loyalty to the Persian Empire. The account of Cyrus's decree in Ezra 1:1 indicates a substantial financial contribution from the Persian treasury towards the project of re-establishing the Temple. While some scholars (e.g. Grabbe 2002:442) see the purported financial assistance as 'unlikely', others have suggested that it was 'not improbable' that this occurred (Albertz 1994:444).

The biblical record speaks of two key figures in the return from exile. Zerubbabel and Joshua the High Priest are spoken of in Haggai's prophecy (1:1) as being key to the rebuilding of the Temple. Darius appointed Zerubbabel as governor of the province of Yehud, and placed him in charge of overseeing the work of rebuilding the Temple. The work was begun (or restarted, if in fact, Sheshbazzar had laid the foundation for the Temple as recorded in Ezra 5:16) in the reign of Darius I, perhaps around 520 BCE (Albertz 2002: 109). According to the account found in Ezra 6:15, the project of rebuilding took only four years to complete. The Temple was dedicated in 515 BCE. No longer was the Temple under the control of the monarchy – not it remained solely under the control of the priesthood.

What is interesting is that Zerubbabel is not mentioned again in the account. (Nor for that matter are Haggai or Zechariah mentioned in connection with the dedication of the Temple.) Some scholars have conjectured that this was due to efforts of 'Nationalist' theologians to argue not only for the rebuilding of the Temple, but for the re-establishment of

the monarchy with Zerubbabel as a king from David's line as well. There are some intimations of this in the prophecies of Haggai (2:23) and Zechariah (4:6-7; 6:12-14). If this is an accurate supposition, it may have been necessary for Zerubbabel to be removed from his position as governor in order to assure Yehud's continued acceptance of Persian rule. (Perhaps there were concerns that Yehud might align itself with Egypt in an attempt to subvert Persian rule.) In any event, the theologians of the 'Reform party' would prevail in relegating the re-establishment of a Davidic kingship to a distant eschatological future.

The next key figures to appear on the scene in the mid-fifth century are Ezra and Nehemiah. Some have suggested that they constituted the answer to nationalistic movements among the returnees. Nehemiah came as a provincial governor, working in cooperation with, and under the oversight of the Persian authorities. The book of Nehemiah records that he steadfastly resisted any attempts by the community to proclaim him as 'king' (Neh 6:6-14). For his part, in 458 BCE, Ezra was given a position of 'Persian secretary for Jewish affairs' by Artaxerxes, with the full authority of the Persian government to apply the laws of the Pentateuch to all Jews residing in the satrapy of עבר נהרה ('Beyond the River') as recorded in Ezra 7:11ff. Within this new political structure, Nehemiah as governor presided over an administrative staff of officials charged with the political administration of the nine administrative districts that comprised Yehud. Under this provincial government structure, a layer of Jewish self-government existed consisting of three bodies: a council of elders, a college of priests (priests, Levites, and Temple personnel), and a popular Assembly of the people that met as occasion demanded (Albertz 2002:110). The book of Nehemiah records that Nehemiah's efforts to rebuild the walls surrounding the city of Jerusalem met with some opposition from neighboring peoples. Inasmuch as the Persian authorities permitted semi-autonomous rule by provincial governors, it was not surprising that Sanballat, the governor of

Samaria would have been opposed to a resurgent Jerusalem (Nehemiah 4). (Presumably, the satrap would have intervened had things gotten too far out of hand.)

Nehemiah faced a great number of challenges in his administration. One of the chief problems facing the new province of Yehud was the economic disparity and social inequity that existed between the upper classes and the majority of the population. This 5th century social crisis threatened the peace and prosperity of the new community. Those who had remained in the land during the exile were the peasantry. Always existing just above the subsistence level, their livelihoods were now threatened by the return of the leadership elite from Babylon. The gap between the wealthy & privileged returnees and those who had remained in the land was huge. In Nehemiah 5:1-5, we read of complaints brought by the poor against their Jewish neighbors. Some were on the verge of starvation (Neh 5:2), while others had to mortgage their fields, vineyards and homes just to survive a period of famine, and to pay the now heavy taxes levied by the Persian administration, the מדת המלך ('king's tax'). Albertz has suggested that these amounted to nearly 30% (Albertz 2002:111).

Worst of all, some of the most oppressed families were forced into to 'selling' their sons and daughters as indentured servants. In fact, there was evidence that some of the young women had been subjected to sexual abuse and rape while working for their overlords (Neh 5:5). While Nehemiah seems to have taken active steps to address the worst of these abuses, the economic disparity and oppression would continue. The wealthy classes were not about to do anything that would upset relations with their Persian overlords. Moreover, they stood to profit by situation. Thus, the economic and social disparity that was extant in Yehud now posed not only a social crisis, but an ethical-religious one. For the Deuteronomic theology had made clear that covenantal faithfulness was measured, in large part, by one's response to the orphan, the widow and the alien (Deut 26:13). The economic prosperity of the wealthy

had the additional impact of making the rich believe that they were secure apart from any dependence upon Yahweh's provision. Albertz has suggested that Jeremiah's description of these wealthy landowners as רשׁע ('wicked') is aptly applied to their counterparts in the 5th century.

There were those wealthy and socially conscious individuals who took up the cause of the poor, the צדק ('righteous'), who resemble the description of Job in Job 29. [Albertz suggests that the entire book of Job constitutes 'one long pastoral scheme seeking to cope with this difficult problem' (Albertz 1994:502).[19]] This relationship between the wealthy privileged classes and the 'righteous' advocates for the poor would continue to be a source of theological and social tension.

In such a social context, it is, therefore, not at all surprising that the poor of the land turned once again to the prophetic message as a source of hope and as a rallying cry against injustice. Alienated, impoverished and 'trapped' in an inequitable system from which they could not free themselves, the eschatological message of hope for the future would have provided some comfort in an otherwise dismal setting.

Theologically, the failure of the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah to be fulfilled in the restoration of the Davidic monarchy posed a problem for the understanding of the role of the prophetic voice within the community. Three steps were taken to deal with this. A deliberate attempt was made to 'tone down' the prophecies; prophecy as an institution was now marginalised and its message increasingly relegated to the distant future eschatologically (Albertz 1994:454). Prophecy could not be entirely discredited, because the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah had placed such emphasis on the Temple and the role of the High

[19] Hamilton suggests that 'it is defensible to read chs. 29-31 in light of issues of the post-exilic era' (Hamilton 2007:88). However, not all agree. Roberts cautions against engaging in eisegesis in reading the social concerns of the post-exilic period into the book of Job (Roberts 2002:116).

Priest within the community. Moreover, the lay Council of Elders had great sympathy for prophecy in general. But the priesthood recognized that some way had to be found to contain prophetic excesses and to refocus the prophetic voice in a way that worked in concert with the restored priesthood of the Second Temple community. Albertz summarizes their efforts succinctly:

> The compromise that they aimed at is typical: whether under pressure from Persia or out of their own insight, on the one hand they corrected the prophetic spokesmen of the nationalist hope for restoration, curbed them with the law, and banished their failed prophecies to a distant future. On the other hand, they attempted to divert the unfulfilled potential of hope to existing practical political possibilities, active co-operation in the rebuilding (Zech. 8.9-13) and the creation of a social climate governed by a social contract (8.16f., 19b). (Albertz 1994:456)

Thus the priestly writers were able to banish utopian elements of early post-exilic prophecy and to develop Moses into the 'incomparable super-prophet', making the Mosaic legislation the criterion for all prophecy. As a final touch, they connected the political administration of elders within the Mosaic tradition with the prophetic spirit (Numbers 11:25), affording legitimacy to the lay Council of Elders. Thus, the various power brokers within the social-political structure of Yehud were able to reach a compromise that was evidenced in the final form of the Pentateuch which maintains both non-priestly and priestly materials. 'Prophets' and 'prophecy' were still revered after a fashion, but forever thereafter identified with the Mosaic authority and tradition. An alliance between prophets and priests in maintaining the centralized authority of the cult allowed for social and political stability, and for a 'prophetic' call to obedience to the תורה associated with the Mosaic tradition. Within this context and setting, the older forms of prophecy associated with divination and 'seeing prophets' would be remembered – but no longer play an active role in the religious life of the post-exilic community.

The implications of this for our study of Balaam are clear. A non-Israelite seer/diviner could not longer be seen as some sort of 'righteous gentile'. While his prophecies of blessing and the defeat of Israel's enemies afforded great comfort, the prophet himself could not longer be venerated. Thus, the framers of the final form of Numbers maintain both the older, non-priestly positive portrait of Balaam, alongside of the parody of Balaam contained in the Tale of the Donkey. Balaam will hereafter be remembered not as a Yahweh prophet, but as a buffoon who was used by Yahweh in spite of himself.

5.6 Conclusion

An investigation of social and cultural texture is critical to the understanding of the narratives within the Balaam cycle in Numbers 22-24. As Hens-Piazza has observed, providing a 'thick description' of the social realm of a story 'teases out and details the potential layers and networks of the social world embedded in the tale' (Hens-Piazza 1996:29). Taken in conjunction with the study of the inner texture and the intertexture of the text, a consideration of the social & cultural texture affords a multi-faceted understanding of the passage at hand. Within the Balaam narratives, an examination of the social and cultural texture reveals that Balaam hails most likely from Pitru in Mesopotamia. The relationship between Balak and Balaam can best be described as a 'dyadic contract' in which reciprocal obligations devolve on each party to the contract. The 'challenge-riposte' interaction between these two characters helps to clarify the role of 'honour' within the narratives. Within the final form of the text, the narrator takes care to demonstrate that Balaam, whose position would ordinarily carry with it 'ascribed honour', is really a man without honour. Such honour as Balaam is afforded within the total narrative is the result of his faithfully speaking the word of Yahweh.

An analysis of the social-cultural context of the implied author and implied reader has shown that at all times related to our study, there were various factions vying for political power and position within Judah. In the pre-exilic context factions of so-called ‘Nationalists’ vied for power and influence with the ‘Reform’ party. The hopes and aspirations of both were dashed by the events of 597 and 587 BCE. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the deportation of the most influential of Jerusalem’s leadership to exile in Babylonia had the effect of smashing the ‘Zion Theology’ of the Nationalists. The theologians of the Reform party had to make sense as well of the reality of judgment after their efforts of reform. They resolved this theologically by pointing to the failure of the majority to obey the commands of Yahweh. Within the context of the Exile they were able to reformulate their theology in such a way that it became the rallying cry for the exilic religion.

Chapter 6
Ideological Texture

Robbins has famously noted that 'every theology has a politics' (Robbins 1996a:192). In considering ideological texture, the interpreter is concerned with:

> . . . [T]he social, cultural, and individual location and perspective of writers and readers. Ideological analysis of a text, then, is simply an agreement by various people that they will dialogue and disagree with one another with a text as a guest in the conversation. (Robbins 1996b: 95)

Accordingly, the stated purpose is to examine the 'biases, opinions, and stereotypes of a particular writer and a particular reader' (Robbins 1996b:95). This involves the recognition that there are no 'objective' or 'disinterested' writers or readers. As Kathryn Smith has observed while reflecting on Foucault's writings:

> That is, the very choice of categories to explore, the classifications, groupings, and constructs that make up our knowledge base, are founded on and undergirded by power inequities. Foucault has shown that there is no such thing as disinterested knowledge and that all knowledge presupposes claims for power. This important social/political element too often has been unstated and unacknowledged by scholars in Biblical Studies. (Smith 2008:456)

While the study of ideological texture may not serve completing to remove the log from our interpretative eye, it will at least serve notice of its presence. Acknowledging our ideological perspectives and bias is at least half the battle to hear the text speak on its own terms. 'Ideology' differs from 'theology' in that ideology presupposes a static 'closed system' of thought or belief that is not open to reformation or change on the basis of new evidence or experience. Theology presupposes a dynamic process of self-critical reflection and interaction with the Scriptures, which remains open to development and change in one's conceptualization and formulation of theological truth. Despite every interpreter's desire to 'objectively' interpret the Scriptures from a theological perspective, there is, inevitably, an ideological component to one's reading that arises out of one's social and cultural location.

H. J. Bernard Combrink has noted an 'interesting shift' in the order in which Robbins treated ideological texture in his books *The Tapestry of Texts* (1996a) and *Exploring the Texture of Texts* (1996b). In the former he moves from the discussion of ideology with texts to the discussion of the ideology within particular groups and individuals. In *Exploring*, he reverses the order beginning with the individual interpreter, and ending with the implied author and discourse of the text (Combrink 2003:34).

In our adaptation of Robbins's methodology, we will focus our attention on the function of ideological texture within the implied author and discourse of the text. This will best serve our purpose of discerning the rationale for different portraits of Balaam within the biblical text.[20]

6.1 Spheres of Ideology: The Social-cultural Location of the Implied Author

The implied author of the narrative has relied upon an understanding of previous events in shaping the story. Within the 'story-line' of the book of Numbers, the people of God had proceeded from one victory to another over their enemies (e.g. the Amorite peoples of Bashan and Heshbon). Their *Blitzkrieg* assault of the Transjordan region prior to their arrival on the Plains of Moab across from Jericho leads to the belief in their invincibility. Because of their allegiance to Yahweh, they will defeat all of their enemies. In this context the almost comic antics of Balak (who is after all a king of sorts) and Balaam (the world-class diviner) take place. Convinced that his military-political assets are inadequate to deal with the implied threat, he acts upon his belief system (in sorcery and manipulation of the spirit world) to attempt to solve his problems in foreign affairs. Balaam, operating within a similar

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[20] It is important as well, for the reader/interpreter to examine his own individual social location, theological tradition and biases (Robbins 1996b: 96-97). This interpreter both reads and interprets as a Presbyterian clergyman from within the Reformed confessional tradition. His life experiences as an attorney at law, missionary, pastor and lecturer in a theological context have all served to inform this writer's 'interpretative grid'.

belief context is hired to what his words that which all of Balak's gold and might cannot. But try as they may, they cannot achieve their common goal of cursing God's people. Balak is motivated by fear, and Balaam by greed, but neither is to be satisfied.

What sort of social-cultural location is evidenced by the implied-author's discourse? What ideological factors are at work in his presentation? As Robbins notes: 'When a person reads for the ideological aspects of a text, he or she seeks to find both the interests of the author and how those interests are argued' (Robbins 1996b:118). Robbins quotes T H Carney's 'taxonomy' of factors evidencing the social and cultural location of the implied author (Robbins 1996b:111-112):

(1) Previous events
(2) Natural environment and resources
(3) Population structure
(4) Technology
(5) Socialization and personality
(6) Culture
(7) Foreign affairs
(8) Belief systems and ideologies
(9) Political-military-legal system

Within the narratives of Numbers 22-24, one can see the following evidence of the implied author's social & cultural location. We noted in chapter 5, in our discussion of the social and cultural texture that the 'reform' party within the Judean religious-political structure sought to call the people of God back to obedience to Yahweh's commands and precepts. This 'reform party' constituted a political 'faction' to which the implied author of Numbers 22-24 belonged (cf. Robbins 1996b:101), that was engaged in the quest for political/religious power within Judah.

As we noted previously in chapter 5, the process of prophetic redefinition seems to have taken place either during the late pre-exilic period or during the exilic period (with continuing effects into the early post-exilic period). The question of determining the time

frame of the re-interpretation of the figure of Balaam is difficult to place with any certainty. A time within either the exilic or early post-exilic period makes the most sense. If the priestly authors responsible for Numbers 31 were the ones that incorporated the story of Balaam and the Donkey into the narrative of Numbers 22-24, then it seems possible that an early post-exilic era is in view. But the concerns of the 'reform party' and the priests in distancing Israel from the practice of divination would have overlapped both historical periods.

6.1.1 Previous Events

The focus of the 'reform party' was on interpreting the meaning of the events that they had experienced in the Exile. It had been the failure of God's people to obey his commands that had led to the Exile. As they looked forward to the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer 29:10) and their return to the land, what would be the conditions of receiving Yahweh's blessing upon their return to the land? The answer was to be found in following the תורה.

6.1.2 Natural Environment and Resources

In the 'return' to Yehud, the returnees would find themselves in fierce competition with the ninety per cent (90%) of Judahites who had not participated in the Exile in Babylon. Struggles would ensue over land and scarce natural resources as the returnees attempted to rebuild their lives within the land.

6.1.3 Population Structure

The Exiles had consisted chiefly of the 'elite' of Judah's society – its cultural, economic, political and religious leadership. The vast majority of those who remained within the land had been of the peasantry. The return of the families of the Exile served to create a social crisis, as class struggles arose as the two populations attempted to 'merge' again into one people of God (cf. Neh 5:1-12).

6.1.4 Culture

The return also created a 'clash of cultures' as those who had lived self-conciously as Jews in Babylon during the Exile merged into the general population of those who had been without sanctuary or priest during the long decades of the Exile. Those who remained had become less distinct in their identity as Jews, and had intermarried with the peoples surrounding them. This cultural clash would lead on the part of the returnees to *xenophobia* as they tried desperately to preserve their unique identity as faithful followers of Yahweh.

6.1.5 Foreign Affairs/Political-military-legal system

The Davidic monarchy would not be restored under Persian rule. Rather, Yehud was administered as a province of Persia, under a governor who answered to Persian authorities. While Judah was no longer an 'independent nation', the situation was not without merit. For this political structure placed the religious authority squarely within the hands of the priests who ministered at the Temple rather than the king. The prophets, who had entered into religious alliance with the priests during the Exilic period were committed to maintaining the position of the priestly authorities as it served to maintain their own position as well.

6.1.6 Belief-system and ideologies

Clearly, the returnees were determined not to make the mistake of their fathers. They were committed to follow the תורה of Yahweh (eventually finalized under the leadership of Ezra). The role of the prophet and priest was not to offer new revelation to the people – but to expound and apply the revealed 'word of Yahweh' found within the תורה. The priestly authorities would place the focus on following the revealed 'instruction' which they held in trust for the people. (Clearly, within such a context, the role of the 'diviner' could have little future.) In point of fact, the priests came to see themselves as the embodiment of the

'prophet like Moses' referred to in Deuteronomy 18:18. Van der Toorn notes that to the Levitical scribes, 'a prophet is not an ecstatic or a diviner but someone who gives Torah and communicates God's law' (Van der Toorn 2007:169). This is evident from Deuteronomy 1:5 where Moses is said to באר את־התורה ('expound this law'). The task of a 'prophet like Moses', then, was to 'expound' the Torah and apply it to new contexts. This would lead later generations of priestly scribes to 'think of themselves as prophets' (Van der Toorn 2007:169). One sees some evidence of this notion that a prophetic voice attached to the priestly office in Matthew 23:2 which ascribed prophetic abilities to the office of the High Priest (Van der Toorn 2007:169). The priestly scribes, therefore, saw themselves as having authority not only to interpret תורה but to 'authoritatively' add to and update the law in light of their own 'prophetic' insights (Van der Toorn 2007:169).

6.1.7 The Rise of Xenophobia within Yehud

Within such a social and cultural context, it is not difficult to visualize the importance that 'belonging to Israel' assumed within the new community of God's people. It was their failure to remain distinct from the nations surrounding them (and the worship of their gods) that had led to the Exile. If they were to experience Yahweh's blessing within the land, there would need to be a steadfast commitment to his ways – and that required an ethnic/religious solidarity untainted by the competing belief systems and ideologies of outsiders. The rise of this xenophobia is evident from a cursory review of the books of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah.

The author of Chronicles devotes a great deal of attention within his account (1 Chr 1-9) to listing those families who were 'of Israel'. In 2 Chron 8:11, the narrator notes that 'Pharaoh's daughter' may not reside in the 'house of King David of Israel', presumably

because she is a Gentile (Dillard 1987:65). These references serve to emphasize the importance placed on belonging to Isarel.

