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NUMBERS 22:1 The children of Israel travelled, and encamped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan at Jericho.

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The Israelites pitch in the plains of Moab, Num 22:1. Balak, king of Moab, is greatly terrified, Num 22:2-4; and sends to Balaam, a diviner, to come and curse them, Num 22:5, Num 22:6. The elders of Moab take a reward and carry it to Balaam, Num 22:7. He inquires of the Lord, and is positively ordered not to go with them, Num 22:8-12. He communicates this to the elders of Moab, Num 22:13. They return to Balak with this information, Num 22:14. He sends some of his princes to Balaam with promises of great honor, Num 22:15-17. He consults God, and is permitted! to go, on certain conditions, Num 22:18-20. Balaam sets off, is opposed by an angel of the Lord, and the Lord miraculously opens the mouth of his ass to reprove him, Num 22:21-30. Balaam sees the angel, and is reproved by him, Num 22:31-33. He humbles himself, and offers to go back, Num 22:34; but is ordered to proceed, on the same conditions as before, Num 22:35. The king of Moab goes out to meet him, Num 22:36. His address to him, Num 22:37. Balaam's firm answer, Num 22:38. Balak sacrifices, and takes Balaam to the high places of Baal, that he may see the whole of the Israelitish camp, Num 22:39-41.

#### Verse 1

And pitched in the plains of Moab - They had taken no part of the country that at present appertained to the Moabites; they had taken only that part which had formerly belonged to this people, but had been taken from them by Sihon, king of the Amorites.

On this side Jordan - On the east side. By Jericho, that is, over against it.

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NUMBERS 22:2 Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.

NUMBERS 22:3 Moab was very afraid of the people, because they were many. Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel.

NUMBERS 22:4 Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this multitude will lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field." Balak the son of Zippor was king of Moab at that time.

NUMBERS 22:5 He sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor, to Pethor, which is by the River, to the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, "Behold, there is a people who came out of Egypt. Behold, they cover the surface of the earth, and they are staying opposite me."

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#### Verse 5

To Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people - Dr. Kennicott justly remarks, that "the description now given of Balaam's residence, instead of being particular, agrees with any place in any country where there is a river; for he lived by Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people. But was Pethor then near the Nile in Egypt? Or in Canaan, near Jordan? Or in Mesopotamia, near the Euphrates, and belonging to the Ammonites? This last was in fact the case; and therefore it is well that twelve Hebrew MSS. (with two of De Rossi's) confirm the Samaritan text here in reading, instead of עמו ammo, his people, עמון Ammon, with the Syriac and

Vulgate versions." Houbigant properly contends for this reading; and necessity urges the propriety of adopting it. It should therefore stand thus: by the river of the land of the children of Ammon; and thus it agrees with Deu 23:4.

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NUMBERS 22:6 Please come now therefore curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall prevail, that we may strike them, and that I may drive them out of the land; for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed."

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#### Verse 6

Come now, therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people - Balaam, once a prophet of the true God, appears to have been one of the Moshelim, (see Num 21:27), who had added to his poetic gift that of sorcery or divination. It was supposed that prophets and sorcerers had a power to curse persons and places so as to confound all their designs, frustrate their counsels, enervate their strength, and fill them with fear, terror, and dismay. See Gen 9:25; Psa 109:6, Psa 109:20; Jos 6:26; Jer 17:5, Jer 17:6.

Macrobius has a whole chapter De carmine quo evocari solebant dii tutelares, et aut urbes, aut exercitus devoveri. "Of the incantations which were used to induce the tutelary gods to forsake the cities, etc., over which they presided, and to devote cities and whole armies to destruction." See Saturnal., lib. iii., cap. ix. He gives us two of the ancient forms used in reference to the destruction of Carthage; the first, to call over the protecting deities, was pronounced by the dictator or general, and none other, when they began the siege. It is as follows, literatim et punctatim: -

Si. Deus. si. Dea. est. cui. populus. civitas. que. Karthaginiensis. est in. tutela. te. que. maxime, ille. qui. urbis. hujus. populi. que. tutelam. recepisti. precor. veneror, que. veniam. que. a. vobis. peto. ut. vos. populum. civitatem. que. Karthaginiensem. deseratis. loca. templa. sacra. urbem. que. eorum. relinquatis. absque. his. abeatis. ei. que. populo. civitati. que. metum. formidinem. oblivionem. injiciatis. proditi. que. Romam. ad. me. meos. que. veniatis. nostra. que. vobis. loca. templa. sacra. urbs. acceptior. probatior. que. sit. mihi. que. populo. que. Romano. militibus. que. meis. praepositi. sitis. ut. sciamus. intelligamus. que. Si. ita. feceritis. voveo. vobis. templa. ludos. que. facturum. "Whether it be god or goddess, under whose protection the people and city of Carthage are placed; and thee, especially, who hast undertaken to defend this city and people; I pray, beseech, and earnestly entreat that you would forsake the people and city of Carthage, and leave their places, temples, sacred things, and city, and depart from them: and that you would inspire this people and city with fear, terror, and forgetfulness: and that, coming out from them, you would pass over to Rome, to me, and to mine: and that our places, temples, sacred things, and city may be more agreeable and more acceptable to you: and that you would preside over me, the Roman people, and my soldiers; that we may know and perceive it. If ye will do this, I promise to consecrate to your honor both temples and games."

