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Animals in the Prophetic World: Literary Reflections on Numbers 22 and 1 Kings 13

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Abstract

In this article, the stories of Balaam's donkey (Num. 22.22-35) and the man of God from Judah (1 Kgs 13) are analyzed independently and are also compared for similarities. Features that are common to both accounts include: the importance of the word of YHWH, the employment of animals as literary characters, the motif of death, and the portrayal of animals as divine agents. This study argues that the literary function of animals as divine agents is a distinctive characteristic of the so-called preclassical phase of biblical prophecy.

Keywords: Animals, Balaam, donkey, lion, preclassical prophecy

Introduction

In this study, the stories of Balaam's donkey (Num. 22.22-35) and the man of God from Judah (1 Kgs 13) are first analyzed independently and then they are compared for similarities. At least ten literary features, which are common to both accounts, are explored. These common features include the importance of the word of YHWH, the employment of animals as literary characters, the motif of death, and the portrayal of animals as divine agents. Finally, in an

excursus on animals in the Bible, the motif of the literary characterization of animals is briefly examined. It is suggested that the portrayal of animals as divine agents is a distinctive characteristic of the so-called preclassical phase of biblical prophecy.

1. The Story of Balaam's Donkey (Numbers 22.22-35)

1.1. Literary Observations

The story of Balaam's donkey exhibits a sophisticated literary structure. It is divided into three paragraphs (the first of which can be subdivided into three separate 'encounters'). The first and second paragraphs employ role reversal as the primary literary convention.¹ The third paragraph restores proper roles and reveals the purpose of the entire episode—to reinforce that Balaam may only speak YHWH's words. Numbers 22.22-35 is outlined here as follows:

- I. REVERSAL A: The Donkey as Seer (vv. 22-27)
 - First Encounter (vv. 22-23)
 - Second Encounter (vv. 24-25)
 - Third Encounter (vv. 26-27)
- II. REVERSAL B: The Donkey as YHWH's Mouthpiece (vv. 28-30)
- III. RESOLUTION: Balaam as Seer and Mouthpiece (vv. 31-35)

The first paragraph (vv. 22-27) reverses the roles of the seer and the donkey. The role of the donkey (which is infamous for its stubbornness²) is assigned to Balaam. The role of Balaam, 'whose eyes are opened' (see Num. 24.4b, 16b), is assigned to the donkey. At the outset of this paragraph, the reader is informed that God 'became enraged' (Num. 22.22a) that Balaam was going with the Moabite officials. Thus the angel of YHWH enters the scene to act as an adversary against Balaam, and three encounters are described. Each encounter contains three elements: (1) the angel obstructs Balaam's path (vv. 22a, 24, 26); (2) the donkey sees the angel and avoids his presence (vv. 23a, 25a, 27a);³ and (3) Balaam reacts by striking the donkey (vv. 23b, 25b, 27b). There is also

1. On role reversal in the Balaam traditions, see especially Way 2005: 682-83; see also Alter 1981: 106; 2004: 804, 813; Ashley 1993: 460; Barré 1997: 261; Clark 1982: 140; Fox 2004: 329; 2008: 937, 942; McKay 2002: 138-40; Milgrom 1990: 191-92, 469; Moore and Brown 1997: 576; Savran 1994: 35-36, 44-45, 53; Wenham 1981: 167-68.

2. The characterization of the donkey as a stubborn/lazy animal is found throughout ancient Near Eastern and biblical sources (see Way 2006: 40-41, 45-46, 50-51, 89-90, 97-98, 121, 125, 211, 227, 247).

3. Alter suggests that 'the verb *to see*...becomes, with some synonyms, the main *Leitwort* in this tale about the nature of prophecy or vision' (Alter 1981: 105; cf. Alter 2004: 795, 801, 806, 811, 814). For further discussion on sight in the Balaam pericope, see Savran 1994: 46-48; 2005: 85-86.

a progression from partial to total obstruction in the adversarial actions of the angel. In the first encounter, the angel is positioned in the road (v. 22a), and the donkey simply swerves from the road to avoid him. In the second encounter, the angel is positioned in the lane running through the vineyards with a fence on either side (v. 24), and the donkey manages to squeeze between the angel and the wall. In the third encounter, the angel is positioned at a narrow place where there was no way to swerve right or left (v. 26b), and the donkey resorts to laying down under Balaam. A similar progression is also evident in Balaam's brutish reactions to the donkey. First, he strikes the donkey (v. 23b); then he continues to strike the donkey (v. 25b); and finally, he strikes the donkey with his rod (v. 27b).⁴ These progressions bring the three characters to a bottleneck, at which point Balaam 'became enraged' (Num. 22.27b)—thus forming an *inclusio* for the first paragraph (cf. v. 22a).⁵