The xenophobic response of the 'reform party' becomes even more prounounced within the book of Ezra. In Ezra 2:59 ff., the reader is introduced to three lay and three priestly families that had 'come up' from Babylon, but who could not show that their families 'were descended from Israel' (including the family descended from 'Barzillai the Gileadite' who originally hailed from the region near the Jabbok River). In Ezra 4:1-5, the reader learns of Judah's 'adversaries' who offered to help, and who contended that they had been worshiping Yahweh 'since the days of King Esarhaddon of Assyria who brought us here'. Their offer is soundly rejected by Zerubbabel and the others on the grounds that these 'adversaries' have no 'part' with God's people (Ezra 4:3). In Ezra 9:1-2, the author makes much of the intermarriage of Judahites and women from the peoples surrounding Jerusalem, as a case in point of the faithlessness of God's people. Ezra's prayer recorded in 9:5-15 records his confession of the abject sinfulness of intermarriage with foreigners. This leads in Ezra 10 with the people responding by entering into covenant to send away their foreign wives and children (Ezra 10:44). The women and their children were 'cut off' from membership in Israel.

This same emphasis and xenophobia can be clearly seen in Nehemiah 13. The author begins chapter 13 with a reference to a reading from the book of Moses concerning the exclusion of Ammonite and Moabite peoples from the קהל of Israel because 'they did not meet the Isarelites with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them – yet our God turned the curse into a blessing' (Neh 13:2). The remainder of the chapter focuses on Nehemiah's reform program as governor. Of particular interest to our study is his condemnation of mixed marriages in 13:23-27. Nehemiah's frustration with the people leads

him to ‘curse’ and ‘beat’ some of them for their presumption in marrying foreign women. The stated rationale is that Solomon’s actions in doing so had led to Israel’s sin (and ultimately to judgment in the Exile). The connection of Balaam (a foreign seer) to the Ammonites and Moabites as cases in point of the dangers of allowing foreigners into the assembly of Israel, clearly reveal a rampant xenophobia that was operative within Yehud in the early post-exilic social and historical context. Clearly, a strong antipathy towards the participation of foreigners within the new community in Yehud existed. This ideological commitment (in contrast to Isa 56:3) revealed a strong desire to preserve the objectives and agenda of the Reform party within the new community within Yehud.

Therefore, within the narratives of Numbers 22-24, the implied author thus seeks to respond within the context of these ideological concerns to recast the Balaam story in a way that focuses the reader’s attention, not on Balaam’s desire to speak only the ‘word’ that Yahweh put in his mouth, but rather on the reality of his status as an *uitlander* with respect to Israel. The result is a narrative that advances the ‘word of Yahweh’ prophetic voice, while distancing the people of God from the tradition of the diviner/seer.

6.2 *Ideology of Power in the Discourse of the Text*

Interestingly, the narrative presents a reversal of power in the text that is unexpected. The reader expects that kings and sorcerers will have the upper hand over pastoralists and nomads. But the reverse is true. And in Numbers 22, it is the donkey who takes centre stage in achieving the narrative’s purpose.

Balak attempts to issue a command performance invitation to Balaam (in what we have suggested was a *challenge-riposte*). Balaam is seemingly unimpressed by the royal attention given to his prowess. Balak’s attempts to command Balaam (or even to compel him by means of a dyadic colleague contract) to curse Israel are repeatedly frustrated in the story.

For his part, Balaam is frustrated as well. Unable to ply his trade with his accustomed proficiency, he is rebuked by his own donkey, which is able to see and analyse the situation far more clearly than he. At the end of the day, it is Yahweh in the person of the Angel of the LORD who is clearly in sovereign control of the proceedings.

6.3 *Mary Douglas – A "Political Reading" of Numbers 22*

A specific example of ideological reading can be seen in Mary Douglas' fascinating study entitled 'Balaam's Place in the Book of Numbers' (Douglas 1993). Douglas sets forth what she describes as a *political* reading of the text of Numbers 22, and in doing so gives the reader an ideological hermeneutic by which to understand the account. The book of Numbers focuses on the 'promise and inheritance of land'. She contends that the early post-exilic period is the time of the redaction of the text – a time when tension existed over land rights. Returnees from Babylon wanted their homes and farms back from those who had been working their land for over fifty years. Ezra and Nehemiah both serving as 'colonial administrators' would have faced conspiracies from neighbouring provinces Moab on the eastern border, Edom (later known as Idumea) and Samaria, the remnant of the Northern Kingdom. Sanballat, the governor of Samaria posed a particular threat to Israel. So, in Ezra 4:1-3, the opponents of the post-exilic community in Jerusalem demand to be allowed to assist in rebuilding the temple. Zerubbabel refuses, saying that this task is only for the descendants of Judah and Benjamin. This 'rejection' of the Samaritan community apparently became the occasion for various conspiracies to arise against the returnee population (Ezra 4:4ff).

Douglas contends that in this tension between Samaria and the returnee community 'the path is cleared for reading Balaam's story as a political satire' (Douglas 1993: 425) She sees each of the three main characters as a 'player' in the post-exilic political scene in Judah.

In her analysis, Balaam then becomes 'a brilliant pastiche of a colonial governor, flourishing his big stick, beating up the people, make threats of worse violence (if only he had a sword)' (Douglas 1993: 425). Possibly, Balaam represents a reference to Nehemiah himself (or possibly Ezra) as one who exercised his office with the backing of the Persian superpower. Balak is identified (possibly) with 'a distant, idolatrous ruler, say Nebuchadnezzar, king of Persia, ignorant of the Lord's power to bless' (Douglas 1993: 426). If this is so, then the Balaam story works well as a 'political parody', representing the perspective of a priestly faction opposed to governmental policies. The donkey (tying back into Safren's intertextual analysis of Numbers 22 and Genesis 22), represents a sort of 'ideal' Isaac, or in this instance, the people of Israel themselves. Israel is often presented as a 'woman' in the prophetic literature, which explains just why Balaam is pictured as riding on a *female donkey*. (Douglas 1993: 427). At the end of the day, the story can be summed up as follows:

> The theological doctrine at issue was whether all the sons of Jacob should inherit the land. The sense of 'land' in numbers is the eschatological 'land'. This would include the rights of the sons of Jacob to be treated as heirs of the promise. Sharing the promise they would share the land. The Lord declares in Leviticus, 'The land is mine' (Lev. 24:23), just as the people of Israel are his, whom he brought out of the land of Egypt (Lev. 25:42). It would be in defence of this doctrine that God, speaking through Balaam, changed the words of Jacob's blessing so that the separate promises to Judah and to Joseph should be combined as one great destiny for all the people of Israel. (Douglas 1993: 427)

Douglas' *political* interpretation of Numbers 22 serves as a fascinating example of an ideological interpretation.

6.4 *John T. Greene – Balaam and His Interpreters*

In his intriguing dissertation, *Balaam and His Interpreters, A Hermeneutical History of the Balaam Narratives,* John Greene undertakes a study of the ideological use of the character of Balaam within particular communities as a symbol. Greene dates the Balaam

cycle between 715 - 687 BCE, during the reign of Hezekiah of Judah (Greene 1992: 46-47). Greene suggests that the TaNaK represents 'a series of priestly, polemical works which cast aspersions on the articulated worldviews of other priests' (Greene 1992: 8). Greene observes: "A picture will slowly emerge which demonstrates that one person's priest or prophet is merely another's diviner, and vice-versa" (Greene 1992: 12). Inasmuch as prophets, priests and diviners share many common characteristics (resulting in his coining of the term *propriediv* to describe them), the choice of appellation largely depended on whether one considered the person in question a friend or foe. (We might think of the more contemporary situation in which the appellation 'lawyer' can be either a term of respect or derision depending on one's context.) Each of the priestly writers has his own opinion of the figure of Balaam ben Beor, and would use his character as a 'literary weapon' in the 'war' for community control and influence. Greene writes:

> All types of aspersions were cast and the seemingly clear terms prophet, priest and diviner took on new meanings as weapons in the mouth and hand of those who would dispute their meaning and legitimacy with opposing groups. Present, and at center stage of these debates was the figure Balaam as the ubiquitous test case and convenient (though necessarily nebulous) paradigm (Green 1992: 16-17).

Accordingly, priestly orders characterised their opponents in ways that would serve their own effort for supremacy. Religious professionals in the Old Testament were expected to be able to give adequate and acceptable answers to the questions: *'What is truth? How can one know that truth when one hears it?'* Failure to answer such questions appropriately could lead to one losing one's influence or position. This was particularly worked out within the struggle ('sacerdotal warfare') between the Israelite Shiloh priesthood with its Mushite orientation, and the Hebron-based Araonite priesthoods of Judah, which Greene sees as extending from the 10th – 4th centuries. Accordingly, Greene contends that

> 'Balaam' served as a code for outside sacerdotal types which combined the characteristics of priests, prophets (here understood in the broadest possible types understood by the ancient Israelite priesthoods), wizards, magicians and diviners which P and his associates opposed. (Greene 1992: 74).

However, Greene suggests that there was a reconciliation between the two priesthoods at some point after 722 BCE, in which the Shiloh (Mushite) and Judean (Aaronid) priesthoods ceased their antagonisms, and 'joined forces'. The JE document is thought to reflect this new conciliatory posture between the two. It is within this setting that Greene believes the Balaam narratives came to be as we now know them:

> In this case, then, it would seem that the setting for the writer/editor of the present Balaam cycle would be the Judean priestly circle dominated by the conciliatory Aaronid/Mushite faction, and is part of the post-722 BCE presentation of the traditions of surviving religious Israel. (Greene 1992: 36)

Since it appears clear that two different narratives have been woven together, one may assume that there are traditions about Balaam which lie behind both accounts. It may be, Greene suggests, that the Elohist (E) version puts Balaam's home near 'the River' Euphrates, while the Jahwist (J) version focuses the story on the south.

The Priestly (P) recasting of the Balaam story during the era of Hezekiah's reign, reflects a later conservatism in which priestly prerogatives were seen to belong only to the Aaronid priesthood. Balaam, who without question was an considered an *uitlander* within Israel, is now shown to have been a 'dupe', whose attempts at 'sacerdotal machinations' were without effect. (Greene 1992: 47). Balaam, the foreign *propriediv¸* becomes the paradigm for all of the Assyrian *propriedivs*, who posed a threat to the Aaronite priesthood. The events during Manasseh's reign show that their concern was not without foundation.

6.5 Conclusion

Ideological readings, therefore, shed light on the hidden agendas and biases of those who write and those who read. In considering ideological texture, the interpreter must not

only consider the ideological perspectives of the implied author, but his own as well. Because ‘every theology has a politics’ (Robbins 1996a:192), the interpreter needs to seek to understand the presence of other ‘voices’ on the text by considering the ideological perspectives of other readers as well. The study of ideological texture builds upon the close reading of the text afforded by the other textures. As one considers inner texture, intertexture and social & cultural texture, certain emphases and perspectives emerge from the text which inform one’s reading. In our study of the Balaam narratives, it becomes clear that the xenophobia within early Yehud impacted the perception of Balaam within the community of faith. As a diviner and a foreigner, it was inevitable that Balaam’s call as a prophet of Yahweh would ultimately be discredited.

We will see in the chapter on sacred texture just how critical the analysis of ideological perspective can be in evaluating the differing opinions of Balaam within the Old Testament.

Chapter 7
Theological (Sacred) Texture

According to Robbins, 'sacred' texture is concerned with "seeking the divine in a text". How does the text speak to, or give insight into, the relationship between human life and the divine? How does the text speak about God, or deal with various aspects of religious life? Robbins notes: 'The study of the sacred texture of a text has a long history. Throughout the centuries, interpreters have developed both systematic and creative ways to explore texts regarding their holy, divine nature' (Robbins 1996b:120). Theological or sacred texture builds on the other textures that we have been considering along the way. Inner texture serves to identify the way in which theological terms function within the text, while intertexture shows the ways in which these words have been used to demonstrate the rhetorical direction of the text. Social and cultural texture helps set the text within a particular social context and location. This is critical to understanding the perspectives of both the implied author and implied audience/reader of the text. Ideological texture shows the ways in which different communities have utilized the text to support particular ideological agendas. *Ideology* differs from theology in that it can represent closed system or tradition that defies all attempts at critique or reformation. *Theology*, ordinarily, represents a dynamic tradition that seeks to engage in self-critique and reformation.[21] It is open to new ideas, conceptualizations, and formulations of theological truth. Thus, theological texture seeks to examine the way in which the text represents the dynamic understanding of theological truth by the community of God's people.

[21] However, one must admit that the line between doing theology and projecting an ideology can become blurred even when one interprets with the best of intentions. One rarely sets out to interpret ideologically. Rather, the interpreter does not always fully recognise her ideological presuppositions, and their impact on the interpretative process. So, one must allow for considerable overlap between these categories.

7.1 Methodological considerations with regard to theological (sacred) texture.

Interestingly, in his book *The Tapestry of Texts* (1996a), Robbins did not include a chapter on 'sacred texture'. However, in his socio-rhetorical criticism 'manual', *Exploring the Texture of Texts, A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation,* Robbins suggested eight fruitful areas of exploration of the *sacred texture* of a text, in which the interpreter explores what the text has to say about: Deity; holy person(s); spirit being(s); Divine history; human redemption; human commitment; religious community; and ethics (1996b).

The reader will immediately note that these categories eschew the traditional categories or terminology of Jewish and Christian theology. This represents a deliberate choice on Robbins's part. His intent is to open up a dialogue with other faith traditions as a continuation of the history of religions approach. Robbins's belief is that this will hinder the fullest exploration of the social, cultural and phenomenological dimensions of a given text. He writes:

> I want to bring theology in, but I want to understand the nature of its presence in the context of social, cultural and ideological phenomena. In other words, we should not stack the deck theologically at the beginning, like I think we so often have. This is the reason for bringing theology in through generalized categories that could function in all religious traditions. So the first two categories are not God and Christology, but deity and holy person. There is an attempt here to use more general, history of religions categories, rather than to use Christian terminology (Robbins 1998:111).

While one can appreciate Robbins's desire to engage those of other religious traditions in the socio-rhetorical interpretative project, this writer is concerned to reflect on the Old Testament Balaam narratives from a Christian theological perspective. Therefore, we will adapt Robbins's categories of 'sacred texture' to reflect more traditionally theological categories of enquiry. Our concern will lie in the analysis of the theological significance of the Balaam narratives within the context

of the book of Numbers and the broader theological concerns of the Pentateuch. Our focus is on seeking to understand how the Old Testament authors understood the definition of a prophet, and how that development is reflected within the various references to Balaam within the Old Testament canon.

Therefore, rather than utilise the category of 'Deity', we will reflect on what the Balaam narratives seek to teach the reader about the person of God within the Old Testament context. Rather than the generic category of 'holy person', we will reflect on the nature and function of prophets. Instead of 'spirit beings', we will reflect on the significance of the appearance of the 'Angel of the LORD' within the narratives. Instead of 'divine history', we will consider the eschatological vision underlying the Balaam narratives, and the hope of divine 'redemption' portrayed there. Our discussion of 'human commitment' will necessarily focus on the issue of what the Old Testament authors understood it meant to be called to be a 'prophet'. What is a true prophet of Yahweh? What were the theological-ethical issues involved in discerning whether a given individual was a 'true prophet'? How did the prophetic call and commitment work itself out within the Balaam narratives? This will be combined with an analysis of the category of 'ethics' under the subset of 'prophetic ethics'. Finally, we will consider the impact of the Old Testament's understanding of prophets and prophecy upon the believing community of Israel. What perspectives on prophecy and prophets did different communities within Israel have, and how did these differing perspectives impact the portraits given of Balaam within the Old Testament?

7.2 An Analysis of 'Sacred Texture' categories within the Balaam narratives

7.2.1 God ('Deity')

Robbins observes that 'God or divine being, may exist in either the background or in a direct position of action and speech in a text' (Robbins 1996b:120). The Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24 are rich in their theological import concerning God's nature, revelation and actions. Key themes are covered which give insight into Israel's understanding of the person of Yahweh as revealed in the text. Olson observes that God is one of the three main characters of the story, in addition to Balak and Balaam: 'The third main character in the story is God, who has several different names in this text, a reflection of various early and later traditions that were brought together to form the story' (Olson 1996:141). God is referred to as *Elohim,* eleven times; Yahweh, twenty-nine times; *El*, eight times; *Shadday*, two times, and *Elyon*, one time (Ashley 1993:433). Balaam's allegiance within the Numbers 22-24 narratives appears to be to Yahweh alone. But one wonders just why this might be so. Why would not a diviner seeking to assist Moab call upon the gods of Moab? Is it because Balaam never intends to assist Moab, but to submit to Yahweh as a true prophet?

Generally speaking, the prose sections argue for a monotheistic point of view, one in which Yahweh's power and authority is extended over all lands and peoples. Levine contends that the poems present a different perspective, and that, perhaps, the most perplexing question is why Balaam did not appeal to the gods of Moab (or even his own gods) in attempting to curse Israel. Instead, Balaam is portrayed as one who is powerless to curse Israel, because he is bound to a divine power(s) which favours Israel. While Balaam appears to "know" of Yahweh, and to acknowledge him as Israel's national deity, at the same time he speaks of *El*, *Shadday*, and *Elyon*, who

appear to be part of a regional pantheon of deities, headed by *El*. Of course, it is possible that *El* is simply used by Balaam as an epithet for Yahweh. But Levine contends that the parallelism of *El* and Yahweh in Numbers 23:8 would argue for it being used as a proper noun.

Accordingly, Levine argues that it is *El* who empowers Balaam and who speaks with him. If this is so, then it would argue for a point of contact with the DAT. For in the DAT Balaam also encounters a vision by night from *El*. In fact, Levine posits that both the Balaam poems and the DAT derive from a collection of *El* literature (cf. Isaiah 14:13b, 'above the stars of El'). Levine thinks it likely that poems and the inscription date from the same general period – that of the early 8th century BCE, before the advent of the Assyrian campaigns against Transjordan and the Northern Kingdom. The language of both the poems and the DAT inscription is *similar* – that is, West Semitic. If this line of reasoning is sound, then it might follow that the DAT inscriptions and the Balaam poems both represent a phase in the development of Israelite religion in which the 'synthesis of El with Yahweh' was yet to be realised, and in which an "overarching regional pantheon" was still dominant within Israelite society. He writes:

> In effect, the Balaam orations of Numbers 23-24 are stating that El, head of the regional pantheon, had redeemed Israel from Egypt and was now bringing this people to its land. The deities of the regional pantheon, whom Balaam served, and who were headed by El, had commanded him to bless Israel forbidding him to pronounce curses upon this people who was blessed by them. To put it simply, Balaam's own chief deity, El, was rendering him powerless. This is why there was no battle of divine powers in the Balaam poems. (Levine 2000: 43)

Therefore, Levine contends that the Balaam poems serve to assert that 'the regional pantheon, headed by El, in which YHWH is a member deity, granted the Israelite's

victory over the Transjordanian nations', thereby conferring legitimacy on Israelite occupation of Transjordanian territory (Levine 2000:43).

The authors of the prose narratives, however, portray Yahweh as the sole deity controlling the circumstances surrounding the interactions of Balaam, Balak and Israel. This would seem to reflect a much later perspective dating from a time when the synthesis of El and Yahweh had been completed (cf. Exodus 6). Accordingly, Levine suggests that they 'reinterpret this dynamic drastically in the spirit of triumphant Yahwism' (Levine 2000: 43).

At any rate, the reader recognises immediately that God plays 'centre stage' in the narrative. Both Balak and Balaam are mere pawns in his hands as he works out his plan to bless his people Israel. Recognition of the role of the deity within the Balaam narratives is key to understanding the sacred texture of the story.

7.2.1.1 The Sovereign Reign of Yahweh

Within the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24, the author places great emphasis on the sovereign reign of Yahweh the King (cf. Isaiah 52:7). Hired to curse Israel, Balaam must proclaim to Balak that Yahweh is the sovereign ruler of the nations. Van Groningen summarizes the message of the pericope in this fashion:

> The message of Balaam's prophecies is that Yahweh's reign is present, effective and all-pervasive. This means that his theocratic kingdom is totally under his authority, power, guidance, and protection. His reign includes complete governance over the nations of the world – Moab (24:17), Edom (24:18), Egypt (24:8), Amalek (24:20, 24), Kain (24:22), and Cyprus or Kittim (24:24 NIV) – as well as all dimensions of the created cosmos (e.g, 24:6-7). (Van Groningen 1990:242).

