Short Comments on the First Part of Parashat Balak Rabbi Eliot Malomet July 16, 2022 17 Tammuz 5782

במדבר כב:ב וַיַּרָא בָּלֶק בֶּן־צִּבְּוֹר כב:ג,ד וַיָּגָר מוֹאָב ניָקץ מוֹאָב וַיֹּאמֶר מוֹאָב	Numbers 22:2 Balak son of Tzippor saw. The Torah introduces us to a new character. Who is he? By some accounts he was actually a Midianite, and the Midianites were allied with the Moabites and rotated their kingships. In the midrash he has a taste for magic and sorcery. What did he see? He saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites that they were victorious. 22:3, 4 and Moav was in exceeding fear they felt dread Moav said. In the Torah, a string of verbs in rapid succession always conveys urgency. This is loaded with irony. The Israelites do not want to engage in war. All they want is safe passage through the territory. The fear of Moav is an outsized projection of					
	their internal insecurity. As a desperate measure, Balak will turn to the deployment of an unconventional force: sorcery.					
כב:ה <mark>וַיִּשְׁלָּח מֵלְאֻכִּים</mark>	22:5 He sent messengers to Bil'am son of Be'or. Torah trivia: which other					
אַל־בָּלִעָם בֵּן־בִּע <u>ֵר</u> אַל־בָּלִעָם בֵּן־בָּעֹר	character sends messengers? Under what circumstances? ¹					
כב:ו וְעַתָּה לְכָה־נָּא	22:6 So-now, pray go, curse this people for me. We can't help but think that this					
אָרָה־לִּיִּ אֶת־הָּעָם הַזֵּה	is personal for Balak. This little phrase אָרָה־לָּיִּ - curse for me, (and later אָרָה־לָּיִּ - curse for me,					
	revile them for me) tells the whole story. It is for me. It is for my reputation. This					
	is my idea. And I'm putting everything on the line for this.					
כב:ז <mark>וַנֵּלְכֿוּ זְקְגֵי מוֹאָב</mark>	22:7 The elders of Moav and the elders of Midyan went, tokens-of-augury in					
<mark>וְזִקְנֵי מִדְיָּו</mark> ְ וְּקְסָמֻים						
בְּיָדֻם וַיָּבֿאָוֹּ אֶל־בִּלְעָׁם בְּיַדֶּם	mighty delegation of notables. And what are <i>tokens of augury</i> ? This builds the					
וַיְדַבְּרָוּ אֵלֶיו דְּבְרֵי	impression that Balak likes magic and sees in Bil'am a world class talent who he					
בָּלֶק:	is trying to impress with his own stuff. This is a way of telegraphing to Bil'am respect and admiration for his craft. ²					
כב:ח וַיְּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶׁם	22:8 He said to them: Spend the night here tonight. But what does he not do?					
בב:וו וַנְּאבָּוּ פָּגַיִּטָּם <mark>לֶינוּ</mark> פֿה הַלַּוְלָה	He doesn't make a big feast for them. Unlike Lot (the Moabite ancestor) or even Abraham, the Torah doesn't emphasize Bil'am's hospitality. Point noted.					
כב:ט <mark>ניָּבְאׁ אֱלֹהָים</mark> אֶלֹּ־בִּלְעָם נִיּאׁמֶּר מֵי הָאָנָשִׁים הָאֵלָּה עְמֶּךּ:	22:9 Now God came to Bil'am and said: Who are these men with you? As if God didn't know who they were. Why not come right out and say, "Don't bother with these men." Because God is also a character in this story. And we readers are trying to figure out what all this means. God's first word to Adam is a challenge to his consciousness: Where are you. To Abraham, a command from nowhere: Lekh lekha, go for yourself. To Moses, God says his name twice when first speaking to him: Moses, Moses. Evidently, God has spoken to Bil'am before this episode, but this question to him, in contrast with the way God talks to other characters, is instructive. The question sets up a comic tension. Everyone knows who these people are. But do you, Bil'am, know who you are? Are you a prophet, or a carpetbagger?					
כב:יב וַיְּאׁמֶר אֱלֹהִים	22:12 God said to Bil'am: You are not to go with them, you are not to curse the					
אֶל־בָּלְעָׂם לָאׁ תַלַּךְּ	people, for it is blessed! What is fascinating about this is that it was not too long ago in the Torah (Num. 14:11, 12ff), that God was ready to destroy them, and here God					
עּמָהֶם לָא תָאֹר אֶת־	in the Torah (Num. 14:11-12ff), that God was ready to destroy them, and here, God says that they are blessed! Despite the people's obstinacy, their faithlessness,					
דָעָׂב <mark>בָּי בָרָוּךְ הְוּא</mark> :	says that they are blessed: Despite the people's bushnacy, then faithlessiless,					

¹ See Gen. 32:4. Jacob sends messengers to Esau his brother, to placate him. Num. 20:14, Moses sends messengers to the King of Edom to petition him for passage through his territory. Num. 21:21, Israel sends messengers to the Sihon for the same reason. In each case, there is diplomacy, petition, and just a hint of pandering. Here too.