The second paragraph (vv. 28–30) reverses the roles of YHWH's mouthpiece and the donkey. The role of the donkey (which is infamous for its stupidity⁶) is assigned to Balaam. The role of Balaam, who hears the words of God (see Num. 24.4a, 16a), is assigned to the donkey. At the outset of this paragraph, the reader is informed that YHWH opened the donkey's mouth (v. 28a). Note that there is no parallel statement in the first paragraph to the effect that YHWH opened the donkey's eyes.⁷ Apparently, the donkey's ability to see what is in front of her is only natural,⁸ whereas the donkey's ability to speak is an act of YHWH. The dialogue in this paragraph is striking for at least two reasons: first, the donkey does not say what the reader expects her to say—namely, that she is trying to avoid the angel who is about to slay them.⁹ Rather, she assumes that

4. For further discussion on the possibly ominous significance of the 'rod' (*maqṣāl*) in this passage, see Way 2006: 115–16 n. 341.

5. Note later how Balak also 'became enraged' after Balaam pronounces his third oracle (see Num. 24.10a). It appears that both Balaam and Balak employ the policy of 'three strikes and you're out' (see Num. 22.22–27; 23.1–24.11). On the patterns of three which permeate the Balaam pericope, see Alter 1981: 106; 2004: 799, 804, 809, 810, 813; Ashley 1993: 456, 460; Barré 1997: 261; Clark 1982: 140, 142, 143, 144; Milgrom 1990: 190, 468, 469; Savran 1994: 35; 2005: 85–86, 139, 165, 206–207; Wenham 1981: 165, 171.

6. The characterization of the donkey as a stupid animal is expressed in a number of ancient Near Eastern texts (see Way 2006: 45, 121, 125, 247).

7. For this observation, see Moore and Brown 1997: 576.

8. Based on what is known about equid physiology, it is interesting that the donkey is depicted here in the role of seer: equids have 'an enormous field of vision..., only three degrees short of all round vision; their eyes are the largest of any land mammal' (McKay 2002: 139). Note also that instinctive clairvoyance is an attribute that has been ascribed to various animals (see Gaster 1969: 309–10 [§99]; Gray 1912: 333–34; Gunkel 1987: 51–52; Keel and Staubli 2001: 11; 2003: 11; Keil 1869: 170 [and n. 1]; McKay 2002: 139; Way 2005: 683 n. 18).

9. Cf. Ashley 1993: 458; Levine 2000: 157.

Balaam knows this obvious piece of information; and instead, her words seem to reflect the introspective thoughts of one who is about to die. She says (Num. 22.28b, 30a [emphasis mine]):¹⁰

מה־עשיתי לך כי הכיתני זה שלש רגלים:
הלא אנכי אתנך אשר־רכבת עלי מעודך עד־היום הזה
ההסכן הסכנתי לעשות לך כה

What have *I* done to you that you should strike me these three times?
Am I not your own jenny whom you have always ridden to this day?
Have I *really* taken advantage by doing thus to you?

The second striking feature of this paragraph is that Balaam is not surprised by the donkey's unnatural ability to speak.¹¹ Why is this so? I have suggested in a previous study that a characteristic of the Balaam traditions is that they employ omens by means of animal activity.¹² It was also noted that donkeys are associated with divination throughout ancient Near Eastern literature.¹³ Therefore, instead of marveling at the donkey's unusual behavior, it appears that Balaam immediately accepts it as an omen¹⁴ and proceeds to investigate by engaging the donkey in dialogue. However, he cannot determine the meaning of the omen—at least not by his own ability.