The promise made to Abraham (cf. Gen 12:1-3) and the patriarchs will be fulfilled. Allen suggests that the theology of the Balaam articles serves as a 'summarization, even the quintessence of Yahweh's relationship to Israel' (Allen 1981:105). Yahweh's blessing, attributes and righteous acts are all set out with remarkable clarity

in these brief narratives. Waltke, in commenting on Balaam encounter with the Angel of Yahweh, notes that: 'The repetition and escalation of the events provoke wonder in Providence and proclaim the message that *I AM* unveils the eyes of a prophet to see the otherwise invisible divine Sovereign who rules history (Waltke 2007b:138).

7.2.1.2 The Blessing of Yahweh

In the context of Numbers 22, it is surely Yahweh's intention to bless Israel that is central to the narrative. Allen notes that '[t]he specific contribution of the Balaam incident to Old Testament theology appears to be its graphic development of the concept of Yahweh's blessing of Israel' (Allen 1981:84) This is all the more remarkable given the placement of the narrative in the Numbers account. The Balaam pericope follows immediately upon the judgment of Yahweh in the wilderness for their grumbling and rebellion (Numbers 21:4-9). The making of the bronze snake by Moses at Yahweh's direction serves as a means of deliverance: 'Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live'. It is singular that Jesus chooses this event to serve as a picture of the salvific impact that his own death will achieve (John 3:14-15). The Balaam narrative is followed as well by the sin of God's people with the Moabite/Midianite women in Numbers 25. Nevertheless, the book of Numbers ends with the people of Israel poised to enter the land. The point of the placement of the narrative seems to be that Yahweh's intention to bless his people and keep his covenant with them will be thwarted neither by their sin nor by the evil intentions of their enemies. (We will discuss later the manner in which this theme speaks to the concerns and perspective of the *gola* in Yehud following the return from Exile.)

Allen in fact sees the issue of blessing vs. cursing as the central theme of the pericope:

> The fact of Israel's blessing by Yahweh is the major theme in the *Heilsgeschichte* of this pericope. Israel is blessed by Yahweh from of old. Balaam, the pagan prophet, attempts to reverse the curse to earn his mantic fee, but is frustrated at every turn. Yawheh's blessing on His people is irrevocable. Demonic powers have no sway; supernatural means are ineffective; pagan acts are useless in the face of the objective reality of the blessing of Israel (Allen 1981:85).

Yahweh's purpose to bless his people flows out of his unchangeable חסד for them. It is his electing love (Ex 19:5-6) that ensures his blessing.

7.2.1.2 The Attributes of Yawheh

The Balaam narratives reveal a great deal about the attributes of Yahweh. Balaam rapidly learns that he is a man 'out of his depth'. As used as Balaam is to trafficking in the spirit world, in the God of Israel, he meets one who is totally outside his prior experience. In the words of Deutero-Isaiah, 'To whom, then will you compare God?' (Isa 40:18). Yahweh as revealed in the Balaam narratives has no equal among the nations, for he is not a localised deity, but the king over all the earth. Likewise, the narrative focuses upon God's sovereign acts in over-riding Balak's plan to curse his people. As Balaam is forced to observe: 'The LORD their God is with them; the shout of the King is among them' (Num 23:21).

Yahweh's immutability is clearly taught as well. In Numbers 23:19, Balaam proclaims: 'God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind.' Martin Noth has taken issue with this assertion, claiming that Numbers 22 presents a god who indeed appears to change his mind: "It then appears as an act of irresponsible despotism on God's part of it, according to v. 21, Yahweh's anger at this departure suddenly burst forth" (Noth 1968:178). But must we understand it so? There is no inconsistency in Yahweh's actions. Balaam is

permitted to accompany the emissaries of Balak, but upon condition that he says only what Yahweh directs him to speak. The problem which is evident from the narrative is that Balaam always intended to find a way to earn his fee. His spiritual blindness was every bit as great as his inability to see the Angel of the LORD.

Within the narratives (and particularly within the Tale of the Donkey), another attribute of God is highlighted: his compassion. Patrick Miller has written a helpful essay entitled '"Slow to Anger" The God of the Prophets' (Miller 2004:269-285) which develops this theme. Yahweh is a God of righteousness and justice, and he desires (demands) that justice and righteousness be lived out within the community of his people. Within the Balaam narratives, God's compassion both towards Balaam, and towards his people is evident. The people deserve judgment (as their rebellion in the wilderness wanderings attests). But Yahweh is determined to bless. Within the Tale of the Donkey, Balaam deserves to meet judgment for his 'perverse ways'. But the Angel of Yahweh lowers his sword, and spares Balaam, who ultimately within the story, becomes an instrument of blessing to Israel.

7.2.2 Prophets ('Holy Persons')

Robbins notes that sacred texts frequently feature 'one or more people who have a special relationship to God or to divine powers' (Robbins 1996b:121). The Balaam narratives present us with just such a figure – that of Balaam, who although portrayed as an *uitlander* nevertheless functions as a Yahweh prophet. (We will discuss the nature of prophetism in much more detail at a later point.) Within the main narrative, Balaam is one who receives messages from God, at times in dreams and visions, and at other times in more direct fashion (22:12, 20; 23:4-5, 16; 24:2). Balaam is portrayed as one upon whom the 'spirit of God' comes (24:2), and who 'hears the words of God', and 'sees the vision of the Almighty'. As Brueggemann

observes, the prophets serve as mediators, who speak 'because they are compelled by an inexplicable force that is taken to be the summons of Yahweh' (Brueggemann 1997:623). Waltke observes that Balaam's utterances in Numbers 24:16-17 seem to comport with the clairvoyant behaviour of the ראה, referred to in 1 Sam 9:9. But he then observes the following:

> A *nabi'* designates a person called and designated by God to be his spokesperson (2 Kings 9:1; 2 Chron. 12:5; Jer 1:5). In other words, a prophet is God's human mouth. (Waltke 2007b:805).

Balaam is introduced within the narrative as something of a pagan diviner or exorcist (22:6). But the narrator takes great pains to demonstrate that Balaam is *also called* by God to be his spokesperson. Balaam's repeated insistence that he speaks only the יהוה דבר that is placed in his mouth would appear to place him within the prophetic role. This becomes clearer as we more carefully examine the development of prophecy and prophetism within the world of the Old Testament. Vernon Robbins has the following to say concerning prophetic discourse, and those who offer it:

> Prophetic discourse is a close ally of both wisdom and miracle discourse, since it presupposes that God's word has the power to create and destroy. Prophetic discourse moves beyond either creation or miracle discourse by focusing on special people or groups God has chosen to take leadership in the production of righteousness within the human realm on earth. In other words, prophetic discourse combines the emphasis on the relation of the created world to God, humans to God, and humans to one another as a result of God to the created world and to humans (wisdom discourse) with the emphasis on the power of God's word to confront malfunction in the human and cosmic realms (miracle discourse). *The special emphasis in prophetic discourse lies in God's active role of choosing certain people and groups for special tasks and blessings.* (Robbins 2002: 44)

Underlying this understanding is the presupposition that the people chosen by God to pursue righteousness have chosen the path of unrighteousness. Therefore, God must raise up another person or group to be beneficiaries of his blessing, and to take

responsibility for calling his people to righteous paths. This represents a 'rule-case-result' style of argument which can be outlined as follows:

> Case: Some people are chosen by God to walk in righteousness – others are not (or rather, choose not to obey)
>
> Result: Blessings are on those who fulfil their responsibilities, and curses on those who do not.
>
> Rule: God has chosen and called some to be "especially responsible for righteousness in the world". *If* they fulfil their calling, *then* they will be blessed. *If* they fail to do so, *then* they will experience "negative consequences". (Robbins 2002: 45)

Robbins' analysis is admittedly intended to be applicable to passages dealing with blessings & woes in the New Testament. Nevertheless, it can assist us in our task of seeking to understand better the prophetic role and definition within the Old Testament context.

7.2.2.1 The Prophetic Role within the Ancient Near East

The word *prophet* is derived from the Greek *prophetes*, meaning one who 'foresaw' the future (BAG 1979:723-724). 'Prophecy' as a phenomenon in the Ancient Near East was not limited to Israel. 'Prophecy' can be understood as the 'human transmission of allegedly divine messages', that is in fact, a 'distinctive branch of the consultation of the divine that is generally called "divination"' (Nissinen, et al 2003:1). From the perspective of the Old Testament author(s), these 'divine messages' were given by Yahweh to those who had been called to receive and pronounce them. Within conservative biblical scholarship, the uniqueness of Israelite prophecy was maintained, and distinguished from ecstatic phenomenon common to the nations surrounding Israel. E. J. Young could write in 1952, that: 'apart from the material discovered at Mari, there is very little from Mesopotamia that can even

remotely compare with the phenomenon of prophecy in the Old Testament' (Young 1952:198). [Van Gemeren (1990) is a recent example of this perspective.]

This understanding has largely changed in light of the recognition that 'prophetic' phenomena were more commonly known among the nations of the Ancient Near East than previously understood. In addition to the Mari Letters, the renewed study of the Neo-Assyrian letters, the Eshnunna Oracles and West Semitic sources (e.g. the Egyptian report of Wenamon, no. 142; the Zakkur Inscription, no. 137, and Balaam inscription from Deir 'Alla), have all served to promote a renewed study of Ancient Near Eastern 'prophetic' texts (Nissinen 2003:2-3). A wide range of terminology is exhibited in these texts to refer to 'prophetic' persons and behaviour. Within the Mari texts, the titles *muhhu or āpiltu* (from the root *mahu* 'to become crazy, to go into a frenzy'), and *āpilu* or *āpiltu* (from the root *apālu*, 'to answer') were most commonly used. Within the Neo-Assyrian texts, the 'standard' word for prophet is *raggimu* (from '*ragāmu'* meaning 'to shout'). (Nissinen 2003:6-7) The inscriptions found at Deir 'Alla and Zakkur utilise the term חוזה ('seer'), while the Lachish letters use the more common *nabi*.

7.2.2.2 Prophetism within the Old Testament

Within the Old Testament itself, there is ambiguity concerning the definition and understanding of the prophetic role. As we noted at the outset of our study, in 1 Samuel 9:9, we are told that the 'one who is now called a prophet' (נביא), was formerly called a 'seer', (חוזה). This ambiguity is not resolved when the reader of the Old Testament encounters the account of Saul stripping himself naked and writhing on the ground in some sort of 'prophetic frenzy' (1 Samuel 10:10). Within the 'former' and 'latter' prophets of the Old Testament, members of the prophetic

guild are sometimes spoken of in unflattering terms (cf Amos 7:14; Micah 3:6-7; and Zech 13:3-4). Even if one accepts the (traditional) explanation that OT prophets who evidenced a disdain for the title נביא were simply drawing a distinction between 'true' and 'false' prophets, it seems clear that prophetism within the Old Testament context drew 'mixed reviews'.

An understanding of the different stages of the development of prophetism within the Old Testament historical context will help to clarify. The most common designations within the Old Testament for 'prophets' were: חוזה (visionary), רואה (seer), אלהם איש ('man of God' or holy man), and נביא (prophet). The נביא was one who was called to a particular task. These four common labels were utilised within different historical contexts and social locations. It appears that the term נביא was more frequently used within Israel, while the term חוזה was used within Judah (Petersen 2002:5-6). Petersen notes that an 'absolute distinction' did not exist between 'prophets' and 'priests'. Jeremiah was descended from Abiathar (1 Kings 2:26-27), while Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:3), and Zechariah (Zechariah 1:1, cf. Nehemiah 12:6) were seen as coming from priestly families (Petersen 2002:7). The prophets were 'boundary figures', and were not recorded as being present during periods of Israel's history. Although Abraham is referred to as a 'prophet' in Genesis 20:7, it is somewhat difficult to see in what sense the appellation is meant other than as an intercessor. (And perhaps, this is the sense in which it's used of Miriam as well in Exodus 15:20.) Deborah is referred to as a נביאה in Judges 4:4, although this seems to have more to do with her role as a judge. As was just mentioned, we are given a

'glimpse' in 1 Samuel 9:9 where the narrator clarifies (of Samuel) that the one now referred to as a נביא was 'formerly called a רואה (seer)'.

However, it is really not until the inception of the monarchy that we encounter prophets functioning as intermediaries between God and man. During the period from 1000 – 500 B.C.E., one finds the sorts of prophets that we have learned to expect within the Old Testament milieu. Within a short period after the return from Exile, the prophetic role seems to have largely disappeared from the scene (Petersen 2002:8), indicating, perhaps, that with the focus of the faith community had shifted to the interpretation of God's Word (e.g. the Pentateuch) within their life and worship. Within the five hundred year period of active prophetism, the nation of Israel went through a number of identifiable, historical 'stages'. Each of these stages represented different historical contexts within the life of the Israelite community, including the following (Petersen 2002:9):

* The inception of statehood
* National schism
* Neo-Assyrian threats and the destruction of the northern kingdom
* Neo-Babylonian threats and the destruction of Judah
* Life in Babylonian exile
* Attempts at restoration within the land following the 'return' to Judah

In each of these stages, prophets were active in the life of Israel, and 'embedded' in the life of Israel (rather than distinct from it). These prophets addressed national leaders as well as the general population depending upon the context, and the message. Nathan and Gad serve as royal advisors to King David, serving as intermediaries between Yahweh and the King. Such advising roles might

involve ‘prophecies’ of blessing (e.g. 2 Samuel 7), or in requisite circumstances could require prophetic confrontation. Nathan confronts David in 2 Samuel 11-12 concerning his affair with Bathsheba, while Gad confronts David in 2 Samuel 24 after he undertakes a forbidden census.

Just before the schism of the northern and southern kingdoms, Ahijah is recorded as advising Jeroboam that he would become king of Israel (1 Kings 11). Within the record of the book of Kings, the adventures of such prophetic ‘giants’ as Elijah, Elisha and Micaiah, are recorded, along with unnamed players such as the ‘unnamed prophet’ and ‘man of God’ of 1 Kings 22. While some have argued that this material as ‘legendary’, it seems unnecessary to conclude that no historical figures exist behind the narratives. Such prophets served during the divided kingdom in a variety of capacities, including calls to both kings and people to national repentance and a return to Yahwistic faith (cf. 1 Kings 18). Their position was often quite tenuous, as prophets came into conflict with powerful political realities. Roberts notes that prophets posed a ‘security risk’ if taken into the king’s war counsels. If the prophet’s pronouncement was contrary to the king’s intentions, it could have the impact of turning both public opinion, and powerful political ‘gatekeepers’ against the king’s plans (Roberts 2003: 352-353). Given the difficulty of knowing whether the prophet’s words really were from God, it is no wonder that they sometimes found themselves the subject of royal manhunts. Roberts observes:

> But even the royal suppression, persecution, and execution of what the biblical tradition regards as the genuine prophets of Yahweh must be seen as a rational act. Within the ancient Near Eastern context, if one believed that a Jeremiah had truly been sent with a genuine and reliable oracle from Yahweh, it would, of course, be folly to oppose him, much less persecute him. If, on the other hand, one rejected his claims and believed him to be a paid agent of the Babylonian enemy, then the execution of Jeremiah that is demanded by the royal officials was a perfectly reasonable, legal and moral course of action. Everything hinged on which belief about the particular prophet were true, but how

> one resolved that quandary was never self-evident to the contemporaries of the prophets (Roberts 2003:353-354).

Amos and Hosea responded to the Neo-Assyrian threat to Israel, while Micah and Isaiah addressed the one to Judah. Jeremiah and Deutero-Isaiah spoke to the threat from the Neo-Babylonian empire, while Ezekiel spoke to the exilic context. Haggai and Zechariah addressed the situation of the post-exilic community.

Judging from the 'snapshot' given us in 1 Samuel 9:9, there was, at one point, little distinction made between the 'prophet' and the 'seer'. But at some point within the development of prophetism within Israel, the picture of a true prophet of Yahweh began to shift from that of the diviner/seer to the 'word of Yahweh' prophet. In Jeremiah 23:28, the prophet who has and interprets dreams is disparaged. The 'true' prophet of Yahweh is one who speaks his word. The true prophet was first and foremost, a speaker of Yahweh's words. He was the one in whose mouth, Yahweh had placed his words (Jer 1:9).

This development continued within the book of Deuteronomy. Petersen suggests that the Deuteronomic portrayal of Moses as the paradigmatic prophet (Deuteronomy 18) was a way to link prophecy (and thus, the Prophetic oracles) to the Torah. Thus, the prophetic oracles became an 'exposition or admonition' based on the Torah, rather than a word from God that was independent of it (Petersen 2003:43) This shift in emphasis within the postexilic community from the prophetic word to the Torah of Moses may serve to help explain changing views of the prophetic role.

However, key questions remain: What theological-ethical concerns governed the Old Testament authors' understanding of the prophetic definition and role? How did one know a genuine prophet of Yahweh when one encountered such a person? Often the discussion in Deuteronomy 13 and 18 have been appealed to in this regard. In Deuteronomy 13:1-2, the reader is told to expect that a prophet (or one who

'divines by dreams') might appear within Israel and that the omens promised by such a person might then take place. If that prophet or diviner tries to entice Israel to follow other gods, *then* they are to be put to death for speaking 'treason' against Yahweh. Deuteronomy 18:15 ff speaks of a 'prophet like Moses' in whom Yahweh will 'put my words in the mouth of the prophet'. The author then goes on to specify how one knows whether a prophet has been sent of God. If he or she speaks in the name of other gods, or presumes to speak a word that Yahweh has not spoken – then, they are to be put to death. The test for determining whether the word is, in fact, from Yahweh is to observe whether the prediction comes to pass. If not, then that 'prophet' is not from Yahweh.

Hans Barstad has suggested that Deuteronomy actually gives a fairly negative appraisal of prophecy. In his reading, Deuteronomy 13 seems to be more focused on prophetic counselling towards idolatry than on prophecy *per se*. Deuteronomy 18, however, has a definite anti-prophetic thrust to it. It discusses three sorts of prophetic activity:

(1) 18:9-14, the prohibition of (unlawful) types of divination.

(2) 18:15-19, the identification of Joshua as Moses' successor.

(3) 18:20-22, the identification of prophets who purport to speak for Yahweh, but who are not sent by him.

Barstad notes that the Deuteronomic authors seem curiously indifferent to prophecy as such. No reference is made to the classical prophets (apart from Isaiah in 2 Kings 19-20). After Moses had given the Torah to Israel, what need was there for prophets? Barstad suggests that their theological reasoning went along these lines:

* Yahweh's message (through Moses) is enough.

* The content of Deuteronomy reveals God's will. Only the Law is truly necessary.

* Prophets might actually prove to be problematical if they attempted to interpret 'God's will' along lines other than those recorded in Deuteronomy. (Barstad 1994: 249-250)

If this is correct, then it stands to reason that the Deuteronomic authors give scant attention to prophecy as such. For the Prophets as *precursors* of the Deuteronomic authors represent a competing understanding or model of the will of Yahweh. Therefore, they could be 'suppressed' in a way that the Torah could not, as they were deemed to be 'supplementary' (Barstad 1994: 251).

7.2.2.3 The Relationship between the 'Law' and the 'Prophets'

The word 'canon' comes from the Greek word *kanon* ('rod', 'standard'), and the Hebrew *qaneh* (a 'reed' which could be used for measurement), has normally signified a rule or standard by which things were measured. The 'Standard Theory' of the development of the Old Testament 'Canon' suggested that the Old Testament was canonized in three distinct stages, corresponding with the three traditional divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures (*Tanakh*), the 'Law' (*torah*), the 'prophets' (*nebi'im*), and the writings (*ketubim*). It was generally thought that Ezra's public reading of the 'Law', recorded in Nehemiah 8, reflected the emergence of the Pentateuch around the mid-fifth century B.C.E. The 'Prophets' were considered as having been 'standardised' by the end of the late third or early 2nd century B.C.E. (Chapman 2003:127). Much depended on the witness to the prophetic books of the deuterocanonical book of Ben Sira (ca. 180 B.C.E.), and the placement of Daniel's prophecy within the 'Writings'. Traditionally, the 'close' of the Old Testament Canon (after a 500 year process of development) was thought to have taken place at the (rabbinical) Council of Jamnia in A.D. 90. By A. D. 95, the Jewish historian Josephus referred to a uniform (and closed) canon in *Against Apion*, 1.37-43 (Chapman 2003:128).