The second, to devote the city to destruction, which it was supposed the tutelary gods had abandoned, is the following:

Dis. Pater. Vejovis. Manes. sive. vos. quo. allo. nomine. fas. est. nominare. ut. omnes. iliam. urbem. Karthaginem. exercitum. que. quem. ego. me. sentio. dicere. fuga. formidine. terrore. que. compleatis. qui. que. adversum. legiones. exercitum. que. nostrum. arma. tela. que. ferent. Uti. vos. eum. exercitum. eos. hostes. eos. que. homines. urbes. agros. que. eorum. et. qui. in. his. locis.

regionibus. que. agris. urbibus. ve. habitant. abducatis. lumine. supero. privetis. exercitum. que. hostium. urbes. agros. que. eorum. quos. me. sentio. dicere. uti. vos. eas. urbes. agros. que. capita. aetates. que. eorum. devotas. consecratas. que. habeatis. illis. legibus. quibus. quando. que. sunt. maxime. hostes. devoti. eos. que. ego. vicarios. pro. me. fide. magistratu. que. meo. pro. populo. Romano. exercitibus. legionibus. que. nostris. do. devoveo. ut. me. meam. que. fidem. imperium. que. legiones. exercitum. que. nostrum. qui. in. his. rebus. gerundis. sunt. bene. salvos. siritis. esse. Si. haec. ita. faxitis. ut. ego. sciam. sentiam. intelligam. que. tune. quisquis. hoc. votum. faxit. ubi. ubi. faxit. recte. factum. esto. ovibus. atris. tribus. Tellus. mater. te. que. Juppiter. obtestor. "Dis. Pater. Vejosis. Manes., or by whatsoever name you wish to be invoked, I pray you to fill this city of Carthage with fear and terror; and to put that army to flight which I mention, and which bears arms or darts against Our legions and armies: and that ye may take away this army, those enemies, those men, their cities and their country, and all who dwell in those places, regions, countries, or cities; and deprive them of the light above: and let all their armies, cities, country, chiefs, and people be held by you consecrated and devoted, according to those laws by which, and at what time, enemies can be most effectually devoted. I also give and devote them as vicarious sacrifices for myself and my magistracy; for the Roman people, and for all our armies and legions; and for the whole empire, and that all the armies and legions which are employed in these countries may be preserved in safety. If therefore ye will do these things, as I know, conceive, and intend, then he who makes this vow wheresoever and whensoever he shall make it, I engage shall sacrifice three black sheep to thee, O mother Earth, and to thee. O Jupiter." "When the execrator mentions the earth, he stoops down and places both his hands on it; and when he names Jupiter, he lifts up both his hands to heaven; and when he mentions his vow, he places his hands upon his breast." Among the ancient records, Macrobius says he found many cities and people devoted in this way. The Romans held that no city could be taken till its tutelary god had forsaken it; or if it could be taken, it would be unlawful, as it would be sacrilegious to have the gods in captivity. They therefore endeavored to persuade the gods of their enemies to come over to their party. Virgil intimates that Troy was destroyed, only because the tutelary gods had forsaken it: -

Excessere omnes, adytis arisque relictis,

Dii, quibus imperium hoc steterat.

Aen., lib. ii., ver. 351. "All the gods, by whose assistance the empire had hitherto been preserved, forsook their altars and their temples."

And it was on this account that the Greeks employed all their artifice to steal away the Palladium, on which they believed the safety of Troy depended.

Tacitus observes that when Suetonius Paulinus prepared his army to cross over into Mona, (Anglesea), where the Britons and Druids made their last stand, the priestesses, with dishevelled hair, white vestments, and torches in their hands, ran about like furies, devoting their enemies to destruction; and he farther adds that the sight, the attitude, and horrible imprecations of these priestesses had such effect on the Roman soldiers, that for a while they stood still and suffered themselves to be pierced with the darts of the Britons, without making any resistance. Tacit. Ann., l. xiv., c. 29. Many accounts are related in the Hindoo Pooran of kings employing sages to curse their enemies when too powerful for them - Ward's Customs.