The third paragraph (vv. 31-35) restores Balaam to his proper role as both seer and mouthpiece. It begins by stating another divine act: YHWH uncovered Balaam's eyes (v. 31a). This act is as equally miraculous as the opening of the donkey's mouth (cf. v. 28a).¹⁵ When Balaam sees the angel of YHWH he bows and assumes a prostrate position (v. 31b). The angel then explains the meaning of the donkey's unusual behavior (vv. 32-33), while Balaam the diviner admits to sinning based on his own ignorance (v. 34a; contrast this with Num. 24.16a). Finally, the angel commissions Balaam to go with Balak's officials and to speak only the word of YHWH. He states emphatically: 'Go with the men. But only the word that I speak to you, such you shall speak' (v. 35a). This verse reveals the

10. For helpful remarks on Num. 22.28, 30, see Ashley 1993: 452-53, 457-58; Levine 2000: 142, 157-58; Milgrom 1990: 191. On the translation of 'atôn as 'jenny' (female donkey), see Way 2006: 201-203, 209-10, 256.

11. Balaam's lack of surprise at the talking donkey is noted by many commentators; e.g. Alter 2004: 800; Ashley 1993: 457; Clark 1982: 140; Gray 1912: 335; Gunkel 1987: 51; Keil 1869: 171; Moore and Brown 1997: 576; Savran 1994: 38; 2005: 139.

12. See Way 2005: 686-88.

13. See Way 2005: 687 n. 33; cf. Way 2006: 41-42, 72-75, 86-88, 113-17, 119, 126, 211, 230, 247-48.

14. The idea that the unusual behavior of the donkey may function as an omen in Num. 22 was previously recognized by R. Largement (1964: 40-41; cf. Milgrom 1990: 190; Wenham 1981: 170); for further discussion see Way 2005: 686-87; 2006: 86-87.

15. Note also that the ability to speak, to hear or to see is given by YHWH (Exod. 4.11; cf. Ezek. 3.27; 33.22).

reason for the story of Balaam's encounter with the angel. The donkey merely serves as the vehicle (both literally and figuratively) that reinforces this message to Balaam. Balaam's mission is not about himself, nor is it about pleasing the king of Moab. His mission is to speak Y^{HWH}'s words only.

1.2. The Word of Y^{HWH} and Numbers 22–24

The fact that the word of Y^{HWH} is such an essential element in the story of Balaam's donkey suggests that the story is situated perfectly within ch. 22 and within the entire Balaam pericope (i.e. chs. 22–24).¹⁶ In ch. 22, the passage preceding the story of the donkey concludes with emphasis on speaking only the word of Y^{HWH}/God (cf. 22.18, 20). Likewise, the passage following the story of the donkey reiterates the same theme (cf. 22.38). Following ch. 22, the restrictiveness of the word of Y^{HWH} is repeatedly emphasized after the first, second and third oracles (see Num. 23.12, 26; 24.13), and it appears to be assumed in the remainder of Balaam's oracles.

The Balaam pericope generally presents the person of Balaam in a positive manner even though he is a gentile diviner who was hired by the Moabites to curse Israel. This positive portrayal of Balaam in Numbers 22–24 is echoed again only in Mic. 6.5. In every other passage of the Hebrew Bible where Balaam is mentioned, he is clearly presented in a negative manner (see Num. 31.8, 16; Deut. 23.3–5 [MT 23.4–6]; Josh. 13.22; 24.9–10; Neh. 13.1–2).¹⁷ Interestingly,

16. The view expressed here—that the donkey story demonstrates continuity with the rest of the Balaam pericope—is not shared by all scholars. For example, B.A. Levine states: 'It has already been noted that Numbers 22:22...directly contradicts Numbers 22:20... Beyond these contradictions, the tale ridicules Balaam most effectively... There is, therefore, considerable logic to the often voiced contention that the author of the Tale of the Jenny has endorsed the later negative casting of Balaam to be inferred from several biblical references to him, and from some postbiblical traditions, as well' (Levine 2000: 154). On the other hand, God's apparent change of mind in the donkey story may be viewed as one instance of a recurring literary motif in the Pentateuch. With regard to the motif of 'God opposing after sending' (cf. Gen. 31–32; Exod. 4), it has been suggested that 'In each instance God did indeed want the individual to make the journey but had an issue to settle first' (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000: 160). J.H. Walton elsewhere explains: 'In each of these three cases, the antagonism that the man experiences from God does not reflect a contradiction in God (telling them to go, then stopping them from going), but a contradiction that needs to be resolved in the man' (2001: 610). As for Balaam's issue, Walton continues: 'God wanted Balaam to go and pronounce blessing on Israel. But Balaam also had some baggage that was not conducive to a proper understanding of what role he was going to play' (2001: 610).