The problems, however, with the 'Standard Theory' are multiple. There is now significant doubt that the so-called 'Council of Jamnia' ever took place. Van der Toorn observes: 'A critical reading of the rabbinical sources has led most scholars to conclude that there never was a Council of Jamnia; it is a historical chimera of dubious Christian inspiration' (Van der Toorn 2007:235). Chapman has also suggested that the traditional understanding of the process of 'canonisation' is flawed. Jewish scribes simply did not work in the fashion normally attributed to them. Scribes did, of course, 'copy texts', but this was not all that they did. The process of textual transmission was a complex one, and '*as part of the same process*, scribes added to, changed, and developed the tradition' (Grabbe 2006:331). Even the traditional language of 'closing' the Old Testament Canon is problematical. As Chapman notes:

> The language of "closing" is also deeply imbedded in the logic of the three stage theory and, although it has not received as much attention as the term "canon," is quite obviously even more imprecise. This language is fatally anachronistic, borrowing the model of conciliar decision from church history and imposing it unfairly upon ancient Judaism. No direct historical evidence confirms the critical theory that at discrete moments in time a representative body within Judaism determined the binding scope of the biblical canon by conscious decision. In fact, much evidence stands against it. (Chapman 2003:136)

If the three-stage 'Standard Theory' is no longer sustainable, then what process likely occurred? Chapman suggests that there are two approaches to understanding the term 'canon'. One is a 'strict' sense of the word which denotes a 'list' of authorised works. The process of Old Testament canonization seems to have been much more 'open' and 'dynamic' than a 'list' would suggest. Grabbe has noted that the differences between the Septuagint, the Qumran texts and the MT would seem to suggest that there were competing versions in circulation until quite late (Grabbe 2006:333). He suggests that rather than seeing these as variants as 'corrupt' or

'inferior' to the MT, one might see them simply as differing texts representing differing perspectives. He suggests, therefore, that before the Maccabean revolt, 'there is no evidence that a particular textual tradition was seen as being preferred' (Grabbe 2006:335). In fact, it does not even appear to have been an issue worth mentioning. Grabbe concludes:

> Different versions of some books circulated alongside each other. *We* might classify them as sometimes being different textual recensions and at other times as different editions, but that is a modern distinction. Both textual and literary processes were still operating, and different versions of the same book were around. It is only later that we may find a conscious attempt to revise one tradition to bring it in line with another. (Grabbe 2006:335)

This process is what Brueggemann seems to be referring to when he speaks of an 'imaginative remembering' by which the canon developed through a 'theological practice' that demonstrated a 'concern to shape the literature according to defining theological conviction' (Brueggemann 2003:5-6). It would appear, then, that the concept of 'canon' and 'canonization' was more fluid than originally envisioned by Ryle's 'standard theory'.

The other approach is to construe 'canon' more broadly to refer to a 'norm'. Within Jewish practise, there were 'collections' of 'books' which were circulated and which were considered authoritative in some sense. Chapman suggests that: 'The dating strongly suggests that by the turn of the millennium, a Jewish canon of Scripture was largely in place, if not absolutely defined and delimited in scope' (Chapman 2003:138). Chapman's understanding of 'canon' is worth noting. He sees it as a '*range* of scriptural witnesses, ordered in such a way that it invites and compels the continual examination of the self and the re-examination of the scriptures' (Chapman 2000:109). He further suggests that 'it is precisely for this reason that both

the exact ordering of a canon and the absolute fixation of its text are unnecessary for a "canon" to function as such' (Chapman 2000:109).

It is interesting that nothing within the gospel accounts suggests that there was any disagreement between Jesus and his opponents (whether Pharisee or Sadducee) about the size and extent of the Canon. Chapman notes that 'given the quite divergent traditions of faith and practice within Second Temple Judaism generally, the silence about the exact shape of the biblical canon is remarkable and suggests that a shared body of Scripture antedated the later disagreements' (Chapman 2003:139). It is perhaps, then, better to speak of the 'closing of the canonical era' than of the 'closing of the canon' (Van der Toorn 2007:248).

The key point for our discussion is that the concept of a tri-partite division was a later development in canonical thought. As Van der Toorn observes, originally, there were only the 'Law' and the 'Prophets' (Van der Toorn 2007:248). The Pentateuch received its final form during the time of Ezra in the Persian period, while the 'Prophets' most likely received its final form somewhat later (i.e. 250 B.C.E.) (Van der Toorn 2007:252).

Nevertheless, Chapman rejects the idea of any Pentateuchal 'priority' or 'pre-eminence' over the 'prophets' in an extended consideration of Old Testament literature, observing that 'no exegetical warrant exists for the subordination of prophetic scripture to pentateuchal scripture on the part of the editors and scribes responsible for the Old Testament' (Chapman 2000:245-246). Instead, he argues for the 'twin authority of Law and Prophets' in Jewish thought as *complementary* to one another as part of a 'core canon'. Chapman observes that: 'despite increasing diversity within Judaism, it was adherence to this 'grammar' of 'Law and Prophets' which more than anything else defined what it meant to be faithful tradents of the past

witness' (Chapman 2000:287). It is worth noting that Chapman is sceptical that 'prophecy' ever 'ceased', although he is willing to concede that it may have undergone some sort of 'transformation' during the post-exilic period to a 'more scribal form of activity'. The elevation of the Torah to a place of pre-eminence over the Prophets is rather to 'be ranked as one of the greatest achievements of the rabbis for *Talmudic* Judaism' (Chapman 2000:264).

However, this conclusion of the *complementarity* of the 'Law and the Prophets' does not vitiate Brueggemann's thoughtful assertion that 'Torah is a normative resource, rooted in the authority of Moses, for the sustenance of a peculiar community of faith and life that is displaced and without other resources' (Brueggemann 2003:22). The Torah functioned as a *'script for displaced community'*, by giving the *gola* the theological perspectives through which to view their experiences as a people (Brueggemann 2003:22). Its purpose was to 'provide the materials for the social construction of reality and for socialization of the young into an alternative world where YHWH lives and governs' (Brueggemann 2003:26).

7.2.3 The Angel of Yahweh ('spirit beings')

The Tale of the Donkey in Nu 22:22-35 presents a contrast between a prophet ('holy person') and a spirit being -- the Angel of Yahweh. The appearance of the Angel of Yahweh (מַלְאַךְ־יהוה) in the narrative is of central importance to the story itself. His identity is disputed, and attempts to define his identity and role have proven 'vexing' (Meier 1999:53). The translators of the LXX tended to avoid the issue by referring to the Angel of Yahweh, as the 'messenger (μαλαχιας) of Yahweh' (Meier 1999:54). The narrator first identifies him as Balaam's 'adversary' (שָׂטָן). The presence of the drawn sword helps to make this point emphatically. However, the Angel of Yahweh seems to be more than an 'ordinary' angel on a mission to deal

with one of God's perceived enemies. Rather, he appears to speak for God himself. Meier notes that 'Balaam treats this *mal' ak* – and not God – as the ultimate court of appeal' (Meier 1999:56).

Gray observes that the Angel of Yahweh is a "temporary appearance of Yahweh in human form" (Gray 1903:333). Vos saw this spirit being as an Old Testament revelation of the pre-incarnate second person of the Trinity (Vos 1948:107-108). Stephen White has examined the function of the figure of the Angel of Yahweh within the Old Testament narratives and made an interesting suggestion. His conclusion is that the Old Testament uses the term as a *euphemism* for Yahweh. White notes the fairly common "inter-changeability" of the Angel of the LORD and God in the Old Testament narratives (e.g. Gen 16, 18; Ex 3; Judg 3, 6), and questions its narrative purpose. His conclusion is that the designation functions as a euphemism that creates tension within the narrative flow of the story. This usage also allows the narrator to emphasize the transcendence of Yahweh, and yet focus on his immanent involvement in the lives of the community of faith. White concludes that:

> [T]he inter-changeability of the angel of the LORD and Yahweh is a literary device to create tension. I also believe that it may reflect different usage of source and editor whose purpose was to place distance between Yahweh and humanity in order to emphasize the transcendence of Yahweh. In this sense, then, 'angel of the LORD' is a euphemism for God. It is God who speaks to Hagar, Abraham, Manoah and his wife, and Gideon and it is God's appearances, commands, promises and foretellings that we read in these passages. (White 1999:305).

White's understanding would certainly fit the Tale of the Donkey well. The appearance of the Angel of Yahweh within the story serves to heighten the satirical aspects of the story. Balaam's donkey can clearly see what the famous seer and mantic cannot – the Angel of Yahweh ready to end Balaam's career in definitive fashion. The repeated attempts by the donkey to turn off to a safer location, and

Balaam's increasing anger at this behaviour only serve to heighten the tension. The Angel of Yahweh silently takes up his post at every turn. It is only at the moment that Balaam's eyes are opened that he understands the adversary that opposes him, and yields to his authority. The Angel of Yahweh then instructs Balaam in the same manner that Yahweh had done before: to 'speak only what I tell you to speak' (22:35). In so doing, Balaam is led to understand that Yahweh is speaking directly to him through the person of the Angel of Yahweh.

Thus, the use of the Angel of Yahweh as Balaam's antagonist within the narratives functions in a way that creates tension within the flow of the Tale of the Donkey, while emphasizing Yahweh's intervention and actions on behalf of his people. God's people are delivered from the nefarious schemes of Balaam by the Angel of Yahweh standing with drawn sword to defend his people, while Balaam is made to pronounce blessing on Israel, and doom on Israel's enemies. The Divine Warrior ensures that Jacob/Israel will experience blessing, not curse.

7.2.4 Eschatology (Divine History)

7.2.4.1 Eschatological Concerns in the Balaam Narratives of Numbers 22-24

Robbins notes that it is common for a sacred text to 'presuppose that divine powers direct historical processes and events toward certain results' (Robbins 1996b:123). Within the understanding of Christian theology, this is the 'realm of eschatology, apocalyptic or salvation history' (Robbins 1996b:123). Within the Balaam narratives, this plan of God to move history in ways that will result in blessing to his people is evidenced in numerous ways. Most obviously, in the narratives refusal to allow Balaam to curse the people of Israel as requested (ordered?) by Balak. Depending on the reader's perspective, God either intervenes to inexorably call Balaam to serve as his mouthpiece, or (in the view of later writers), converts

Balaam's attempts at cursing Israel into words of blessing (Jos 24:9-10). Within the Balaam poems, this reaches its zenith in Balaam's prophecies of Moab's defeat, and the coming of a royal person who will defeat Israel's enemies. There is a long history of messianic interpretation of the 'star' referred to in verse 17, due in part to its associations with Is 14:12, where the reference seems to point to a king (Budd 1984:270). Olson notes that 'the fourth oracle is a final vision of Israel's future exaltation over its enemies as it becomes established as a nation in the promised land of Canaan' (Olson 1989:150).

7.2.4.2 The Theological Significance of the Balaam Narratives within the Book of Numbers

If Olson is correct that the theological significance of the book of Numbers is to be found in the struggle of those returning from exile to Judah to understand the nature of their relationship with Yahweh, then it stands to reason that the Balaam narratives are placed where they are within the book, in order to further that very purpose. The Balaam narratives and poems are placed in between two singular examples of the wilderness generation's rebellion at God's word, Numbers 21:1-9, and the incident at the Baal of Peor in Numbers 25. As Olson notes, the narratives are placed strategically in a way that marks the end of the generation of rebellion (Numbers 25), and marks the inception of the 'generation of hope' in Numbers 26 (Olson 1996:151).

Within the narratives themselves, no indication is ever given that Moses or the people of Israel are aware of the danger they face from Balak's attempts to have Balaam curse the people. They are totally passive as participants in the drama that is about to unfold. Nevertheless, through the 'good offices' of a pagan diviner, Yahweh blesses his people in no uncertain terms. The oracles of blessing prophesied by

Balaam predict a time of future blessing and hope, a future that nothing will intervene to prevent. Olson notes:

> In the midst of the dismal end of the old desert generation, a new generation of hope is about to rise up. These children of the wilderness will be propelled into a more hopeful future by the powerful words of blessing that God has resolved to speak through Balaam in the face of all outside pressures to the contrary (Olson 1996:151).

To a people returned from exile, facing enemies within and without, these were powerful words of encouragement. It celebrates Yahweh's sovereignty over their enemies, and proves that the 'worst they can do turns to a positive good in Israel's favor' (Budd 1984:273). Budd observes that this theme persists within Christian theology as a word of hope for the future: 'The coming of God's rule to the world he made cannot be hindered or turned aside by the scheming and devices of men' (Budd 1984:273). Israel is reassured that 'despite its defection, it is blessed and will live, through its posterity, in the promised land' (Milgrom 1989:xv). Cole notes that the 'Balaam oracles stand as a testimony of God's faithfulness to Israel and his commitment to work on behalf of his people even though they rebel against him' (Cole 2000:62). As Sakenfeld notes, it serves to answer the question of 'what happens' when a people 'destined for blessing' rebels and turns its back on Yahweh: 'The OT answer, indeed the biblical answer, to this question is that God's mercy always outlives God's wrath' (Sakenfeld 1995:134). She concludes her theological appraisal of the Balaam cycle of narratives by observing that:

> Blessing is extended and maintained before it is even asked for or even known to be needed. The story of Balaam bears witness to God's power and God's grace at work even before the needy cry out for help. (Sakenfeld 1995:135)

One can only imagine what a powerful message of reassurance and hope the Balaam narratives must have represented to the postexilic community.

7.2.5 Human Redemption within the Balaam narratives

Robbins notes that it is common within sacred texts, to observe the 'transmission of benefit from the divine to humans as a result of events, rituals, or practices' (Robbins 1996b:125-126). This often involves the 'liberation' of a person or persons from 'powers or practices that are debilitating and destructive' (Robbins 1996b:126). Within the Balaam narratives, this dimension of human redemption appears in two forms.

First, the narrator makes it clear that Balaam (a pagan foreign diviner) desires to become a faithful Yahwist (10b). Ashley suggests that Balaam is actually reflecting on the fact that Israel's status as a people that have been blessed by God, is evident from their numbers. Balaam could well wish that his end and legacy would be the same as their happy fate (Ashley 1993: 472). The word 'upright' (ישרים) "highlights the idealized depiction of Israel as a nation secure in its habitations, numerous as the dust of the earth and without iniquity" (Levine 2000: 177). Levine suggests that ישרים is actually a synonym of גבור ('mighty ones') in Psalm 112:2, and that Numbers 23:10b might better be rendered 'May I die the death of the valiant. . .' The emphasis in this case would be a focus on Israel's destiny to be victorious over its enemies. The one who is valiant is both brave and one who 'merits' victory before the righteous judge of all the earth (Levine 2000: 177-178).

Secondly, the entire thrust of the Balaam narratives within Numbers 22-24 is focused on the deliverance of Israel from its wilderness experience into a new dimension of life within the land. The second Balaam poem addresses this aspect. In verse 21, as Yahweh observes Israel, he does not see 'misfortune' or 'trouble', because *he is with them*. The text at issue is:

לא־הביט און ביעקב ולא־ראה עמל בישראל

The challenge seems to be in getting the sense of און. It can have the sense of 'disaster' (either present or 'looming'); evil/injustice; deception or falseness (in cultic worship). Koehler-Baumgartner suggest that the sense in Numbers 23:21 is 'looming disaster' (Koehler-Baumgartner 2001: 22). The other key word in the line is עמל which can mean trouble, acquisition, care/anxiety, need or harm (Koehler-Baumgartner 2001: 845).

Ashley notes that the key challenge is to determine whether these words have a physical referent or an ethical one. If the former is the correct understanding, then Israel has 'no physical or political problems' that would occasion cursing, and if the latter, then 'the Israelites have no moral failings that would lead to cursing' (Ashley 1993: 478). Harrison follows this latter view, in which Israel is seen as an 'ideal spiritual community' in which no iniquity is found (Harrison 1990: 312). In order for God to dwell among his people, they must be without sin (Wenham 1983: 175). Allen makes an alternative suggestion:

> At first blush the wording of this verse is nearly incredible. The whole course of Israel's experience in the desert was one evil after another, one trouble on another. Yet it is evidently the standing of Israel that is in view here, rather than her state. It is also possible that the words "evil" and "trouble" in this verse are not used to moral issues but to mantic concerns. That is, God does not look on his people with "an evil eye" or a hostile glance. This interpretation may fit better with the first bi-colon of v. 23. When Israel is presented in the context of a hostile environment, then it is the blessing of Israel that is maintained. Only in the family is the sinfulness of the people addressed. (Allen 1990: 902)

In the text at hand, it would appear then that it might be best translated as follows: 'No disaster looms for Jacob, nor is any trouble observed in Israel'. The final words of verse 21 proclaim that Yahweh is with Israel both as her God and her King. Budd notes that the word תרועה is used both of shouts/trumpet calls in battle as well as

'the acclamation of a king' (Budd 1984: 268). [However, it is worth noting that the LXX has a different rendering: τα ενδοξα αρχοντον εν αυτο ('the glories of rulers are in him'), as does the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Targum Onkelos (Harrison 1990: 313).]

The next verse is difficult, and presents two issues. First is the identity of the animal referenced. In verse 22 Balaam recounts that God, who had brought Israel out of Egypt has 'the strength of a wild ox' (ראם). The precise meaning of this word is unclear (cf. Koehler-Baumgartner 2001: 1163). The LXX renders it as μονοκεροτος or 'unicorn'. Harrison suggests that the animal referred to is the (now-extinct) Aurochs (*Bos primigenius)*, a preferred animal for hunting during the Middle Bronze Age (Harrison 1990: 313). The second issue concerns whether the strength referred to is Yahweh's or Israel's, and depends upon to whom the word לוֹ refers. Albright contends that it refers to the strength of Israel (Albright 1944: 215). Ashley suggests that a reference to God (the subject) would be 'more normal' than a reference to Israel (the object) (Ashley 2000: 480). Taken with the flow of verse 21, however, the clear intent seems to be to emphasise that curses and enchantments are ineffective against Israel precisely because their God, who is mighty to save, is with them. He has determined to bless them, and he sees them dwelling in a state of *shalom*. Whatever their past rebellion (whether the wilderness or the era of the divided kingdom is in focus), their future will be one of living as God's redeemed people in the land

7.2.6 Human Commitment

Robbins notes that sacred texts often address the issue of human commitment to the divine will: 'The sacred texture of a text, therefore, regularly includes a portrayal of humans who are faithful followers and supporters of people who play a

special role in revealing the ways of God to humans' (Robbins 1996b:126). Within the New Testament context, one would automatically think of Jesus' *disciples*. Within the Balaam narratives, this aspect of sacred texture takes its point of departure around the question of whether Balaam was a *disciple* of Yahweh. We noted earlier the observations made by Butzer and Zannoni. Albert Butzer has referred to Balaam ben Beor as 'one of the most perplexing problem characters in all literature.' (Butzer 1953: 247) Arthur Zannoni succinctly puts the issue in this fashion:

> How are we to understand this figure who first confronts us as a pagan diviner, earning his wage as a master of the black arts, and again as the very channel of the word of God? (Zannoni 1978:5)

Michael Barre also grapples with the story of Balaam in Numbers 22-24. He compares it with that of *Sefer Balaam* and comes to the rather startling conclusion that Balaam may have been a non-Israelite Yahwist (Barre 1997:254-266). In yet another analysis of Balaam entitled 'Saint or Sinner', George Coats goes so far as to ascribe heroic status to Balaam:

> Balaam begins and ends with the same devotion to speak only what Yahweh gives him to speak. If a saint is defined as the hero of a legend who demonstrates at least one overriding virtue, then Balaam qualifies. (Coats 1973:28)

Coats further suggests that the Balaam narratives is not particularly about the theme of blessing & cursing, but rather is about *obedience*:

> The Balaam legend is not primarily a story about blessing and cursing. Although most of the allusions to Balaam outside of the legend show the tradition's focus on Balaam's blessing, or better, on his cursing converted by God to a blessing, in the legend the focus of the tradition pinpoints Balaam's obedience. (Coats 1982:64).

While Coats has misstated the overall thematic direction of the Balaam story, it is nonetheless the case that he is absolutely correct that 'obedience' is a significant theme within the Balaam story. The prior intertextual discussions concerning comparisons between Balaam and Abraham, and Balaam and the 'man of God from

Judah' of 1 Kings 13 would seem to bear out Coats' point (Coats 1982:65-66). The respective emphases of the Balaam story and that of the temptation in Genesis 3 likewise serve to underscore this theme. Moore picks up on this theme as well, although his stress is on God's transformation of Balaam from a 'vile idolater' into an 'obedient servant' (Moore 2001:20).