² The National Archives has many saddles given to President Reagan from foreign leaders. They knew of his love of horseback riding and gave him extravagant saddles as Gifts of State not only as a courtesy, but also to establish a tone for negotiations. Balak's presentation to Bil'am is in the same vein.

penchant for idolatry, incessant complaints and a little lust to boot. God scems to like, or even love them! How is it that they are blessed? Because God has blessed their ancestors and they have inherited that blessing. 22:12 Bil'am got up in the morning. This by itself should not be remarkable. Except, the contract of the probability of the probability is an experiment of the probability of their task with a great degree of urgency. Not Bil'am. He got up in the morning, probably well after the crack of dawn. 22:17 Only: pray go! revite this people for me! The word mag is a synonym for the word mag above. Some lexicographers connect this to ap-to piece or 22-to hollow which is an interesting way to understand the intent of cursing. To curse is to pread on enemy or to hollow out their essence. In Ethiopic gaba is to despise. 22:18 Ill'am arose in the morning, he saddled his she ass. Antentive readers will note the contrast with Abraham, Gen. 22:3 1707 mg 1772 2073 2073 2074 2079 - Avraham arose-early in the morning; he saddled his she ass. Antentive readers will note the contrast with Abraham. He she with Dan Quayle! I served with Abraham. In knew Abraham, Abraham was a friend of mine, Bil'am you're no Abraham. Abraham was a friend of mine, Bil'am you're no Abraham. Abraham was a friend of mine, Bil'am you're no Abraham. Abraham was a friend of mine, Bil'am you're no Abraham. Abraham was a friend of mine, Bil'am you're no Abraham. Abraham was a friend of mine, Bil'am you're no Abraham. Abraham was a friend of mine, Bil'am you're no Abraham. Abraham was a friend of mine, Bil'am you're no Abraham. Abraham was a friend of mine, Bil'am you're no Abraham. Abraham was a friend of mine, Bil'am you're no Abraham. Abraham was a friend of mine, Bil'am you're no Abraham. Abraham was a friend of mine, Bil'am you're no Abraham. Barity to this shows that Bil'am is no Abraham. Abraham barity to the situation. The sh							
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מווmal is kinder than the prophet. She doesn't say, what are you doing to me! She says, what did I do to you?! She assumes she is the guilty one, out of unjustified deference to him, but we all know that he is guilty of wanton cruelty towards her. 22:29 Bil'am said: Because you have been capricious with been capricious with me, If a sword had been in my hand, by now I would have killed you! Good thing he didn't have a sword in his hand. And how does Bil'am meet his end? Later on we read (31:8) עַהָּה הַרְגְּהִיךְּבִּי בְּיִלִּי בְּיִלְּבִי בְּיִלְּבִי בְּיִלְבִי בְּיִלִּבְי בְּיִלִּבְי בְּיִלִּבְי בְיִלְבִי בְּיִלְבִי בְּיִלִּבְי בְּיִלִי בְיִלְבִי בְּיִלִּבְי בְיִלִּבְי בְּיִלִּבְי בְיִלִּבְי בְּיִלִּבְי בְיִלִּבְי בְיִלִּבְי בְיִלִּבְי בְּיִלִּבְי בְּיִלִּבְי בְיִלִּבְי בְּיִלִּבְי בְּיִלִּבְי בְּיִלִּבְי בְּיִבְּי בְּיִבְּיִבְי בְּיִבְּי בְּיִבְי בְּיִבְּיִבְי בְּיִבְּי בְּיִבְי בְּיִבְּי בְּיִבְי בְּיִבְּי בְּיִבְּי בְּיִבְי בְּיִבְּי בְּיִבְי בְּיִבְּי בְּיִבְי בְּיִבְּי בְּיִבְּי בְּיִבְי בְּיִבְי בְּיִבּי בְּיִבְּיִב בְּיִבְי בְּיִבּי בְּיִבְּיִב בְּיִבְּי בְּיִבְיִב בְּיִבְּי בְּיִבְי בְּיִבְּי בְּיִבְּיִב בְּיִבְּי בְּיִבּי בְּיִבְּיִב בְּיִבְּיִי בְּיִבְּיִי בְּיִבְיִי בְּיִבְיִי בְּיִבְי בְּיִבְי בְּיִבְי בְּיִבְי בְּיִבְיִי בְּיִבְיִי בְּיִבְיי בְּיִבּי בְּיִבּי בְּיִבּי בְּיבִּי בְּיבִּי בְּיבִּי בְּיבִּי בְּיבִּי בְּיבְּיבְּי בְּיבּי בְּיבְּעּבְּיבִּי בְּיִּבְּיבְּי בְּיבּי בְּיבְּעּבְּיִי בְּי בְּיבְּעּבְיי בְּי בְּיבְּעבִּי בְּיִי בְּיבְּיבְּיבְּי בְּיבְּיבְי בְּיִבְּיבְּי בְּיִבְּיבְּי בְּיִּבְּיבְּיִבְּי בְּיִבְּיִי בְּיִי בְּיבְּיבְּיבְּי בְּיִבְּי בְּיִבּי בְּיבְּיבְּיבְּי בְּיִבְּיבְּבְּיבּי בְּיִבְּיבְּבְּיבְּי בְּבְּבִּיבְּי בְּיבְּיבְּבְּבִּיבְּי בְּבְּבִּי בְּבְּבְּבְּבְב							
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