The Jews also had a most horrible form of execration, as may be seen in Buxtorf's Talmudical Lexicon under the word  $\Delta\tau\eta$ . These observations and authorities, drawn out in so much detail, are

necessary to cast light on the strange and curious history related in this and the two following chapters.

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NUMBERS 22:7 The elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand. They came to Balaam, and spoke to him the words of Balak.

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Verse 7

The rewards of divination - Whoever went to consult a prophet took with him a present, as it was on such gratuitous offerings the prophets lived; but here more than a mere present is intended, perhaps every thing necessary to provide materials for the incantation. The drugs, etc., used on such occasions were often very expensive. It appears that Balaam was very covetous, and that he loved the wages of unrighteousness, and probably lived by it; see 2Pet 2:15.

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NUMBERS 22:8 He said to them, "Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the LORD shall speak to me." The princes of Moab stayed with Balaam.

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Verse 8

I will bring you word again, as the Lord shall speak - So it appears he knew the true God, and had been in the habit of consulting him, and receiving oracles from his mouth.

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NUMBERS 22:9 God came to Balaam, and said, "Who are these men with you?"

NUMBERS 22:10 Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has said to me,

NUMBERS 22:11 'Behold, the people that has come out of Egypt covers the surface of the earth. Now, come curse me them. Perhaps I shall be able to fight against them, and shall drive them out.'"

NUMBERS 22:12 God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people; for they are blessed."

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Verse 12

Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people - That is, Thou shalt not go with them to curse the people. With them he might go, as we find he afterwards did by God's own command, but not to curse the people; this was wholly forbidden. Probably the command, Thou shalt not go, refers here to that time, viz., the first invitation: and in this sense it was most punctually obeyed by Balaam; see Num 22:13.

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NUMBERS 22:13 Balaam rose up in the morning, and said to the princes of Balak, "Go to your land; for the LORD refuses to permit me to go with you."

NUMBERS 22:14 The princes of Moab rose up, and they went to Balak, and said, "Balaam refuses to come with us."

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Verse 14

Balaam refuseth to come with us - "Observe," says Mr. Ainsworth, "Satan's practice against God's word, seeking to lessen the same, and that from hand to hand, till he bring it to naught. Balaam told the princes less than God told him, and they relate to Balak less than Balaam told them; so that when the answer came to the king of Moab, it was not the word of God, but the word of man; it was simply, Balaam refuseth to come, without ever intimating that God had forbidden him." But in this Balaam is not to blame; he told the messengers in the most positive manner, Jehovah refuseth to give me leave to go with you, Num 22:13; and more explicit he could not be.

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NUMBERS 22:15 Balak again sent princes, more, and more honourable than they.

NUMBERS 22:16 They came to Balaam, and said to him, "Thus says Balak the son of Zippor, 'Please let nothing hinder you from coming to me,

NUMBERS 22:17 for I will promote you to very great honour, and whatever you say to me I will do. Please come therefore, and curse this people for me.'"

NUMBERS 22:18 Balaam answered the servants of Balak, "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I can't go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more.

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Verse 18

I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God - Balaam knew God too well to suppose he could reverse any of his purposes; and he respected him too much to attempt to do any thing without his permission. Though he was covetous, yet he dared not, even when strongly tempted both by riches and honors, to go contrary to the command of his God. Many make all the professions of Balaam, without justifying them by their conduct. "They pretend," says one, "they would not do any thing against the word of God for a house full of gold, and yet will do it for a handful!"

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NUMBERS 22:19 Now therefore, please wait also here this night, that I may know what the LORD will speak to me more."

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Verse 19

What the Lord will say unto me more - He did not know but God might make a farther discovery of his will to him, and therefore he might very innocently seek farther information.

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NUMBERS 22:20 God came to Balaam at night, and said to him, "If the men have come to call you, rise up, go with them; but only the word which I speak to you, that you shall do."

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 Verse 20

If the men come - go with them - This is a confirmation of what was observed on the twelfth verse; though we find his going was marked with the Divine displeasure, because he wished, for the sake of the honors and rewards, to fulfill as far as possible the will of the king of Moab. Mr. Shuckford observes that the pronoun הוא hu is sometimes used to denote a person's doing a thing out of his own head, without regard to the directions of another. Thus in the case of Balaam, when God had allowed him to go with the messengers of Balak, if they came in the morning to call him; because he was more hasty than he ought to have been, and went to them instead of staying till they should come to him, it was said of him, not כי הלך ki halach, that he went, but כי הולך הוא ki holech hu, i. e., he went of his own head - without being called; and in this, Mr. Shuckford supposes, his iniquity chiefly lay - Connex., vol. iii., p. 115. How many are restrained from sinning, merely through the fear of God! They would gladly do the evil, but it is forbidden on awful penalties; they wish the thing were not prohibited for they have a strong desire to do it.