7.2.7 Religious Community

The sacred texture of texts may also place a focus on the 'formation and nurturing of religious community'. Robbins observes that 'human commitment regularly is not simply an individual matter but a matter of participating with other people in activities that nurture and fulfil commitment to divine ways' (Robbins 1996b:127). The Balaam narratives do not explicitly address this issue, other than in terms of their intended purpose. Balaam has no connection within the story with the community of Israel. However, if the focus of the narratives is to help the exilic and postexilic community process their experiences theologically in ways that will encourage them and give them hope for the future, then the rhetorical design of Numbers 22-24 can surely be seen as focusing on this issue of nurturing identification with the people of God, in renewed commitment to 'walking in the ways of the LORD', according to the 'Torah of Moses'.

7.2.7.1 The Theological Perspective of the Book of Numbers

This can be more clearly seen when one considers the theological perspective of the Book of Numbers. Philip Budd suggests that the book of Numbers should be viewed as presenting an understanding of a 'community on the march' that has yet to reach its ultimate goal (Budd 1984:xxv). The 'Tent of Meeting' takes centre stage within the camp, indicating clearly that God himself is at the centre of the community's life and worship. If the people of God are to receive the promised

inheritance of land, then, they must focus their attention on listening to, and obeying the instructions of Yahweh their God. Their collective failure in Numbers 14 to enter the land serves as a rejection of the gift promised by God. Land is portrayed of lasting importance to the economic life of the community, and the necessity of ensuring that all members of the community have access to the land and its resources (Budd 1984:xxvi). The focus of authority within the book of Numbers is understandably on Moses, and the consequences for rejecting Mosaic authority are staggering within the narratives. Nevertheless, despite their defection and rebellion, God will bring his promised blessing upon a new generation of his people.

Jacob Milgrom stresses the theme of the 'presence of God' in the midst of his people, as illustrated by the presence of his 'glory' in the Tabernacle. Despite the extreme provocation of the people, Yahweh continues to keep his covenant with his people, to guide them through the wilderness, and to providentially care for all of their needs (Milgrom 1989:xxxvii). It is God's חסד that the narratives illustrate, as his love for his people remains 'constant' throughout the story.

Timothy Ashley likewise lays great importance on the fact that the book of Numbers reveals that God's commitment to his people remains despite their rebellion. Ashley notes that:

> The 'future is open to God's people, but it is unsure'. It will depend upon whether his people maintain their orientation toward him and him alone. Every new generation of God's people faces the same uncertainty, but also has the same promise of blessing (Ashley 1996:9).

This focus on the succeeding generations is echoed by Dennis Olson in his theological analysis of the narratives. The people of God are on a 'journey through the wilderness' in Numbers, transitioning between the old wilderness 'generation of rebellion', and the 'new generation of hope' (Olson 1996:7). Dozeman observes that the wilderness really serves as the 'birthplace' of the nation of Israel within the

narratives, the place: where Israel is organized, when structures of leadership are defined, when their relationship to God is revealed, and when systems of worship and government are developed' (Dozeman 1998:16). However, the wilderness also becomes a place of 'testing'. Would the people listen to God as he spoke through his servant Moses? Or rebel at his authority?

All of the themes suggested above are critical to our understanding of the theological significance of the book of Numbers, particularly, if the book reached its final form in the Persian period. Ska notes that: 'If the Pentateuch was composed for Israel after the Exile, the book of Numbers explains under what conditions they may regain the Promised Land' (Ska 2006:38). Olson also suggests that the theological perspective of the book of Numbers reflects its postexilic social context:

> The diverse materials in Numbers were shaped and developed throughout many different periods and social situations, ranging from the earliest to the latest times in Israel's history. But the definitive shaping of the book of Numbers in roughly its present form likely occurred sometime after the Babylonian exile (587 – 538 B.C.E.). The book of Numbers was the product of the Jewish community's struggle to understand the pain and punishment of exile and its implications for Israel's relationship to God. Israel's definition as a people and Israel's posture toward the promised land, which had been lost but was now about to be regained. (Olson 1996:3)

The people of Israel were the 'new generation of hope' that longed to worship Yahweh again in the land, in the city of David, in a new temple indwelt by Yahweh's glory. They had been tested in the wilderness of the exile, and had experienced it as a purifying event within the faith community. However, they were still on a journey – no longer an independent nation, resident in the land, but a small, weak people under the administrative political oversight of a foreign empire. As they processed theologically what had happened in the past, and what they hoped for in the future, the book of Numbers would bring reassurance that Yahweh's *hesed* would not desert them. The future might be uncertain, but their relationship to Yahweh, and his word

as mediated by his servant Moses was not. Within this context, the focus on Mosaic authority, on Moses as the 'exemplar' prophet and the priestly regulations for the right worship of Yahweh would serve to galvanize the community into a unified, faithful worshipping community that walked 'in the ways of the Lord'.

7.2.7.2 The Role of the Balaam Narratives of Numbers 22-24 in the development of religious community within the Exilic and early Post-exilic Contexts

Given the theological perspective of the book of Numbers as a whole, it is no surprise to the reader that the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24 serve this purpose. In the darkness of the Exile, the people of God are given a ray of hope. There is no 'enchantment against Jacob, no divination against Israel' (Num 23:23). God's electing purpose in choosing Israel to bear his name and his determination to bless them will be fulfilled. Their election is a calling to walk in a way that is holy and blameless before him. They are called to walk in the ways of Yahweh, by doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly (and faithfully) with their God. For a people who must have questioned whether God's election of Israel and his concomitant purpose to bless them remained in force, the Balaam narratives were a call to rededicate themselves as his called-out community. They were to turn away from the apostasy of their fathers during the divided monarchy, and to turn again to the ways of Yahweh as expressed in the תורה. The message of the Balaam narratives (that God intends blessing, not curse for them) thus serves to galvanise the exilic/early post-exilic community in their identity as the people of God.

7.2.8 Ethics/Prophetic Ethics

Robbins notes that the question of ethics arises within sacred texts with regard to the way in which they portray the 'special ways of thinking and acting' which are 'motivated by commitment to God' (Robbins 1996b:129). Within the narratives, we

are presented with ethical questions concerning the behaviour of both Balak and Balaam.

Recent scholarship has called into question the legacy left to Balak. Perhaps, he has been 'short-changed', historically speaking, and 'marginalized' (Lee 2004:259) within our analysis of the story. On the face of it, Balak seems to be doing what kings are called upon to do – to protect their people from external threats. In a delightful study, Goldin asks: 'Should not a king do all he can to protect his country?' (Goldin 2001:455) Furthermore, Balak humbles himself as a king, begging Balaam for his help, even putting his own (considerable, no doubt) personal fortune at risk. He engages in very un-kingly behaviour, taking Balaam almost by the hand from one location to another to help facilitate the pronouncement of execrations. He takes 'orders' from Balaam about where to build the altars, and how they are to be furnished. In short, he is depicted as one who puts national interest ahead of his own self-interest (Goldin 1991:456). Goldin notes the unfairness of it all:

> He knew his immediate obligation to protect his people from invaders who had to be repelled by more than ordinary weapons. That is why he was ready to reward Balaam handsomely. He was neither the first nor the last to be let down by a trusted ally. That in seeking help he was prepared to go to extremes, was that to discredit? The Hebrew chronicler implies that it was, but that it is partisan reporting. (Goldin 1991:459)

And yet, partisan or not, the narrator is at pains to stress that Israel has, as yet, made no threatening moves towards Moab. Balak's intended pre-emptive 'strike' through the use of execrations is therefore, decidedly reprehensible. Unfortunately for Balak, it is 'a fool's idea which unfolds into inevitable failure' (Lee 2004:259).

Balaam's conduct is more nuanced, and points us to the question of what it means to be a faithful prophet of Yahweh. Opinions as to Balaam's ultimate character abound, and differ widely. George Coats continues to argue for Balaam's candidacy

for 'sainthood', noting that the story 'emphasizes the virtue of a man, his contribution to Israel's well being, indeed the well being of all nations' (Coats 1973:29). On the other hand, Moberly sees Balaam's willingness to check in with God once more in 22:18-19, as 'a pious smokescreen' (Moberly 2006:141). He suggests that Balaam is driven by greed: 'Balaam is allowing his vocation to be corrupted by greed, and this greed has made him blind to the presence of the God with whom, and for whom, he speaks' (Moberly 2006:147).

What then were the ethical demands placed upon a prophet of Yahweh? Walter Brueggemann has helpfully expressed the Old Testament authors' understanding of the task of a prophet in this way:

> *The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us*. . . The alternative consciousness to be nurtured, on the one hand, serves to *criticize* in dismantling the dominant consciousness. To that extent, it attempts to do what the liberal tendency has done, engage in a rejection and delegitimatizing of the present ordering of things. On the other hand, that alternative consciousness to be nurtured serves to *energize* persons and communities by its promise of another time and situation toward with the community of faith may move. To that extent it attempts to do what the conservative tendency has done, to live in fervent anticipation of the newness that God has promised and will surely give. (Brueggemann 1978: 13)

Similarly, Bruce Birch has suggested that the prophetic task was distinctively rooted in the word of God proclaimed:

> Although rooted in tradition, the prophets clearly announce the word of a living God who is active in new ways in the people's midst, and they often found themselves as the announcers of God's new future for the people, both in judgment and in hope. Although God's word may be known through the traditions of the past, the prophets believed in the power of God's word to change history for the future. The people could receive or refuse God's word, but in either case the future would be affected by the entry of God's word into their midst. Thus, the prophets were both renewers of a faith tradition and discerners of God's "new thing" (Isa 43:19). (Birch 1991: 257)

Janzen notes with regard to the 'prophetic paradigm' that 'at its center stood faithful service to the point of suffering' (Janzen 1994:155). The 'prophet' was one who spoke Yahweh's word, and who was 'subject to God's command'. He would proclaim the demands of covenant faithfulness to king and people alike, without regard to personal cost (Janzen 1994:173).

Balaam is clearly a bit of an enigma. A pagan diviner, he is called upon by Balak to pronounce execrations against Israel (22:6, 11; 23:25; 24:10). Within the narratives of Numbers 22-24, he functions as a Yahweh prophet. The conflict between Balak's expectations, and Balaam's actual performance is central to the story's unfolding. Michael Moore has noted the 'role strain' evident in their encounter. Balak is expecting Balaam to be proficient in sorcery (כשׁף) who specialises in execrations and who will pronounce curses on Israel. Within the narrative, Balaam sees himself as a *diviner* (רואה) who seeks to know what God has revealed (Moore 1990: 109 ff.). Balaam's response is in accordance with his call – he can only speak that which Yahweh puts in his mouth. Allen notes:

> In the introductory oracle the major elements of the passage are on display. Balaam is unable to curse Israel; Israel is unique because of her blessing from the Lord. Balak is furious – and the Lord is sovereign. The words of consternation of Balak and the response of Balaam are marvellous; we are supposed to chuckle as we witness the work of God among the enemies of his people. (Allen 1990: 899)

We have been introduced to a pattern that will become familiar. Balak has brought Balaam to pronounce execrations – but Balaam will speak only the *word* of blessing that God puts in his mouth. The first Balaam poem gives us a deep insight into the relationship between blessing and cursing in the Balaam narratives. Balak's deepest desire is that Israel be cursed. Yahweh's sovereign determination is that

Israel be blessed. Balaam is caught in the middle, unable to do anything beyond that which God ordains.

What did Balak *expect to happen*? Balak sought Balaam to come and curse Israel, presumably because Balaam was thought to have some particular skill in this regard. Levine asks the question: what was it exactly that Balak expected Balaam *to do*? A diviner or sorcerer would call upon a god or group of gods to disperse the enemy. The process is known elsewhere from the Old Testament. In Numbers 10:35-36, the 'Song of the Ark' is an example: 'Arise, O LORD, let your enemies be scattered.' Levine writes:

> What the numinous Ark was expected to do in battle, namely, to disperse the enemy as the call upon YHWH was pronounced was what Balak wanted Balaam to accomplish: the pronouncement of (Levine 2000:212)

In the Ancient Near East, the words of a curse or execration were largely believed to have an inherent power to bring about the desired effect. Brichto notes:

> Since it does not seem likely that either God or demonic agents were assumed as the authors of the effects of the curse, the spoken curse was itself and alone conceived to be the effective agent. This is the significance of the habitual preference for the passive construction in the curse formula and the consequent absence of any reference to an external agent, demonic or divine. *The curse was automatic or self-fulfilling* having the nature of a "spell", the very words of which were thought to possess reality and the power to effect the desired results. (Brichto 1963: 8-9)

However, whatever the common understanding may have been, the Old Testament's stated view of the efficacy of a curse, was that it was effective *only insofar as it declared the will of Yahweh* (Batto, 1999:211). It is curious that Balak would have retained a diviner if he desired the pronouncement of execrations against Israel. However, Christopher Mitchell has suggested a different understanding of Balak's request and expectation of Balaam:

> There is no question, then about the manner in which Balaam's benedictions or maledictions take effect. Balaam does not have an exceptional ability to pronounce powerful formulas which effect what they state. . . Neither are the words, prayers, or wishes for God to bless/curse. Rather, Balaam is a diviner. His skill lies in his ability to *predict* the future based on the examination of signs, not in making events occur. . . Balaam seeks his oracles from Yahweh. . . This also is perfectly in keeping with his role. Since Yahweh is Israel's God, Balaam must find out Israel's fate from Yahweh. It would do no good to consult Baal or Ishtar about a people that lies outside of their jurisdiction. The references to Yahweh do not make Balaam a monotheist or a worshipper of Yahweh – when inquiring about another people, Balaam would consult their god. . . (Mitchell 1987: 91-92)

Mitchell's suggestion is, therefore, that Balak's interest lies not in his ability to pronounce effective execrations, but rather in his ability to give accurate intelligence about Israel's fate from the perspective of her gods. Mitchell observes that:

> Balak wants Balaam to declare that Israel is headed for defeat, for he knows that Balaam accurately predicts the future. The strength of Balaam's curse is not in the power of the words, but in the accurate discernment of what the gods have in store. (Mitchell 1987: 92)

Mitchell gives us an interesting proposed solution to the intra-role conflict noted by Moore. If Balak merely wished to know Israel's future so that he could determine how to respond to them, then it would have made sense for him to retain a diviner. He was asking Balaam to provide a service which the diviner was well able to provide. If this is so, then it might also explain why Balak takes no punitive action against Balaam when things do not go as he wishes. Balaam had not betrayed him by pronouncing blessing (for even a mercenary is expected to be loyal to his employer). Rather, Balak had wanted to know Israel's future destiny, and he had learned it in no uncertain terms.

Mitchell's proposal is an attractive one. Yet, it fails to explain from the text why Balak is portrayed as so very angry at the results of Balaam's actions. He clearly expected something different to happen. Balak wanted execrations – but Balaam could not provide them, because they had not been permitted: 'The kinds of

punishments that are threatened in the curses mentioned above have not been authorised. To the contrary, blessings have been authorised'. (Levine 2000: 214) Balaam experienced both visual and auditory communications from divine beings. The visual involved both time and space, as he *sees* the intended target of his curse. Note that in the poems, Balaam shifts his vantage point several times for this very purpose. Levine notes that Balaam is quite overwhelmed by what he sees and concludes that execrations will not prevail against Israel (Levine 2000:173). The pronouncement of execrations is under divine control. The divine control of magical praxis is fundamental to Ancient Near Eastern thought. The diviner did not so much manipulate or coerce the gods – rather, he appealed to them for their help. Levine is quite critical of Coats at this point – Balaam actually had no decision to make whether he would obey Yahweh (Levine 2000:215). The first oracle does not reveal how Balaam knew that *El/Yahweh* had marked Israel for blessing. Perhaps, the writer assumes that Yahweh's blessing upon Israel was obvious to Balaam. However, the 3rd and 4th oracles explicitly tell the reader that Balaam has, in fact, received instructions from God regarding Israel. Balaam comes to realise that God will not renege on his promise to bless his people, and that he (Balaam) cannot withdraw from his role in the story. As Lapsley so trenchantly observes: 'Balaam seems to grasp only fitfully and gradually that exegesis in the service of God does not coincide very well with exegesis that profits him' (Lapsley 2006:26).

Michael S. Moore has made some extremely helpful observations on the issue of 'role strain' within the Balaam narratives. He concludes that the Balaam narratives represent 'intra-role conflict'. Balak attempts to 'hire' Balaam on the understanding that he can function as a sorcerer/exorcist. Balaam is portrayed as seeing his owns gifts as that of a seer and diviner. Moore contends that the final form of the Balaam

cycles preserves *both* role sets, and places the focus of the narratives on Balaam's God (Moore 1990:116-121).

It would seem that the reader is, indeed, left with the unresolved problem of role-conflict in Balaam's case. Balak takes no punitive action (other than failing to reward Balaam), because it is not a good idea to antagonise a powerful diviner. But Balaam, at the end of the day, fails to 'deliver the goods' so far as Balak is concerned.

A consideration of the 'ethical' dimensions of the Balaam narratives is critical to the reader's understanding of the narratives. Balak's conduct is reprehensible and murderous. Balaam's conduct, while ambiguous at points, seems to point to an intention to do only the will of Yahweh, insofar as it concerned Balak's request. He fulfilled the 'ideal' of an Israelite prophet in that he would speak only the word of Yahweh, and do only what Yahweh commanded. Despite the personal risk and cost, Balaam would not be deterred by Balak's entreaties or anger. At the end of the day, Balaam remained faithful to Yahweh's call to be his mouthpiece, and pronounces the blessing that Yahweh has determined to give to Israel. While he was not an Israelite (as required by Dt 18:18), he was a servant of Israel's God. Within the narrative of Numbers 22-24, Balaam upholds the prophetic ethical ideal. (Obviously, the perspective of the Tale of the Donkey is intended to lampoon Balaam as a sort of foreign 'anti-prophet' who could neither see, nor hear the Angel of Yahweh. But this represents a later interpolation, intended to discredit a foreign mantic used by God to speak his word.)

7.3 Recent Perspectives on the Theological Interpretation of the Balaam Narratives of Numbers 22-24

The Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24 are intended to serve as a comfort and reassurance to the exilic/early postexilic community that Yahweh has not forgotten them in spite of their shattering experiences in the Exile. Weise notes that

despite all of the seeming evidence to the contrary, Israel has not been cursed and God will fulfil his promise to the Patriarchs to bless Israel in the future (Weise 2006:233).

Schuele points out that the central issue within post-exilic Yehud was the tension between those who had stayed in Judah, and those who had returned from the exile in Babylon. The decision of the final editor to place the Balaam narratives within the book of Numbers at a point where the people are poised to enter the 'Promised Land' was intended to legitimize the concerns of the refugee community in Yehud. Those who returned to the Persian province of Yehud had to struggle with critical questions of what constituted a true prophet, a true Jew, and orthodox religious practice (Schuele 2001:20). Within that context, the issue of what to make of Balaam's apparent prophetic status was a key issue. The forming of negative views of Balaam become a means of helping to preserve Israel's identity within the post-exilic context.

Despite his apparent function as a Yahwistic prophet within the narratives of Numbers 22-24, Balaam must be transformed into a foreign diviner who (while used for a time by Yahweh), was ultimately an enemy. The insertion of the Tale of the Donkey in Numbers 22:22-35 serves as a form of anti-prophetic satire that serves to ridicule and parody the figure of Balaam. In this way, the post-exilic leadership is able to locate prophetic authority within the figure of Moses as the paradigmatic prophet, and ultimately within the Torah of Moses. With the presence of the Torah, there is no longer much need for prophets.

As noted earlier, Michael S. Moore devoted his doctoral dissertation to an investigation of the Balaam narratives, giving particular attention to the text of *Sefer Balaam* from Deir 'Alla (*The Balaam Traditions -- Their Character and Development*, 1990). His focus, however, is not on the Old Testament text as such,

but rather on the role of magico-religious specialists in the context of the Ancient Near East. In Moore's view, 'few traditions in the Hebrew Bible manifest so great a degree of internal conflict as do the Balaam traditions' (Moore 1990:116).