17. For further reference on the disparate assessments of Balaam in biblical literature, see Ashley 1993: 435–36; Barré 1997: 255; Budd 1984: 272–73; Clark 1982: 139; Fox 2004: 328; 2008: 940; Kaiser 1996: 95–106; Levine 2000: 154, 238–40, 453–54; Milgrom 1990: 469–71; Moore 1990: 1, 9–11; Noth 1968: 172–73, 231; Savran 1994: 54–55; Wenham 1981: 166–68. For the negative portrayal of Balaam in the New Testament, see 2 Pet. 2.15–16; Jude 11; Rev. 2.14; cf. 2 Tim. 3.8.

many scholars place the story of the donkey in the 'negative' column based on source-critical assumptions,¹⁸ though, literarily speaking (see the preceding paragraph), the story is closely linked with the larger pericope (chs. 22–24), which is regarded as 'positive' by most scholars.

1.3. The Literary Characterization of Equids

In Num. 22.22–35, the donkey is employed as the subject of a verb no less than thirteen times (see vv. 23, 25, 27, 28, 30, 33). Most notably, she has the capacity of speech (see vv. 28, 30). Such a personification of the donkey occurs only once in the Hebrew Bible (the only other instance of animal speech is that of the serpent in Gen. 3),¹⁹ but there are two additional passages that feature equids as the subjects of verbal forms. The first one is 2 Sam. 18.9, which recounts the actions of Absalom and his mule:²⁰

ואבשלום רכב על־הפרד ויבא הפרד תחת שובך האלה הגדולה
ויחזק ראשו באלה ויתן בין השמים ובין הארץ
והפרד אשר־תחתיו עבר

Now Absalom was riding on the mule, and as the mule passed under the tangled branches of the great terebinth, his head got caught in the terebinth; he was left hanging between heaven and earth as the mule under him kept going.

The second passage is 1 Kings 13, where a donkey and a lion are said to be standing beside the corpse of a prophet (v. 28; cf. v. 24; see below). While 2 Sam. 18.9 and 1 Kgs 13.24, 28 seem to feature the equid as a minor literary character, they do not employ the same level of characterization as Numbers 22, where the donkey is totally personified by displaying the faculty of speech.²¹

18. E.g. Levine 2000: 154.

19. For a stimulating study on the intertextual relationship between Gen. 3 and Num. 22, see Savran 1994; cf. Way 2005: 685–86; 2006: 35, 85–86, 232–33. The published abstract of Savran's article is worth noting: 'The anomalous feature of animal speech in Gen. 3 and in Num. 22 is only the most obvious point in common between the two texts. The serpent and the she-ass play complementary roles in relation to the human actors in the stories, and a comparison of their functions reveals further similarities. Both the garden story and the Balaam narrative focus on the themes of blessing and curse, vision and understanding, and obedience/disobedience to God. The intertextual relationship between the stories uncovered in this analysis sheds light on larger patterns of inner-biblical interpretation within the Pentateuch' (Savran 1994: 55).

20. For helpful remarks on 2 Sam. 18.9, see Alter 1999: 304–305; McCarter 1984: 396, 401, 406; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000: 347.

21. For further discussion on animals (especially equids) with speech capabilities in ancient Near Eastern texts, see Way 2005: 685–86; cf. Gunkel 1987: 52. N.S. Fox adds that the gender of this speaking animal may be significant: 'Her role as the insightful one of the pair is reminiscent of the biblical notion of Lady Wisdom (especially in

1.4. Divinely Endowed Speech for Equids

The story of Balaam's talking donkey is not the only text from the ancient Mediterranean world that attests to divinely endowed equid speech. An additional example of this scenario is attested in Homer's *Iliad* (XIX.404-24), where Achilles converses with his horse named Xanthus. H. Rouillard²² points out three 'convergences' between the biblical and Homeric episodes: (1) a deity grants the faculty of speech to the equid (Hera in XIX.406; YHWH in Num. 22.28); (2) the equid's speech coincides with the rider's blindness; and (3) the rider reacts with anger (Achilles in XIX.419-20; Balaam in Num. 22.27b, 29). One could also add a fourth element that is common to both stories: death is a major theme in the dialogue (the death of Achilles in XIX.409-10, 420-22; the death of the donkey in Num. 22.29; the death of Balaam in Num. 22.33).