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NUMBERS 22:21 Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab.

NUMBERS 22:22 God's anger was kindled because he went; and the LORD's angel placed himself in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him.

NUMBERS 22:23 The donkey saw the LORD's angel standing in the way, with his sword drawn in his hand; and the donkey turned aside out of the way, and went into the field. Balaam struck the donkey, to turn her into the way.

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 Verse 23

And the ass saw the angel - When God granted visions those alone who were particularly interested saw them while others in the same company saw nothing; see Dan 10:7; Act 9:7.

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NUMBERS 22:24 Then the LORD's angel stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side.

NUMBERS 22:25 The donkey saw the LORD's angel, and she thrust herself to the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall. He struck her again.

NUMBERS 22:26 the LORD's angel went further, and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left.

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 Verse 26

And the angel - stood in a narrow place - In this carriage of the angel says Mr. Ainsworth the Lord shows us the proceedings of his judgments against sinners: First he mildly shakes his rod at them but lets them go untouched. Secondly he comes nearer and touches them with an easy correction as it

were wringing their foot against the wall. Thirdly, when all this is ineffectual, he brings them into such straits, that they can neither turn to the right hand nor to the left, but must fall before his judgments, if they do not fully turn to him.

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NUMBERS 22:27 The donkey saw the LORD's angel, and she lay down under Balaam. Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff.

NUMBERS 22:28 The LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"

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#### Verse 28

The Lord opened the mouth of the ass - And where is the wonder of all this? If the ass had opened her own mouth, and reproved the rash prophet, we might well be astonished; but when God opens the mouth, an ass can speak as well as a man. It is worthy of remark here, that Balaam testifies no surprise at this miracle, because he saw it was the Lord's doing. Of animate and inanimate things receiving for a short time the gift of speech, the heathen mythology furnishes many fictitious examples, with which I do not deem it proper to occupy the reader's time.

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NUMBERS 22:29 Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have mocked me, I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would have killed you."

NUMBERS 22:30 The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Was I ever in the habit of doing so to you?" He said, "No."

NUMBERS 22:31 Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the LORD's angel standing in the way, with his sword drawn in his hand; and he bowed his head, and fell on his face.

NUMBERS 22:32 the LORD's angel said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out as an adversary, because your way is perverse before me.

NUMBERS 22:33 The donkey saw me, and turned aside before me these three times. Unless she had turned aside from me, surely now I would have killed you, and saved her alive."

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#### Verse 33

Surely now also I had slain thee - How often are the meanest animals, and the most trivial occurrences, instruments of the preservation of our lives, and of the salvation of our souls! The messenger of justice would have killed Balaam, had not the mercy of God prevented the ass from proceeding.

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NUMBERS 22:34 Balaam said to the LORD's angel, "I have sinned; for I didn't know that you stood in the way against me. Now therefore, if it displeases you, I will go back again."

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## Verse 34

If it displease thee, I will get me back again - Here is a proof, that though he loved the wages of unrighteousness, yet he still feared God; and he is now willing to drop the enterprise if God be displeased with his proceeding. The piety of many called Christians does not extend thus far; they see that the thing displeases God, and yet they proceed. Reader, is this thy case?

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NUMBERS 22:35 the LORD's angel said to Balaam, "Go with the men; but only the word that I shall speak to you, that you shall speak." So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

NUMBERS 22:36 When Balak heard that Balaam had come, he went out to meet him to the City of Moab, which is on the border of the Arnon, which is in the utmost part of the border.

NUMBERS 22:37 Balak said to Balaam, "Didn't I earnestly send to you to call you? Why didn't you come to me? Am I not able indeed to promote you to honour?"

NUMBERS 22:38 Balaam said to Balak, "Behold, I have come to you. Have I now any power at all to speak anything? The word that God puts in my mouth, that shall I speak."

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## Verse 38

The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak - Here was a noble resolution, and he was certainly faithful to it: though he wished to please the king, and get wealth and honor, yet he would not displease God to realize even these bright prospects. Many who slander this poor semi-antinomian prophet, have not half his piety.

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NUMBERS 22:39 Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kiriath Huzoth.

NUMBERS 22:40 Balak sacrificed cattle and sheep, and sent to Balaam, and to the princes who were with him.

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## Verse 40

And Balak offered oxen, etc. - This was to gain the favor of his gods, and perhaps to propitiate Jehovah, that the end for which he had sent for Balaam might be accomplished.

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NUMBERS 22:41 In the morning, Balak took Balaam, and brought him up into the high places of Baal; and he saw from there part of the people.

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## Verse 41

That - he might see the utmost part of the people - As he thought Balaam must have them all in his eye when he pronounced his curse, lest it might not extend to those who were not in sight. On this account he took him up into the high places of Baal.