Moore considers a variety of magico-religious specialists in turn. From Anatolian sources, he examines the 'old woman', (who enacted, at various times, the roles of exorcist, purification-princess, incantation-reciter, diviner, and sorceress), and the 'augur', who served as augur, purification-priest, and diviner. From Mesopotamian sources, he examines the 'Exorcist' (who served not only to free people from demonic influence, but also served as purification-priest, healer, and sorcerer), and the 'Diviner/Seer' (Akk. term *baru*) who served as diviner, dream-interpreter, and oracle/prayer reciter. He also examines Syro-Palestinian sources and the function of the 'Diviner' [who served as Ornithomantic (observation of the flight of birds), Cleromantic (observation of the flight of arrows), Oneiromantic (interpretation of dreams), Lecanomantic (divination by observing the flow of oil), Rhabdomantics (use of 'magic' wands or staves), and Necromantic (attempted communication with the dead)], and the 'Seer' (*ro'eh)*, who served as sacrificial-priest, diviner, oracle-reciter, government adviser (Moore 1990:20-60). He also gives extended consideration to the exorcist in Syro-Palestine. Moore observes that while it is difficult to point to the existence of a particular speciality focused on exorcism, it seems clear that the role of the exorcist was enacted within the community. He notes the listing of specific demons in the Bible (e.g. Lilith, Isaiah 34:14; Azazel, Leviticus 16:8, 10, 26;) and suggests that there is evidence of exorcistic 'praxis' with the Old Testament:

> Traces of exorcistic praxis are thus probably retained in the wearing of alarm bells on the high priest's robe (Exodus 28:35), the fumigation ceremony on *yom kippur* (Lev 16:12-13), the wearing of blue tassels (Num 15:38), and the binding of the *mezuzot* on head, hands, door and

> gate (Deut 6:18; 11:19), not to mention the purely magical elements still preserved in some of the prophetic legends (e.g., 2 Kgs 13:21). Worthy of further note in this regard is Nehushtan, a bronze serpent whose origin is traced back to Mosaic times (Num 21:9), and who was honored in the Jerusalem temple for generations before its destruction by Yahwistic reformers. (2 Kgs 18:4). (Moore 1990:64)

Moore concludes that although one cannot speak with the same precision about Syro-Palestinian exorcists as one can with respect to Anatolian and Mesopotamian exorcists, there nonetheless is sufficient evidence to ‘reject Eichrodt's view that “ancient Israel knew nothing of a world of evil spirits.”’ (Moore 1990:64)

Role Enactment, Role Expectations and Intra-role Conflict

Moore then examines the Balaam texts in the light of three primary role theory variables: *role enactment, role expectations,* and *intra-role conflict.* Moore's basic conclusion is that the Balaam tradition of Numbers 22 manifests a high degree of internal *role strain* within different groups within the Israelite community. In this instance, the tension is between Balaam's roles as diviner/seer and sorcerer/exorcist. Moore sees the tradition in its final form as a reformulation that allowed the recognition and preservation of both role-sets (those of diviner and exorcist) while giving primary attention to the role of Israel's God in the narrative. This served to preserve the theocentric perspective in the understanding of Israel's history. (Moore, 1990:110-123). The point of all this is to suggest that role designations often overlapped. Therefore, one should not be surprised that Balaam’s role-sets also overlap within the narratives. After analysing the various roles enacted by Balaam both in the DAT and in the Old Testament accounts, Moore concludes:

> From a role theory perspective, we simply want to ask. . . what *roles* Balaam enacts in the recoverable biblical tradition about him. To some extent the pluralistic portrayal of Balaam in the biblical tradition would appear to testify to a significant degree of role overlap and pre-emption between the two role-sets we observed in the DAT tradition. In the Bible, Balaam enacts roles as “seer,” “oneiromantic,” and “oracle-reciter” within an overall “diviner-seer” role-set. But he also enacts

> roles as "purification-priest," and (*potential*) "sorcerer" within a (now severely restricted) "exorcist" role set. Thus the Balaam we see in the biblical texts is not a simple figure, but a complex one enacting a plurality of roles for which there is not a minimal but a considerable degree of role overlap and pre-emption. (Moore 1990: 109)

Clearly Balaam serves as a 'diviner/seer' within the text, in keeping with his Mesopotamian origins. Moore suggests that the repetition of sacrifices within Nu 23-24 suggests the actions of a 'purification-priest', seeking favourable conditions for a reading for his client (Moore 1990:108). Balak's impression that Balaam can pronounce execrations on Israel would seem to support the plausibility of Balaam's portrayal as a possible 'exorcist'. Moore also makes a great contribution to our understanding of the differing Balaam traditions within the Old Testament. His suggestion is that the maintenance of both role sets (diviner/seer and exorcist) became untenable within the historical development of the Balaam figure.

> As the biblical tradition gradually passed through the hands of Israelite tridents, however, any pluralistic view of Balaam which may have lain at its core began to creak and groan under the increasing strain. Without arguing for a rigid evolutionary view of Israelite religious history, there seems little doubt that Israel's view of "appropriate" magico-religious behaviour experienced a shift away from the "magic" pole towards the "religion" pole on the "magic-religion" continuum. Accordingly, this shift must have led to different pressures among different audiences to reinterpret the Balaam tradition. (Moore 1990:118)

Moore's study is detailed and insightful. One of its greatest contributions is the recognition that the study of similar role-sets within the Ancient Near East can shed light on the study of prophecy within the Old Testament. The conflict of role expectations within the story between Balak and Balaam helps to explain the tension inherent within the story. However, his conclusion that Balaam was not a Yahwist seems at odds with the text. Nevertheless, his is an indispensable work. [Leson critiques Moore's methodology for a 'fundamentally flawed assumption' – that

Balaam was a historical figure. In Leson's view, the story set forth in Numbers 22-24 is 'a *literary* work, not a report of actual events or actual people' (Leson 2007:388).]

We have already considered John Greene's work on Balaam in the discussion on ideological texture. Greene's argument is that the key issue facing Israel was the nature of divine-human communication. Greene suggests that the figure of Balaam served a paradigmatic role for succeeding generations of authors, who 'eventually became a marked, paradigmatic mantic for all seasons' (Greene 1992:x). Balaam is a historical figure, perhaps a monarch (deduced from a social scientific analysis of the communication patterns between Balak and Balaam), possibly, to be identified with King Bela, 'son of Beor' (Gn 36:32), who ruled Edom in the late 2nd millennium. Greene observes that: 'It seems likely that underlying the numerous accounts of Balaam was a monarch who was famous for his abilities as a diviner – and who, like the others, became a legend' (Greene 1992:xi).

Greene (following Friedman) posits that 'warring priesthoods' (each struggling for their own power advantage) utilised Balaam as a 'foil' in their respective propaganda campaigns. These differing perspectives on Balaam are reflected within the various strata of the Pentateuch, and account for the differing views of Balaam within Numbers and Deuteronomy (Greene 1992:66-67). The Balaam cycle in its present form represents a period between 715-687 BCE during Hezekiah's reign (Greene 1992:46). The 'Tale of the Donkey' portrays Balaam as an 'Assyrian dupe', and represents P's polemical perspective (Greene 1992:47). A typical example of the flavour of Greene's analysis can be seen on pages 62-63:

> It is difficult, therefore, not to look for correspondence between figures in the Balaam cycle and figures during the time of P. Here is my reconstruction. For P, Balak recalled Ahaz. Balaam recalled all the mantics whom P saw threatening the Aaronids. Sacrifices of rams and bulls by Balak, and by Balak and Balaam on another occasion, recalled the sacrifices that Ahaz would have offered on behalf of the Assyrian

> monarch on the one hand, and perhaps some joint sacrifice by Ahaz and an Assyrian agent respectively. Since the princes of Moab labor under P's indictment also, these recall the political support Ahaz would have had to have in order to "send all the gold and silver" to Assyria. (Moore 1992:62-63)

While Greene presents a very suggestive understanding of the development of the narratives, his presentation is rather speculative. What is most valuable about it, is the notion that the differing viewpoints within Israel about the figure of Balaam (and the role sets he represents) were the result of tensions within the Israelite community. It seems more probable to this author that these resulted from tensions within the postexilic community between the returnees and those who had remained, and, therefore, centred on the need to define Israelite identity within the postexilic context

Mark Stewart Leson has written a massive dissertation which takes a different tack to the study of Balaam (Leson 2007). He is not primarily concerned with the phenomenological issues of Michael Moore, nor with the source-critical concerns of Greene, Weise or Schuele. Rather, he hypothesizes that the Balaam cycles are best understood as 'folklore', a literary genre that focuses on texts (spoken and written) that are 'primarily oral and traditional, as opposed to written and novel' (Leson 2007:8). He rejects the use of source-criticism to resolve the differing traditions found in the Balaam narratives:

> [V]arious repetitions in Numbers 22-24 have been explained by source critics as the result of an editorial process in which multiple sources were combined together to form a single narrative. The instinct of the source critic is understandable – it is difficult to deny that Numbers 22-24 contains materials that on the surface are diverse, including poetry (the seven oracles) and a prose section, the story of Balaam and his she-ass, that appears intrusive with regard to the rest of the prose. Although there are numerous elements of content that link the various parts of Numbers 22-24, there are significant differences among them as well. The existence of the similarities and differences within Numbers 22-24 and the other Balaam materials warrants explanation without resorting to source-critical methods. (Leson 2007:9-10)

Leson suggests, rather, that the biblical Balaam narratives and the DAT be understood arising out of a primarily oral culture ('the folk'). The focus is on identifying those central elements of the folk tale that serve to illuminate the culture from which the story emerged, and to explain the use of the particular figure around which the story is formed. Leson does this by organizing the themes and motifs that he considers are at the heart of the Balaam cycles both within the Biblical materials, and within Combination I of the DAT, as these motifs serve as the 'building blocks from which the narratives are constructed' (Leson 2007:14). The themes chosen are: concepts of space, place and geography; foreignness and ethnicity; the world of animals and plants; and forms of communication (Leson 2007:15). Leson's discussion of these themes and motifs is fascinating and very helpful at numerous points. He concludes:

> [T]he central figure of Numbers 22-24, Balaam, is an alien presence within the Pentateuch. He is a figure who exists in a marginal and peripheral space: He never enters the central space of the narrative of Exodus-Leviticus-Numbers, the Israelite encampment; he only gazes down on it from elevated vantage points. He comes from an unidentified, distant land. Much of the imagery employed in his oracles and in the stories associated with him is drawn from the natural world, that is, the world peripheral to human settlement. His primary function, as an intermediary between the human and divine worlds, further sets him apart from ordinary human existence. The Deir Alla Balaam Text, with its focus on Balaam's role as a communicator with the divine realm and on his use of natural imagery in his oracle, adds to the sense that he is a figure on the periphery. (Leson 2007:454)

Leson observes that 'despite all of the positive aspects of the Balaam figure, the biblical traditions about him were ultimately reinterpreted, first in Yahwist circles, and later on in both Jewish and Christian scholarship, as overwhelmingly negative' (Leson 2007:455). Leson's approach is innovative and suggestive. However, he does not suggest exactly how the Balaam traditions arose and reached their final literary form.

David Marcus has also taken a different approach to the Balaam story in his fascinating book, *From Balaam to Jonah, Anti-prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible* (1995). Marcus is attempting to answer the question of why various prophets or prophetic types are satirized within the Old Testament. He gives particular attention to the story of Elisha and the mocking boys 2 Kings 2; the 'lying prophet' of 1 Kings 13; Jonah, and, of course, the figure of Balaam. Marcus (citing Rofe) suggests that these stories may have originated within the same literary circle, and have been circulated within the post-exilic 6th century, early Second Temple period in order to promote a viewpoint regarding 'wayward prophets' (Marcus 1995:167). Thus, the satire of Elisha calling a bear to savage a group of boys puts the focus on the abuse of prophetic power. The lying prophet of 1 Kings 13 is an example of prophets who cannot be trusted to speak the truth. Jonah is an example of a type of prophet who places personal comfort and concerns above his mission. Balaam is an example of a prophet (and a foreigner at that), whose only interest is pecuniary gain, and so on. They would also serve as a timely warning against the abuse of power by any authority figure (Marcus 1995:168). Marcus identifies the presence of five primary elements that help to identify the Tale of the Donkey as satire: fantastic situations, use of irony, ridicule, parody, and rhetorical features.

Fantastic Situations

The first is the use of 'fantastic situations' which in Marcus' view, places the Tale of the Donkey in the realm of legend or folklore. The inclusion of the Angel of the Lord, and the presence of the talking donkey form the key aspects of this element.

Use of Irony

The second key element is the use of irony, in which the story appears to be saying one thing, but really has an entirely different message to convey. The irony

conveyed in the Tale of the Donkey is palpable. Balaam is portrayed as one who is a 'professional seer'. It is his 'stock in trade' business to be able to peer into areas which mere mortals are not given to look into. In Numbers 24, he is described as the one whose 'eye is clear' or 'open' (24:3, 15); and as one who 'sees the vision of the Almighty' (24:4). What delicious irony, then, that Balaam cannot *see* anything at all until God opens his eyes (22:31). Marcus notes that the one who could boast that he 'knows the knowledge of the Most High' (24:16) had to acknowledge that he had not known the Angel of the Lord was in the road to oppose him – something that was readily apparent to his donkey! (Marcus 1995: 32)

More than this, the 'man of words' must resort to beating his donkey in an attempt to communicate, whereas his donkey is given the facility of fluent speech with which to confound him. Marcus notes:

> It is ironic that the man of words is reduced to using brute force, whereas the brute (his donkey), teaches him with words. Balaam is thereby shown to be more of a brute than his donkey! The Midrash notes the irony in this situation. Here was this donkey, 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. (Marcus 1995: 33)

He also notes Jacob Milgrom's observation that Balaam wishes for a sword with which to kill his donkey – when the sword he desires is closer than he thinks in the hands of the Angel of the Lord. But it is not the donkey who will feel its edge, but Balaam himself. The irony is intensified when one realises that a man who intends to destroy an entire nation and military force with a 'word' cannot kill his donkey without a blade. (Marcus 1995: 33). There is also the presence of a 'measure for measure' feature. God is angry at Balaam for 'going', after apparently giving permission to Balaam to go. Balaam is angry at the donkey for *not going*. Both Balaam and the donkey seem not to be at fault in their behaviour.

Ridicule

Marcus observes that the author of this satire *ridicules* Balaam by placing him in all sorts of undignified situations. First, the one who purports to control the spiritual forces of the heavens finds that he cannot control his donkey (as it wanders off the path into a field). Then, the master diviner is unceremoniously shoved into a wall by the donkey who is trying to avoid the angel, such that Balaam's foot is 'scraped' (22:25). But the worst is yet to come – the donkey simply sits down with Balaam on his back and refuses to move. Balaam, who normally converses with kings, must now debate his own donkey. (In this, Marcus notes, he seems to be ignorant of the conventions of ordinary speech as he seeks to answer the donkey's own rhetorical questions.) The master of control now is shown to be out of control as he flails at his donkey with his staff. The diviner and the donkey change places as it were: the donkey becomes the 'seer', and the seer becomes the clueless creature. Balaam's ridicule is complete. (Marcus 1995: 35)

Parody

Parody involves the failure of a character within a narrative to conform to expected behaviour patterns. In the Tale of the Donkey, Balaam is parodied when he fails to produce his bona fides as a seer. His gifts of divination appear to fail him. Rather than being in 'control' of the situation, he is a passive observer, almost victim of the circumstances beyond his control.

Marcus suggests that there is even an intentional comparison made to two other stories: the call of Samuel (1 Samuel 3) and the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22). Intertextual comparisons have already been made with both of these narratives. What is significant here is that the reader would have seen the comparison: Samuel hears the call of Yahweh on three occasions, but does not realise who is calling until the

fourth encounter. Balaam is totally clueless on three occasions as to the danger he faces in encountering Yahweh on the road. Not until the fourth encounter are his eyes opened to his real adversary and danger (Marcus 1995: 38.) We have already noted Safren's analysis (1988) of the inner-biblical similarities between Genesis 22 and Numbers 22. Abraham and Balaam (both 'prophets') are on a journey with a donkey – Abraham in obedience to God's will, and Balaam in (apparent) disobedience to the divine direction. At the climax of the story, the Angel of the Lord appears, and 'reverses' what seemed to be Yahweh's original intention. Abraham is allowed to return home with his son Isaac, and Balaam is allowed to proceed from his home to meet Balak. The inner-biblical allusions to the call of Samuel, and the binding of Isaac serve to show Balaam's 'true colours' – at least, in the opinion of the author of the Tale of the Donkey! (Marcus 1995: 38-39)

Rhetorical Devices

Marcus notes many of the features of the story that have already been discussed earlier in our study: the use of inclusion, the use of three-fold repetition, and suggests that their use combined with the elements previously discussed serves to develop a marvellous example of anti-prophetic satire within the narrative. After analyzing each of these elements of the satire, he concludes:

> The purpose of the satire is to belittle Balaam and expose him to ridicule. Through the satire, it is demonstrated that Balaam, supposedly the best of his profession, is not such an expert after all. He is no match when faced with real competition like the angel of the Lord. In terms of 'seeing', he is even bested by his donkey. (Marcus 1995: 41)

Marcus' characterisation of the Tale of the Donkey as anti-prophetic satire is enormously helpful in understanding the final form of the story as we now have it. The presence of such beautifully crafted literary satire also constitutes evidence of a changing perspective on the figure of Balaam within the Old Testament.

7.4 Is Balaam Among the Prophets? Differing Perspectives on Balaam within the Old Testament

We have already discussed the intertextural references to Balaam in the Old Testament. However, it is important to return to the various references to Balaam within the Old Testament to address an issue of central importance to our study. This writer has found Ed Noort's incisive study entitled 'Balaam the Villain: The History of the Reception of the Balaam Narrative in the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets', tremendously helpful in this task, and seeks to build upon its insights (Noort 2008).

How is one to explain the differing views of Balaam within the Old Testament? We begin by presupposing that the account in Numbers 22-24 (minus the Tale of the Donkey) represents the main tradition concerning Balaam within the Old Testament. The other references to be considered are brief in the extreme and do not form coherent text units on their own. Rather, they are reflections upon, and developments of themes found within the Numbers 22-24 pericope.

Within the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24, it is significant that Balaam is portrayed in a positive light. He is never described *per se* by his vocation. Rather, he is portrayed as one who is intent on doing the will of Yahweh, and who will only speak the "words that Yahweh puts in his mouth (Numbers 22:38; 23:12, 26; 24:13). In doing so, he resembles the ideal prophet of Deuteronomy 18:18, who will only speak the words that Yahweh places in his mouth. To be sure, Balaam is never referred to within the Balaam pericope, or the remainder of the Old Testament as a נביא. Nor is he ever referred to as a הוזה *or a* ראה. The only designation of him at all within the Old Testament is that found in Joshua 13:22 where it is described as a הקוסם or 'soothsayer'. Within the narrative in Joshua, this is considered an indictment, making him guilty of violating Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and 18:10-14. From

the Deuteronomic author's standpoint, 'divination' is treasonous behaviour, a practice of the Canaanites living around Israel. But Noort has convincingly pointed out that this represents a much later perspective on the figure of Balaam (Noort 2008:17).

One needs consider the gloss in 1 Samuel 9:9, where we are told by the narrator that 'what is now called a prophet (נביא*)* was once called a seer (ראה)'. In other words, in an earlier time and place, it was recognised within Israel that there were a variety of ways in which one might seek to discern the divine will. In Isaiah 3:3, the role of the 'diviner' (קסם) was listed with other important members of the religious establishment and leadership of Judah. Within the context of Isaiah's pronouncement, it is said that the diviner, who served as part of the 'support and staff' of Judah will be taken away. What is most significant for our purposes is that the role of diviner is not condemned – only the manner in which it was practiced (Wildberger 1991:131). Blenkinsopp observes that: 'It is worth noting that the diviner (*qosem*) is mentioned without comment or criticism alongside the prophet (*nabi'*), and that the priest is conspicuously and somewhat unexpectedly absent from that enumeration' (Blenkinsopp 2000:199). This can also be seen in Micah 3:6-7, where diviners and seers are mentioned in the same breath as prophets.