Out of these four observations, the first 'convergence'—that of divinely endowed speech for equids—is the most striking and compelling. The three other observations serve to bolster the case for literary comparison. Perhaps this Homeric parallel to Numbers 22 can be regarded as evidence for the existence of a type-scene that was employed in the literature of the ancient Mediterranean world.²³

1.5. The Donkey's Immunity from Death

If one examines Num. 22.22-35 from the perspectives of either the donkey or the angel, it becomes immediately evident that the donkey is afforded exceptional treatment by the angel of YHWH. The angel makes a loaded statement regarding the donkey's immunity from death. The angel explains to Balaam: 'Had she not avoided my presence, it is you I would have killed and her I would have let live' (Num. 22.33b).²⁴ Why is the donkey exceptional? Baruch Levine opines that 'she would not have been slain in such an encounter, as she was only an animal'.²⁵ But the fact that she is 'only an animal' may just as well be a reason to slay her along with her rider!

In Num. 22.22-30, I would suggest that the donkey has a special function as YHWH's agent. YHWH not only employs her natural behavior for his purposes (vv. 22-27), he also endows her with *supernatural* ability for his purposes (vv. 28-30).

Prov. 8-9). Perhaps, however, the story is merely suggesting that even a female donkey, the lowliest of the low animals, is more perceptive than Balaam' (Fox 2008: 942). For other biblical references to female equids see Exod. 13.13a (*hāmôr*), 2 Sam. 19.26 (מִתְּ 19.27; *hāmôr*), 1 Kgs 1.33, 38, 44 (*pardah*), and the passages which employ the term *'atôn* (see Gen. 12.16; 32.15 [מִתְּ 32.16]; 45.23; 49.11; Num. 22; Judg. 5.10; 1 Sam. 9-10; 2 Kgs 4.22, 24; 1 Chron. 27.30; Job 1.3, 14-15; 42.12; Zech. 9.9).

22. See Rouillard 1985: 118; cf. Murray and Wyatt 1999: 362-65.

23. For further discussion on type-scenes, see Alter 1981: 47-62.

24. For helpful remarks on Num. 22.33, see Angel 2005: 34; Ashley 1993: 453, 458-59; Levine 2000: 159; Milgrom 1990: 192.

25. Levine 2000: 159.

The donkey is the vehicle that YHWH uses in this story to remind Balaam that he may only speak the words of YHWH. The donkey is therefore quite exceptional and shares a status similar to that of the angel of YHWH. The reason why the angel feels differently about this donkey is that they are both employees of YHWH.

2. The Story of the Man of God from Judah (1 Kings 13)

2.1. Literary Observations

The story of the man of God from Judah also exhibits a high level of literary sophistication. The central theme of the story is clearly ‘the word of YHWH’—a phrase which occurs a total of nine times in the passage (cf. 1 Kgs 13.1, 2, 5, 9, 17, 18, 20, 26, 32). Additionally, a couple of key words are employed in the account: ‘to return/bring back’ (*šûb*; 16 times) and ‘road/way’ (*derek*; 12 times).²⁶ The literary structure of the story is now apparent thanks to the recent keen observations of James Mead (1999) and Jesse Long (2005). These readers suggest that the pericope properly begins at 1 Kgs 12.25/26 and continues through 13.34. Both Mead and Long detect a chiasmic arrangement in which the central pivot is v. 19,²⁷ which reads: ‘Then he went back with him (וַיָּשֹׁב אִתּוֹ)²⁸ and ate bread and drank water in his house’. This verse divides between the positive and negative portrayals of the man of God from Judah (that is, between vv. 1-18 and vv. 20-32).²⁹

The verse which is most interesting for the present study on animals is found in the second half of the chiasm—v. 24. This verse describes the immediate result of YHWH’s judgment upon the disobedient prophet from Judah. Interestingly, YHWH employs the services of both a donkey and a lion. Verse 24 reads as follows:

וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיִּמְצְאוּהוּ אֲרִיָּה בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיִּמְתָּהוּ
וַתְּהִי נִבְלָתוֹ מְשֻׁלֶּכֶת בְּדֶרֶךְ
וַהֲחִמּוּ עַמְדַּת אֲצֵלָהּ וְהָאֲרִיָּה עָמַד אֲצֵל הַנִּבְלָה׃

26. On *šûb*, see Cogan 2001: 373; Long 2002: 170, 175-76; 2005: 8, 10, 11; Mead 1999: 194 (n. 11); Simon 1976: 109. On *derek*, see Long 2002: 170, 175; 2005: 8, 10.

27. See Long 2005: 13; Mead 1999: 194, 196. It should be noted that Mead and Long are in agreement regarding the external frame (12.25/26-33; 13.33-34) and the center (13.19) of the chiasm, but they are not in agreement regarding the relationship(s) between 13.1-18 and 13.20-32. I must thank Jesse Long for discussing this passage with me (via email; 14 November, 2005) and for sending me a copy of his unpublished paper.

28. The LXX interprets the same consonants differently (i.e. as *hiphil* rather than *qal* [MT]): ‘And he [the northern prophet] brought him back’; cf. Cogan 2001: 370. J. Long suggests: ‘The ambiguity is intentional, highlighting the two sides of the story’ (personal communication via email, November 2005).

29. See Mead 1999: 194-95.

Then he set out, and a lion met him on the road and killed him.³⁰ His corpse was thrown on the road,³¹ with the donkey standing beside it, and the lion also standing beside the corpse.³²

After the northern prophet arrives and sees this bizarre scene, the narrator adds the remark: ‘The lion had not eaten the corpse nor had it mauled the donkey’ (v. 28). This comment highlights the *unnatural* behavior of the lion in order to underscore the divine employment of the animal world. Mordecai Cogan aptly remarks: ‘To make the point that the lion was fulfilling a divine order, the carnivore did not devour the dead man or the donkey, in departure from its natural behavior. Indeed, the donkey watched over its rider; the lion stood guard over both of them.’³³ The text here seems to portray the lion and the donkey as collaborative partners who carry out YHWH’s mission.

2.2. Lions and Donkeys in the Biblical World

The juxtaposition of the lion and the donkey is unusual but not unique to 1 Kings 13. These two animals are also present in the Balaam traditions (see Num. 22.21-33; 23.24; 24.9), which feature numerous animals behaving in an ominous manner.³⁴ In Egyptian instructions the respective temperaments and

30. Another instance of a lion ‘finding’ and killing a prophet is in 1 Kgs 20.36. Note that the key issue in both 1 Kgs 13 and 1 Kgs 20 is ‘the word of YHWH’ (1 Kgs 20.35; see Cogan 2001: 469; Long 2002: 236-37; 2005: 12).

31. The use of the verb ‘thrown’ (*šlk*, *hiphil*) in vv. 24, 25, 28 is significant. S.M. Olyan explains that it is ‘clearly a ritual act of disrespect and disregard; it is an act specifically associated with animal [donkey!] burials in Jer. 22.19. This is to be contrasted with use of the verb *נח* in the *hiphil* (“to set at rest”), an idiom used several times in one narrative of honorable interment for the treatment of the corpse (1 Kgs 13.30)’ (2005: 606-607). It is indeed ironic that the southern prophet in 1 Kgs 13 is treated like a dead donkey (cf. Jer. 22.19; 36.30) while the donkey in 1 Kgs 13 is spared and unscathed.

32. Mead opines that the donkey is subtly identified with king Jeroboam: ‘The donkey’s action of “standing beside” (*ʿēšel*) the corpse (v. 24) recalls Jeroboam’s “standing beside” (*ʿal*) the altar (v. 1). Moreover...the “thrown” body of the man of God echoes the “torn down” altar. These parallels lead to a subtle identification between the king and the donkey. In other words, the narrator is calling Jeroboam an ass. Helpless and dumb to stop the judgment of Yahweh’s word, the king can only stand idly by and await his fate. At present, the lion does not consume the donkey, and Yahweh leaves Jeroboam on his rebellious throne’ (Mead 1999: 202). I do not accept Mead’s interpretation. He fails to present any clear evidence for the literary equation of the donkey with Jeroboam. Instead, a much stronger case can be made for the literary equation of Jeroboam with the man of God from Judah (see Mead 1999: 196, 197, 198, 201, 205; cf. Angel 2005: 35; Long 2002: 176-77; 2005: 12, 14).

33. Cogan 2001: 371; cf. Angel 2005: 34; Brueggemann 2000: 171; Gunkel 1987: 53; Long 2002: 172; Strawn 2005: 45, 345.

34. See Way 2005: 684-85.

speeds of the two animals are contrasted.³⁵ There is also an Aramaic fable which depicts the lion and donkey as conversing in a seemingly peaceful manner.³⁶ Similarly in 1 Kgs 13.24, 28, the story depicts the two animals as peacefully cooperating in order to execute YHWH's judgment. It is curious that the lion and donkey are portrayed as a peaceful pair in both the biblical and ancient Near Eastern sources. This is obviously intended to be ironic since the donkey could suffice as an easy meal for the lion!