If so, then Balaam, although not an Israelite, followed a respected and important calling, well known to Israel. In the main Balaam pericope of Numbers 22-24 he comports himself as a prophet of Yahweh. Even if one takes the view that he was a הקוסם, he remains well within the tradition of Israelite seers such as those referred to in 1 Samuel 9:9 (Levinson 2003:516). But within the narrative of Joshua 13, he is excoriated for 'practicing divination'. How are we to understand this development?

In part, this development within the Old Testament authors' view of the figure of Balaam reflects the development in their view of prophecy. We begin by examining afresh, the later re-evaluations of Balaam within the Old Testament authors' view. Noort suggests that the reception history of Balaam can be seen as following one of two paths. Either Balaam is viewed as the Gentile prophet who helped prophesy the coming of Messiah (Numbers 24:17), a precursor of the Magi of Matthew 2, or he is viewed as the despicable enemy of Israel that led God's people into disaster at Baal Peor in Numbers 25 (Noort 2008:7-8). [In his essay, 'Balaam the Villain', Noort uses two paintings to illustrate these traditions: Bosch's *Epiphany* which portrays Balaam as looking on at the Christ child, and Rembrandt's *Balaam* in which the Angel of Yahweh is ready to split Balaam in two with his sword.] Let us examine each of the subsequent biblical re-interpretations in turn.

Micah 6:5

Apart from the portrait presented in the main narratives of Numbers 22-24, Balaam is presented in a positive light in only one passage – Micah 6:5. Israel is directed to reflect theologically upon their slavery and wilderness wandering, and the attempts by Balak to curse them. The focus is on what Balak attempted to do (have Israel cursed), and how Balaam responded (by refusing to do so, and pronouncing blessing). All of this is attributed to the mighty 'saving acts' of Yahweh. It is Balak who 'planned' (יעץ) evil against Israel. Balaam is never said to have done so, but is pictured as one who does and says exactly what Yahweh tells him to say. Noort's assessment is that 'in literary-historical terms Micah 6:5 is situated between Numbers 22-24 and the negative texts' (Noort 2008:12).

Deuteronomy 23:4-6, Joshua 24:9-10, and Nehemiah 13:2

These three texts (Deut 23:4-6; Josh 24:9-10, and Neh 13:2) share several assumptions about the figure of Balaam. All three presume that Balaam actually intended (and, perhaps, attempted) to curse Israel, but that Yahweh refused to listen to Balaam, and changed the curse into a word of blessing. [Frankel contends that the text intends to convey that Yahweh changed the curse into a blessing *after* it was spoken (Frankel 1996:33).] It is important to recall that words of cursing or blessing are not self-executing, but rather function as entreaties to the deity to give them effect (Mitchell 1987:174-175). Within Deuteronomy 23, the picture of Balaam is 'darkened' (Noort 2008:12). The Deuteronomic author is at pains to make clear that no descendant of either Ammon or Moab is allowed within the קהל of Israel to the tenth generation. The implicit rationale suggests in v. 2 that no-one born of an illicit relationship will be admitted to the assembly of Yahweh. McConville has observed that: 'An associative link between the preceding verses and these verses may be provided by the fact that Moab and Ammon were the product of illicit unions between Lot and his daughters' (McConville 2002:349). However, the explicit rationale given for this exclusion is that Moab failed to supply Israel with bread and water on its wilderness journey, *and* that they 'hired' (שׂכר) Balaam to curse Israel (Deut 23:4). One must contrast this perspective with the Numbers 22 account, where it is clear that Balaam has refused to be 'bribed' by Balak's offers of reward (Num 22:18, 24:13).

In Joshua 24:9-10, we also find a 'reinterpretation' of the Balaam tradition (Noort 2008:13). In this account, Balak 'set out' to make war against Israel. (In the Numbers 22 account, he only evidenced a willingness to do so.) There are differences with the Deuternomy 23 account. In Joshua we are told that Balak 'sent for' and 'invited' Balaam to come and curse Israel. He is not 'hired' or 'bribed' to do so.

However, according to the author of Joshua, in the event, God refused to listen to Balaam, and converted the curse into blessing. [Butler notes that this serves to stress that, within the prophetic relationship, God is not at the beck and call of the prophet, but rather 'directs the prophetic action and word' (Butler 1983:272).] Noort suggests that the account in Deuteronomy is dependent upon the Joshua account, so that the progression of textual development follows this pattern: Numbers > Joshua > Deuteronomy. With each stage, the character of Balaam is further besmirched.

Nehemiah 13:2 is essentially an intertextual quotation of Deuteronomy 23:5-6. The same arguments are advanced for Balaam's villainy. Of interest, however, is the point of the illustration. In Nehemiah, the focus is on separating out the foreigner from the assembly of the postexilic community. Foreign women and their children are to be sent away at once. Thus, Balaam becomes the *cause celebre* for the decision to insist that the *gola* put away foreign (presumably unbelieving) wives.[22]

Numbers 31:16 -- The Final Deconstruction of Balaam

Numbers 31 presents a 'battle report' that contains within it, the Priestly author's 'deconstruction' of the figure of Balaam. Levine observes that here 'we see the beginning of Balaam's denigration' (Levine 2000:454). The context is that of a confrontation of sorts between Moses and the military leaders after the war with Midian. Upon observing that the Midianite captives have been kept alive, Moses gives the order to kill all of the men, and all those women who have had sexual intercourse. The rationale given in Numbers 31:16 is that these women had followed Balaam's 'advice' to seek to seduce the Israelites into apostasy at Baal Peor (Num 25). What is interesting about this explanation, is the fact that Numbers 25 makes absolutely no reference to Balaam in its account of the apostasy at Baal Peor.

[22] As we noted in chapter 6, this evidence of *xenophobia* serves as part of the ideological texture, in demonstrating some of the ideological concerns of the implied author of the narratives.

Furthermore, the focus of Numbers 25 begins with Moabite women, while Numbers 31:16 puts the focus on Midianite women. How are we to understand this shift in understanding? Noort suggests that we are witnessing the combination of Balaam's words to Balak in Numbers 24:14 and the account of Israel's apostasy in Nu 25. In the course of the reception history of Numbers 24, it is asserted that Balaam did not simply foretell Moab's future to Balak in 24:14, but rather that he 'counselled', 'advised', or 'planned' (עשׂין) with Balak the events that led to Israel's judgment at Baal Peor. Furthermore, the subject and object of Numbers 24:14 are reversed so that Balaam is now advising Balak what *Moab will (could) do to Israel*, rather than the other way round (Noort 2008:15). This is made clearer by the Vulgate's rendering: *dabo consilium quid populus tuus huic populo faciat extreme tempore*.[23] [This seems to accord well with Philo's imaginative remembering in *De Vita Moses*, 292-301.] Thus, the Priestly writer manages to deftly switch the focus of Balaam words to Balak from a prediction of Moab's defeat at Israel's hands, to a nefarious (and ultimately successful) attempt to corrupt the people of Israel. Noort observes that: 'the besmirching of Balaam has reached its zenith when Balaam tells Balak how he can achieve his goal: the destruction of Israel' (Noort 2008:16).

Numbers 31:8, Joshua 13:22

In Numbers 31:8, we are also told that Balaam was killed along with the five kings of Midian. However, no explicit reason for his execution is provided. That rationale is found in Joshua 13:21b, 22. In the Joshua account, Balaam is put to death along with the five kings of Midian *because he practiced divination* (הקוסם). This

[23] This reading is supported by Targum Onkelos ('Come, I will advise you how to act') and 2 Targum Jonathan ('Come and I will advise you what to do to this people'). See Vermes's discussion (Vermes 1973:161-164). The Samaritan Pentaeuch differs from the MT only by adding the marker for the direct object (את) in the object clause. See Gesenius-Kautzsch §157 (Gesenius-Kautzsch 1988:491).

puts Balaam in violation of Deuteronomy 13:5, and 18:10-12. In Numbers 31:16, Balaam leads Israel to violate the 1st commandment, and in Joshua 13:22, he violates the prohibition against divination. Noort suggest that the Joshua account is dependent upon the Numbers 31:8 account, thus linking the two accounts, and ultimately, serving to justify Balaam's death.

7.5 Implications for our understanding the definition of an Old Testament prophet

The preceding study of the reception history of the Balaam narrative of Nu 22-24 within the Old Testament highlights our focus in this study. The understanding of prophetism and prophetic ethics developed in stages and within different historical contexts. Initially, it was understood that the discernment of the divine could take place within a number of different contexts. Joseph possessed a silver cup for the purpose of divination (נחשׁ*)* in Genesis 44:5, and interpreted dreams (Ge 41). Elisha instructed King Joash in 2 Ki 13:14-19 to engage in the practise of belomancy or divination with arrows (Van Gemeren 1990:22). Most critically, we are told in 1 Samuel 9:9, that in earlier days, those needing guidance would go to see a 'seer' (ראה), for the one now called a 'prophet' (נביא) was formerly called a 'seer'. Taken with the list of political and religious leaders within Judah found in Isaiah 3:1-3, it is clear that at one point, to serve as a 'diviner' was considered as serving as a 'prophet'. More importantly, Balaam as depicted within the Nu 22-24 account repeatedly asserts that he will only speak the word that Yahweh puts in his mouth. Whatever his occupation, his commitment to speak only the דבר יהוה marks him *functionally* as a 'prophet' within the narratives (Jer 18:18).

However, as Noort observes, 'a thoroughly principled condemnation of all forms of queries to God – apart from the word-of-God prophet – starts between the

end of the 7th and the beginning of the 6th century B.C.E.' (Noort 2008:19). One sees intimations of this already in Jeremiah 23:28, where Yahweh condemns the *nabi* who pretends to interpret dreams, and then authenticates only the prophet who speaks the דבר יהוה.

We can see, then, that a shift has taken place with regard to the understanding of the prophetic role within the Old Testament context. This transition within the Old Testament tracks broadly with the development of the Old Testament literature in its final form. Within Numbers 22-24, we see the positive view of Balaam proffered by the Elohist (with Jahwist materials evident at times). The view set forth in Micah 6:5 seems to comport with this positive view of the person and work of Balaam. What is striking, of course, is the earlier condemnation within Micah 3:5-7 of the entire range of prophetic endeavour. The 'sun will go down' upon the prophet (3:6), and the 'seer' (הוזה) and the 'diviner' (קסם) will both be made ashamed (3:7). What is intriguing about this passage is the fact that in Micah 6:5, Balaam is commended as an instrument of Yahweh's mighty acts of salvation. So, it would seem that Micah's condemnation of prophets, seers and diviners in 3:5-7 is focused on those who seek to misuse their calling for their own personal interests. The call to 'remember what Balaam answered him (Balak)', is a call to remember that Balaam refused to speak anything other than the word which Yahweh placed in his mouth (Num 22:12).

However, the views and perspectives elucidated within the various passages found in Deuteronomy and Joshua are representative of the hand of the Deuteronomist, with the concomitant emphasis on 'word of Yahweh' prophets 'like Moses' (Deut 18). Within the reckoning of the Deuteronomic authors, diviners and seers need not apply for the task of receiving communications from God. Balaam's figure undergoes a transformation in reputation from positive to negative, which

represents the fact that he is portrayed as a diviner and an outsider from Pethor (Pitru). Such a one could never be a true prophet of Yahweh. (The reference within Nehemiah reflects the Deuteronomic viewpoint as well.) As noted previously, the references to Balaam within Numbers (and Joshua 13:22) reflect the Priestly writer's concerns.

What is significant is that the (now) negative view of Balaam serves the postexilic community well. Birch notes the tensions inherent within the circumstances of the returnee community:

> It is clear that the arrival of returnees to Judah created immediate tensions. The land was in the hands of a new class of landowners, many of whom were among the disenfranchised before exile. Some returnees apparently intermarried and re-established themselves, but the majority seemed to have formed a separate community and considered these new "people of the land" as illegitimate. (Birch 1991:309).

In their struggle against religious impurity, and intermarriage with the peoples around them, and their desire to forge a new Israelite identity within Yehud, a focus on the 'foreignness' of Balaam would be first and foremost. Balaam's good reputation would have to be sacrificed for the good of the community.

Numbers 22:22-35 The Tale of the Donkey

In discussing the definition of a prophet 'presupposed' by the Balaam narratives, one must account for the viewpoint of the Tale of the Donkey (Num 22:22-35). For if the narratives taken apart from the Tale of the Donkey presuppose a faithful messenger and servant of Yahweh, the Tale of the Donkey provides an anti-prophetic satire of the most damaging sort. In it Balaam is portrayed as one who cannot see even the most basic and simple spiritual realities that even his own donkey is able to see, until the Angel of Yahweh 'opens' his eyes to see. Balaam is the

buffoon of the story, and paints a rather unflattering portrait of a prophet of God. It is clear that the Tale of the Donkey has an anti-prophetic polemical 'edge' to it. The questions that remain are to discern the *why* of its inclusion in the Balaam narratives, and to determine just *who* is responsible for this perspective.

A variety of suggestions have been offered. For his part, David Marcus suggests the answer proposed by Rofe – that the (anti-prophetic) satire serves to answer the question of just how a pagan diviner could become a vehicle of the word of God. The Deuteronomist and Priestly editors would have had difficulty in ignoring the strong (Jahwist) tradition concerning Balaam's blessing of Israel, but would have had equal difficulty with the idea that such a person could be a true prophet of Yahweh. Frankel's work would seem to support this. Frankel says that: 'It would only be natural to expect an author of the Deuteronomic school, presumably an ardent nationalist, to reject the portrayal of the gentile Balaam as an ideal prophetic type who converses with God and resists the riches of Moab, and to attribute to him divination and wickedness instead' (Frankel 1996: 37). Marcus summarizes it in this way:

> Whereas earlier generations could accept the fact that a non-Israelite seer was able to commune with Israel's god, later generations (like the Deuteronomist and Second Isaiah [6th century] found this difficult to accept. The tradition that Balaam conversed with God and ultimately blessed Israel was too strong to deny, but they tried to diminish Balaam's stature by emphasizing the fact that he essentially incompetent, able to operate only with God's help. The purpose of the satire was to demonstrate that Balaam was not a real prophet. If Balaam were to represent a type of non-Israelite seer, then the satire could have been used to demonstrate that all other 'Balaams', all non-Israelite seers, were equally incompetent and thus illegitimate sources of the divine word. Such a negative depiction of Balaam would conform to other biblical (Deuteronomistic and Priestly) and post-biblical traditions which are critical of him. (Marcus 1995: 166-167)

In this case, the satire serves to distinguish Israelite from non-Israelite prophets. Balaam remains an anomaly, totally outside of Israel's prophetic tradition.

Robert Gnuse takes something of the same approach in his article, *Redefining the Elohist* (2000). His suggestion is that the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24 are a later reaction to the Transjordanian traditions concerning Balaam that are recorded in the Deir 'Alla Texts. Along with Levine, he suggests that the DAT actually reflect the beliefs of certain Israelites who were on the 'periphery' of Israelite religious practise, and for whom, Balaam represented an 'acceptable prophet' (Gnuse 2000: 205). The dream sequences in which El comes to Balaam by night in Numbers 22 are thought to be derived from the dream sequence of Combination I of the DAT. Likewise, the reappearance of the phrase, 'And Balaam rose in the morning', (I.3) in Numbers 22:13, 21 indicate some sort of literary dependence. Gnuse writes:

> The Elohist may have used the information from the Deir 'Alla inscription for particular theological reasons. The Elohist would have attempted to distance Balaam from the religious beliefs of Israel by making him into a potential enemy or at best a strangely ambiguous figure vis-à-vis Moses and the Israelite ancestors. The Elohist then defines Balaam as being outside the prophetic tradition recognized in Elohist accounts; he is a foreigner who tried to oppose their entrance into the land. However, the memory of Balaam's blessing of Israel may be a concession to the origin of Balaam traditions among groups of people who considered themselves to be Israelite. If this scenario is correct, then the Elohist traditions about Balaam attempts to domesticate this memory of unacceptable prophetic practices by placing it outside of the true Israelite tradition. (Gnuse 2000:205-206)

Gnuse suggests that one can deduce from this that 'the traditions in the northern state of Israel might have been defining the nature of prophecy after the fall of Samaria in 722 BCE' (Gnuse 2000: 206). If this is a correct assumption, then it follows that the north could not have been totally emptied out of people in the Assyrian deportations. More likely, only the major urban centres would have been affected.[24]

[24] Lutsky raises the intriguing possibility that the ambivalence towards Balaam in the Balaam narratives stems from the fact that he was actually a diviner of the goddess Asherah. This contention is based upon the association of Balaam with Shadday in Numbers 24, and the plural form *Shaddayin* in the DAT, which she understands as a pantheon of lower gods associated with Shadday (Lutsky 1999: 421). Lutsky sees Shadday as an epithet for the goddess Asherah, who is seen as the patron goddess of diviners. However, such an interpretation is totally unsupported by the biblical Balaam traditions.

Whatever the case, it is clear that the Tale of the Donkey of Numbers 22:22-35 serves to distance Balaam from being identified as a *Word of Yahweh* prophet. Balaam remains an enigma, and ultimately, a tragic figure.

7.6 Toward an Answer to the Questions Posed in this Study

Our study of the Balaam narratives to this point has had an 'end' in mind – to answer our fundamental research problem: How do we explain the conflicting views of Balaam within the Old Testament? Our hypothesis has been that the 'definition' of a prophet developed in stages within different contexts in the Old Testament, and that these differing perspectives are reflected in the diverging understandings of Balaam.

To put it another way, can we clarify the theological-ethical concerns which govern the Old Testament authors' understanding of what the role of "prophet" entailed in Ancient Israel? What definition of a prophet was pre-supposed by the Balaam narratives? In what way do the Balaam narratives function as a prophetic critique? How does our understanding of the Balaam narratives aid our understanding of the historical development of the definition of a prophet within the Old Testament? Our concern is to get at the heart of the discussion concerning the focus of prophetic discourse.

We are now ready to attempt to answer the questions presented early on. The explanation is found in the recognition that the definition of a prophet developed in stages, within different contexts in the Old Testament, and that these differing perspectives are reflected in the divergent understandings of Balaam. Within the Elohist (Jahwist) narratives of Numbers 22-24, Balaam is presented as a 'word of Yahweh' prophet, who seeks only to say that which Yahweh places within his mouth. The Tale of the Donkey represents an interpolation (evidenced by the literary

technique of resumptive repetition) at a later time, when it becomes necessary to distance the gentile Balaam from Israel's prophetic tradition.

The views of Balaam gradually become darker within the Old Testament text. Balaam is portrayed positively only within Micah 6:5. But as the understanding of the *nabi* and the prophetic role begins to change, so does the portrayal of Balaam. He becomes within the perspective of the Deuteronomonistic authors (Deut 23:4-6 and Josh 24:9-10), one who actually attempted to curse Israel, but whose efforts were thwarted by Yahweh. Joshua 13:22 identifies Balaam as one who was a diviner (קוסם), a violation of Deuteronomy 13 and 18, and a crime worthy of death. The author of Nehemiah quotes the Deuteronomic tradition found in Deuteronomy 13:2 with approval, as part of the argument against intermarriage with non-Jews. The Priestly writer's concerns in Numbers 31 reduce Balaam to an enemy of Yahweh and Israel. He is the one deemed responsible for the unspeakable acts of apostasy that occurred at the Baal of Peor in Numbers 25. Balaam's discrediting is now complete. He is a 'villain' of the worst sort.