Additionally, it is relevant to note that the lion is attested as an instrument of divine judgment not only in the Hebrew Bible (1 Kgs 13.24-26; 20.36; 2 Kgs 17.25-26; Isa. 15.9; Jer. 5.6; cf. Hos. 5.14; 13.7-8),³⁷ but also in texts such as a curse from the treaty of Esarhaddon and Baal of Tyre: '[May] Bethel and Anath-Bethel [deliv]er you to a man-eating lion'.³⁸ Notably, there is also textual evidence that the lion's behavior in 1 Kgs 13.28 might be understood as ominous. For example, a fragmentary Akkadian omen from *Šumma Alu* reads: 'If a lion kills [...] and does not eat (it), there will be plague in that city' (Tablet 44.25').³⁹

2.3. Comparison with Numbers 22

The story of the man of God from Judah shares many similarities with the story of Balaam's donkey in Numbers 22. The two stories have at least ten features in common.⁴⁰ First, both stories place emphasis on the word of YHWH (cf. Num. 22.18, 20, 28-30, 35, 38; 1 Kgs 13.1, 2, 5, 9, 17, 18, 20, 26, 32). Second, both stories employ the same idiomatic response to a king's offer/invitation (cf. Num. 22.18; 1 Kgs 13.8).⁴¹ Third, both stories utilize key words such as 'road/way' and 'return' (*derek* occurs eight times in Num. 22; *šûb* occurs only once [Num.

35. See the *Instruction of Any* (Papyrus Boulaq) from the 18th Dynasty: 'The savage lion abandons his wrath, And comes to resemble the timid donkey' (Hallo and Younger 1997: 114 [text 1.46]; cf. Way 2006: 43-44). See also the *Instruction of Onchsheshonqy* (BM 10508), maxim 24/9: 'A horse is found to go after a lion; a donkey is not found to conduct it' (Ritner 2003: 524; cf. Way 2006: 49-51). For a comparison of the lion and the mule (*parû*) in Akkadian, see CAD P/12:207.

36. See the twenty-eighth saying in the *Proverbs of Ahiqar* (VII.110): 'The lion approached to gr[ee]t the donkey]: "Peace be unto you!" The donkey replied to the lion...' (Lindenberg 1983: 96; cf. Way 2006: 91).

37. For further discussion, see Brueggemann 2000: 172; Strawn 2005: 64, 234, 250 (and cf. p. 143).

38. Strawn 2005: 143, 234; cf. CAD N/2:194; Cogan 2001: 371. For other examples, see Strawn 2005: 143-44, 234; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000: 404.

39. Translation by S.M. Freedman (personal communication, June 2008); cf. CAD N/2:194; Strawn 2005: 149 n. 92.

40. At least two of these common features are discussed in a recent article by H. Angel, who even suggests that 1 Kgs 13 is 'modeled after the Balaam narrative' (2005: 31). It should be noted, however, that the ten similarities listed in this paragraph were observed independently and prior to reading Angel's article.

41. This observation is made by Cogan (2001: 369); cf. Angel 2005: 32, 36.

22.34]). Fourth, both stories feature the literary convention of role reversal.⁴² Fifth, both stories contain references to death (cf. Num. 22.29-33; 1 Kgs 13.22-31).⁴³ Sixth, both stories depict the donkey as having immunity from death—or at least as being spared from death (cf. Num. 22.33; 1 Kgs 13.28).⁴⁴ Seventh, both stories display the donkey as a mount for a prophet—that is, a person of status (cf. Num. 22.21-34; 1 Kgs 13.13-29).⁴⁵ Eighth, the unusual animal behavior can be interpreted as ominous in both stories (the donkey in Num. 22.23-33 and the lion in 1 Kgs 13.28). Ninth, both stories present animals as literary characters—or at least as the subjects of verbal forms (cf. Num. 22.23-33; 1 Kgs 13.24-28). Tenth, and finally, the animals seem to function as YHWH's agents in both stories (cf. Num. 22.23-33; 1 Kgs 13.24-28).

3. Excursus: Animals in Biblical Literature

The ninth and tenth similarities between the stories of Balaam's donkey and the man of God from Judah can now be enhanced by making some additional observations on the relatively prominent biblical motif of the literary characterization of animals.