Balaam's gradual discrediting follows the gradual shift in the understanding of prophets and prophetism within the Old Testament. Originally seen as nearly synonymous with seers and diviners (1 Sam 9:9), by the postexilic era, they are, at times, viewed with contempt as frauds and charlatans (Zech 13:2-6).[25] Within the postexilic context, the written *Torah* has assumed the place of the prophets. If Moses is the quintessential prophet, and if *Torah* is seen as thoroughly Mosaic in authority, then there remains no real need for prophets. (Prophets were, after all, notoriously difficult to control at times, as many an Israelite king learned to his dismay.) Rather, the exposition and application of the *Torah* of Moses is needed. Such an

[25] It is important to note that the Chronicler uses the terminology of prophet, seer, and diviner interchangeably, without any indication that diviners & seers are to be viewed with contempt.

understanding would greatly support the efforts of the newly constituted Israelite community in Yehud to define what it means to be a Jew, and a worshiper of Yahweh. Blenkinsopp observes that:

> If prophetic activity was to continue in the basically different social and political circumstances obtaining in the postdisaster period, it would necessarily be of a different kind and would be perceived differently among the survivors of the disaster. . . Once prophecies delivered in an earlier epoch were available in writing, the emphasis would tend to be less on direct inspired prophecy and more on the inspired interpretation of past prophecy. (Blenkinsopp 1996:227)

The new emphasis on the Deuteronomic reformulation of prophecy and 'redefinition of the prophetic role' would result in an ever-increasing conviction among the postexilic community that 'God does not communicate directly but has revealed his will and purpose in past communications whose bearing on the present situation remains to be elucidated' (Blenkinsopp 1996:227). The implications of this for the נביא would become increasingly clear. Considered to be little better than 'a purveyor of falsity, and therefore subject to the death penalty following Deut 13:1-5 and 18:20', the 'professional' prophet would quietly recede into the religious background of the Second Commonwealth community (Blenkinsopp 1996:235).

These developments would, of course, have implications for the way in which Balaam was viewed, and whether he was perceived as a 'hero' or a 'villain'. Unfortunately for his literary reputation, the latter would prove to be the case. While Balaam's prophecies of blessing would remain of great comfort to a generation attempting to understand their experience of Exile, the tradition of the gentile prophet of Yahweh would necessarily have to be transformed to accommodate new realities within the *gola*. Balaam's heroic status reflected in the traditions of Numbers 22-24 and the Deir 'Alla texts would be transformed into a cautionary tale of greed and unmentionable behaviour. And for anyone tempted to think more highly of the figure

of Balaam than they ought, the Tale of the Donkey would serve to remind them of the buffoon that Balaam truly was. At the end of the day, Balaam would be remembered ultimately as a pagan *baru*, used by Yahweh, and later cast away as an enemy of Israel. At the end of the day, it was a very sad end for Balaam whose expressed wish was to 'die the death of the upright' (Numbers 22:10). His 'end' would be very differently recorded within the pages of the Old Testament.

Chapter 8
Summary and Conclusion
Viewing the 'Tapestry' as a Whole

Our socio-rhetorical study of the Balaam narratives has reached its conclusion. In chapter 1, we explored the need for yet another study on the Balaam narratives, and concluded that the ambiguity concerning the various perspectives on the figure of Balaam ben Beor had yet to be satisfactorily explained. Our research problem presented the question: 'How can we explain the conflicting views of Balaam within the Biblical text?' Our hypothesis was that: 'The definition of a prophet developed in stages within different contexts in the Old Testament, and these different perspectives are reflected in the diverging understandings of Balaam.' It was suggested that the utilization of socio-rhetorical criticism (critically adapted from the methodology of Vernon K. Robbins), would afford a multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional approach to the text.

8.1 A Summary of our study

In chapter 2, we briefly examined various recent approaches to the study of the Balaam narratives. Work has been done on each of the 'textures' of the text. But no one study had attempted to analyze the Balaam narratives from the standpoint of each of the textures (inner texture, intertexture, social & cultural texture, ideological texture and sacred texture), and to combine the results into a unified perspective. The present study has attempted to fill this gap.

Chapter 3 began our socio-rhetorical study of the Balaam narratives in earnest, as we dove into a consideration of the inner texture of the narratives. Our examination of the inner texture of the Balaam cycle suggests that it appears likely that the narratives were composed to provide a setting for the oracles which are older.

Numbers 22 represents a melding of two traditions into one account in its final form, as demonstrated by the repetitive resumption seen in 22:21 and 22:35b reflects an insertion into the main storyline, as does the narrative inconsistency within the Tale of the Donkey.

The presence of *repetitive-progressive texture and pattern* plays a key role within the narrative, through the repetition of key words evidencing a repetitive progression of 'seeing', as well as an emphasis on the themes of 'blessing' and 'curse'. Analysis of the repetitive-progressive texture also revealed the key importance to the story of the requirement that Balaam speak only the 'word' of Yahweh, and not his own words.

The attentive reader will recall that these are the same emphases found in the key Pentateuchal passages related to the identity and call of a prophet. In the 'paradigmatic' call of Moses to be Yahweh's prophet, the narrator places tremendous emphasis on the verb ראה. Moses turns aside to 'see' this 'great sight' – why the burning bush is not consumed (Exodus 3:3), while in the next verse Yahweh 'sees' that Moses has turned aside to 'see'. Yahweh's call of Moses to be his spokesman is his response to having 'seen' the misery of his people Israel (Exodus 3:7, 9), and a demonstration of his purpose to bless his people by bringing them up out of Egypt into 'a land flowing with milk and honey' (3:8). Moses is commanded that he must 'say' to the Israelites whatever Yahweh tells him to 'speak' (15). This emphasis fits well with that of Deuteronomy 13:2 where the reader is told that if a prophet or a diviner who divines by means of dreams appears and attempts by מופת או אות ('signs or wonders') to lead them to worship and serve other gods, they are not to listen to that prophet's דבר (Deut 13:4). Rather they are to obey the קול of Yahweh

and heed his commands alone (Deut 13:5). Those prophets or diviners who have spoken treason against Yahweh must be put to death (Deut 13:6). In Deuteronomy 18, the people are enjoined to look for the 'prophet like Moses' in whose mouth Yahweh will put his words (Deut 18:18). Such a prophet must never presume – on pain of death – to speak any word other than that placed in his mouth by Yahweh (Deut 18:20). The emphasis on the 'word of Yahweh' prophet that speaks only the word Yahweh places in their mouth is central to the understanding of the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24. The use of similar key words/phrases links the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24 to the discussion in Exodus 3 and Deuteronomy 13, 18 concerning the definition of a prophet.

Our examination of *narrational texture and pattern* focused upon the 'voices' heard within the text. Each scene of the narrative afforded a rhetorical interaction between characters that served to advance the rhetorical purpose of the text. Balaam's repeated insistence that he is able to say only that which Yahweh puts in his mouth served to reinforce the emphasis on the 'word of Yahweh' within the narratives.

We also noted that discernable patterns of *opening-middle-closing texture* reflected the narrator's desire to craft a story with three cycles focused around the theme of 'seeing' and 'not seeing' (Olson 1996:142). Within the narratives themselves, the evidence of *argumentative texture and pattern* served to reveal that the story contained a logical argument in which the author 'proved' that Israel cannot be cursed (because Yahweh is sovereign and has determined to bless Israel), and that the 'prophets' can only speak what God tells them to say. Furthermore, the presence of *sensory-aesthetic texture and pattern* within the text served to highlight each of the foregoing sub-textures, as zones of 'emotion-fused thought', 'self-expressive speech' and 'purposeful action' were all found to be present, as rhetorical emphasis was

placed on eyes, ears and mouth. Our analysis of the inner texture of the Balaam narratives revealed a rich, carefully crafted literary masterpiece.

Chapter 4 considered the presence of intertextual references within the Balaam narratives in a variety of contexts. We noted the presence of oral-scribal intertexture as the author of the Balaam poems re-contextualised the Jacob blessing of Gen 49 (on Judah) for use with reference to Jacob/Israel.

Within the study of 'cultural intertexture', we observed the presence of intertextual allusions between Numbers 22 and Genesis 3, 22; Exodus 1-2; 1 Samuel 3; 1 Kings 13, 17, 22; and 2 Kings 1. These passages illustrated a rich texture of inner-biblical allusion that developed the themes identified within the study of inner texture. Comparisons evoked the stress on blessing & curse (Gen 3, Exod 1-2), on calling & faithfulness (Gen 22, 1 Sam 3), and on what it meant to be a faithful prophet of Yahweh (1 Kgs 13, 17, 22; and 2 Kgs 1). Through these intertextual allusions, the rhetorical purpose of showing Yahweh's intention to bless his people, and Balaam's inability to speak anything other than the 'word of Yahweh' was emphasized.

In examining the historical intertexture of the narratives, we examined the broader context and structure of the book of Numbers. It became clear that the Balaam narratives actually serve as a 'hinge' or 'fulcrum' for the book of Numbers. Prior to the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24, the sad story of the former generation and its disobedience was recounted. Following the Balaam narratives, the story of the 'new generation' is told in hopeful terms, as they anticipate their entry into the land of God's promise. Given our understanding that the Balaam narratives were written to encourage the exilic/early post-exilic community that God still intended to bring them into the land, the entire book of Numbers takes on a new significance for the exilic/post-exilic community. Not only does it present the story of

how Israel first came to be in the land – but it now points to their hopeful future in the land. The Balaam poems with their focus on Yahweh's blessing of his people, and his condemnation and victory over their enemies must have been a powerful encouragement to a community that felt it had lost its identity as well as God's blessing.

Additionally, our study of 'historical intertexture' revealed that, apart from the largely positive reviews afforded to Balaam within Numbers 22-24 (the Tale of the Donkey excluded) and Micah 6:5, he is viewed within Numbers 31, Deuteronomy 23, Joshua 13 & 24, and Nehemiah 13 from an overwhelmingly negative perspective. The portraits provided to the reader by the New Testament witness found in 2 Peter 2:15, Jude 11, and Revelation 2:14 are considerably darker. By this point, Balaam is seemingly, reckoned a 'villain' (Noort 2008).

The Balaam inscription from Deir 'Alla presents a largely sympathetic view of Balaam that accords well with the primary Balaam narratives in Numbers 22-24. We noted the appropriateness of Ashley's caveat that one should be careful in drawing too many conclusions or parallels from what is admittedly, a limited data set, but said that, nevertheless, the evident similarities between the two text cycles are truly amazing. Both texts present Balaam as a seer/diviner who sought to use his powers in obedience to *El*, and as a means of blessing to the people he served. The DAT afford a remarkable glimpse at an 8th century tradition concerning this literary figure from a location very near to the biblical setting of the Balaam story cycle.

In chapter 5, we examined social and cultural texture as being critical to a full understanding of the narratives within the Balaam cycle in Numbers 22-24, and acknowledged the value of socio-scientific criticism and cultural anthropology in that endeavour. As Hens-Piazza has observed, providing a 'thick description' of the social

realm of a story 'teases out and details the potential layers and networks of the social world embedded in the tale' (Hens-Piazza 1996:29). Within the Balaam narratives, an examination of the social and cultural texture reveals that Balaam can most likely be seen as venturing from Pitru in Mesopotamia. Our consideration of 'social intertexture' revealed that Balaam is assigned a multiplicity of 'roles' within the narratives, resulting in 'role overlap' between his various functions as seer, diviner, exorcist and prophet.

The relationship between Balak and Balaam within Numbers 22-24 can be described as presenting a 'dyadic contract' in which reciprocal obligations devolve on each party to the contract. The narratives further present a 'challenge-riposte' interaction between these two characters, which helps to clarify the role of 'honour' within the story as a key component. Within the final form of the text, the narrator has taken great care to demonstrate that Balaam (whose position would ordinarily carry with it 'ascribed honour') is really a man *without* honour. Such honour as Balaam is afforded within the total narrative is the result of his faithfully speaking the word of Yahweh.

We also considered the social location of both the implied author and reader of the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24. Our examination determined that the most probable setting for these narratives was the exilic or early post-exilic context. The people of Israel were wrestling with profound theological questions concerning their relationship to Yahweh. Cognizant of his apparent judgment in the destruction of Samaria and Jerusalem, and the exile of much of the population to Babylon, they wrestled with how they might understand the future. Would Yahweh again bless their community? Would the promises made to the patriarchs ever see fulfilment in a restored Israel in the land? If this were to be possible, what would be the conditions

of such a blessing? In our study it became clear that there were various factions vying for political power and control within the exilic and post-exilic communities. Within the pre-exilic context, these ‘nationalists’ had engaged in political intrigue in opposition to the ‘reform’ party.

The hopes of both factions had been dashed by the events of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile. The now discredited ‘Zion theology’ of the nationalists had to be replaced with a theology that could take account of the events that had befallen Judah. The theologians of the Reform party resolved their theological issues by rooting the judgment of Yahweh in Israel’s failure to observe Yahweh’s commands. Within their analysis, the remedy for God’s people was to return to the strict observance of the תורה. Only a new community built on this foundation could hope to obtain God’s blessing in the future. As a result both the priestly and prophetic guilds joined hands in this enterprise. The prophetic voice would now consist in the exposition and application of God’s Torah. This redefinition of prophetic activity of necessity would exclude those elements of the prophetic tradition that posed a threat to this reformation – the diviners who claimed to ‘see’ God’s purposes and discern his will. Yahweh’s will had been revealed to Moses – all that remained was to follow the pattern laid out in the Deuteronomistic theological programme.

Chapter 6 focused on the analysis of ideological texture and its outworking within the text. We recognised at the outset that all authors, reader/interpreters and implied readers have ideological commitments that impact their reading of texts. This author indicated his own ideological commitments as a clergyman and lecturer within the Reformed confessional tradition of American Presbyterianism.

We also noted Robbins’ assertion that ‘every theology has a politics’ (Robbins 1996a:192), and observed that, therefore, the interpreter needs to seek to understand

the presence of other 'voices' on the text by considering the ideological perspectives of other readers as well. We then looked at examples of ideological interpretations of the Balaam narratives as seen in the works of Greene and Douglas.

Chapter 7 was devoted to an extended consideration of the Sacred Texture of the Balaam narratives. Our study analysed Robbin's categories (as adapted) of God (deity), Prophet (Holy Person), Angel of Yahweh (spirit being), Eschatology (divine history), human redemption, human commitment, religious community and (prophetic) ethics. This study afforded a rich foundation upon which to begin our theological analysis of the Balaam narratives, considering its function within the book of Numbers and the Pentateuch as a whole. We also took the opportunity to consider the implications of recent research on the formation of the Pentateuch, the Old Testament 'canon' as a whole, and the relationship of 'the Law and the Prophets' for our study. Attention was also given to the exilic or early postexilic context in which the stories concerning Balaam were finalised.

8.2 Results of the study of the various textures of the Balaam narratives

Our study of the Balaam narratives has demonstrated that the literary history of the Balaam narratives reflects a long process of transmission and literary modification resulting in the final form of the text. While the exact details of that process, and the precise identification of various source strata are lost to us, enough evidence remains on which to build a solid case to show that the conflicting views of Balaam within the Biblical accounts are due to the fact that the definition of a prophet developed in stages and different historical contexts, and that these different historical contexts resulted in the different perspectives concerning Balaam within the Biblical text(s).

Specifically, our study has confirmed that the themes of seeing/not seeing; knowing/not knowing; obedience/disobedience and blessing/curse are at the centre of the Balaam traditions. These themes are tied as well to Exodus 3 (the paradigmatic call of Moses), Deuteronomy 13 (pre-exilic alignment of 'signs & wonders' with prophecy), and Deuteronomy 18 (exilic re-configuration of prophecy so as to exclude divination). Our study showed that this prophetic redefinition most likely took place either in the late pre-exilic period (Noort 2007:18), or in the exilic period (Bosman 1996:14; Van der Toorn 2007:159 and Barton 2007:270). The impact of this prophetic redefinition and re-alignment of prophet and priest in an alliance devoted to the exposition and application of Torah had far reaching effects, extending into the early post-exilic period.

Balaam, originally portrayed as a Yahweh prophet, is later, for ideological reasons reassessed and presented as a traitor to Yahweh, a pagan diviner motivated solely by greed. Our suggestion was that the historical context that best made sense for this reassessment of Balaam was either that of the exilic, or early postexilic community in Yehud. If the priestly writers responsible for Numbers 31 were also responsible for the inclusion of the Tale of the Donkey in the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24, then an early post-exilic date makes most sense (cf Dozeman 1998:179). But in either case, the concerns of both the exilic and early post-exilic communities were similar. As this community wrestled with the theological questions stemming from the Exile, and as they strived to create a new community of Israelites committed to walking in the ways of Yahweh, the focus shifted subtly from the prophetic message to the *Torah*¸ and the 'lawgiver' Moses as the paradigmatic prophet. No longer was the *nabi* necessary to know God's purpose and will, as it was contained within the *Torah*. Therefore, the role of the prophet within the Israelite

community in the postexilic context largely faded from view. Interestingly, the Chronist utilises different words at different points in his narrative to refer to the same prophet. We noted that while the use of נביא predominates in his discussion, he also feels free to continue using terms such as רואה and חוזה. This appears to be part of the dynamic nature of the Chronist's theology which allows for the co-existence of both definitions. While no doubt motivated in part by respect for the past, it seems clear that there is a clear desire, even after the 'redefinition' of a prophet to maintain the memory of both traditions. This is seen within the Balaam narratives of Numbers 22-24 as well. Both portraits of Balaam are preserved – Balaam as a 'word of Yahweh' prophet and Balaam as a disreputable (and avaricious) diviner. The Tale of the Donkey lampoons Balaam as a sort of 'unseeing prophet' now discredited within Israel's community. Nevertheless, both portraits persist, principally because both were already circulating within Israel.[26]

The figure of Balaam, in particular, came under attack because of his identification within the narratives of Numbers 22-24 as a Yahweh prophet. The need to emphasize the uniqueness of the Israelites as a people, necessitated a 'distancing' from the figure of Balaam. Following Ed Noort's insights, we noted an increasingly negative view of Balaam. The views of Balaam gradually become darker within the Old Testament text. Balaam is portrayed positively only within Micah 6:5. But as the understanding of the *nabi* and the prophetic role begins to change, so does the portrayal of Balaam. He becomes within the perspective of the Deuteronomic author in Deuteronomy 23:4-6 and Joshua 24:9-10, a foreign pagan who actually attempted

[26] That both portraits are preserved is really not so unusual. Within the history of this writer's own country, the memory of Thomas Jefferson, one of its 'founding fathers' appears equally conflicted. He is revered for his role in establishing a constitutional republic with its emphasis on the 'Bill of Rights', while at the same time he is excoriated for his attitude towards, and treatment of the slaves that he held on his Virginia plantation in defiance of the very rights he espoused.

to curse Israel, but whose efforts were thwarted by Yahweh. The author of Joshua identifies Balaam in Joshua 13:22, as one who was a diviner (קוסם), a violation of Deuteronomy 13 and 18, and a crime worthy of death. The author of Nehemiah quotes the Deuteronomic author with approval in Deuteronomy 13:2, as part of the argument against intermarriage with non-Jews. The Priestly writer's concerns in Numbers 31 reduce Balaam to an enemy of Yahweh and Israel. He is the one deemed responsible for the unspeakable acts of apostasy that occurred at the Baal of Peor in Numbers 25. Balaam's discrediting is now complete. He is a 'villain' of the worst sort.

Though his pronouncement of blessing was a great encouragement to the refugees from the Exile, it was necessary to parody and ridicule his person through the Tale of the Donkey, for he remained a 'foreigner" to the people of Israel. His lampooning, and eventual discrediting would serve to emphasize that Yahweh would use any and every means to fulfil his promises to the Patriarchs to bless his people Israel.

8.3 Topics for future research

Much work remains to be done on the Balaam narratives. With respect to the themes identified in our study of inner texture, through the analysis of repetitive-progressive texture, and narrational texture, it would be useful to search for corresponding themes within the prophetic literature as a whole by way of comparison. A more detailed intertextual analysis of each of the inner-biblical allusions to the Balaam stories within the Old Testament would help to understand the narrative's influence on other passages within the Old Testament. One could also fruitfully examine additional themes within the social and cultural milieu of the narratives. The study of ideological texture within the narratives, and particularly,

within their reception history is really just beginning. With respect to the study of 'sacred texture', it would be helpful to undertake a closer study of the postexilic context in which these stories were finalised. A closer reading of the references to Balaam within the New Testament would also afford greater insight into attitudes towards Balaam within the Second Temple and early Christian era contexts. Finally, the study of the reception history of the Balaam narratives within art and literature would likely prove fruitful as well.

The Balaam narratives constitute an important part of the Old Testament witness to 'the saving acts of Yahweh' (Micah 6:5). These narratives served to encourage and reassure the Israelite community within the exilic and postexilic context that God's judgment in the Exile was not his final word and that his promise to bless would ultimately prevail (Miller 2004:280). Just so, they now serve to reassure a new generation of God's people who seek to walk in his ways.

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