This motif mainly occurs in narrative passages—especially those which employ animals as the subjects of verbal forms. Such references seem to depict animals as participants or actors in the stories. In many passages, divine providence (or at least the destiny of the human characters) appears to be assumed or implied. In some cases the animals even appear to be acting on YHWH's

42. For the many reversals in 1 Kgs 13, see Angel 2005: 34-35; Cogan 2001: 372; Long 2002: 169, 173; 2005: 10; Mead 1999: 194 (and n. 11), 197, 201, 204, 205; Simon 1976: 93, 96; see n. 13 above on the use of the verb *šlk* in 1 Kgs 13.24, 25, 28.

43. In the Bible, the donkey often seems to have a literary function in which it is portrayed as leading its rider directly or indirectly toward death. This motif is visible not only in Num. 22 and 1 Kgs 13 but also in 1 Sam. 9.5; 10.2; 2 Sam. 17.23 (cf. 2 Sam. 18.9 [*pered*]). For further discussion on the donkey's association with death in the biblical world, see Way 2006: 46-48, 56-59, 128-29, 191-92, 195, 213-14, 229, 234, 235, 238, 243, 247. Perhaps the literary connection between death and donkeys is somehow related to the Bronze Age phenomenon of donkey burials that are associated with human graves (see Way 2006: 47-48, 129, 192).

44. W.T. In der Smitten also observes that Num. 22 'has certain similarities with the ride of the man of God in 1 Kgs 13.11-29. In both stories, permeated with death, the mount is never in danger' (1980: 469). E. Nielsen also comments that in both stories 'death is threatening' and that 'In none of the traditions is the ass menaced with any harm' (1953: 268 n. 17).

45. The association of prophets with donkeys may be due to nothing more than the fact that prophets (and cult personnel in general) are generally people of high social status who ride vehicles appropriate to such status. It is well-known that donkeys also serve as mounts for judges, nobility/aristocracy, royalty, deity, etc. For further discussion, see Way 2005: 685; 2006: 65-72, 84, 96-97, 111-12, 128, 212-13, 247-48.

behalf—that is, as YHWH's agents. The *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* describes the phenomenon in this way: 'Since all events are under God's control, animals function as divine agents. Some fulfill God's mission. Others are co-opted by evil and permitted to harm. Behavior considered abnormal for an animal suggests that it is fulfilling such a role.'⁴⁶

It is suggested above that this motif is evident with regard to donkeys and mules in passages such as Num. 22.23-33 (*'ātôn*),⁴⁷ 2 Sam. 18.9 (*pered*) and 1 Kgs 13.24, 28 (*hāmôr*). The same may also be said for 1 Sam. 9.1-10.16, in which Saul searches for his father's jennies (*'ātônôt*) and eventually finds kingship.⁴⁸ But this motif is not restricted to equids.

It is also present in connection with other animals such as lions, bears, cows and birds. It has been stated already that the lion (*'aryēh*) can act as an instrument of YHWH's judgment upon disobedient prophets (see 1 Kgs 13.24-28; 20.35-36).⁴⁹ In addition, two she-bears (*dubbîm*) are said to have mauled 42 youths in fulfillment of Elisha's curse in the name of YHWH (2 Kgs 2.23-24).⁵⁰ Also, two lowing cows (*pārôt*) act contrary to nature and guide the ark of YHWH to Beth Shemesh (1 Sam. 6.7-12).⁵¹ In 1 Kgs 17.2-6, YHWH commands ravens (*'orbîm*) to bring bread and meat to Elijah while he was hiding by the Wadi Cherith.⁵² More instances of this motif may be identified in the story of Jonah, especially regarding the fish and the worm (Jonah 1.17; 2.10; 4.7).⁵³

Such examples of animals in divine employment are quite prominent in biblical narrative, while ancient Near Eastern literary examples of this motif are relatively rare.⁵⁴ The examples in biblical narrative are mostly concentrated in the prophetic corpus of the Hebrew canon (with the notable exception of Num. 22). They are especially found in the pre-exilic period in the so-called

46. Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman 1998: 31.

47. Note Keel and Staubli's observation that the donkey 'perçoit immédiatement la volonté de la puissance divine' (2003: 11; cf. Keel and Staubli 2001: 11). See also Gamkrelidze 1998: 612 (n. 3).

48. For further reference on 1 Sam. 9.1-10.16, see Gamkrelidze 1998: 612 (n. 3); In der Smitten 1980: 469; McCarter 1980: 185, 186; Moore and Brown 1997: 576. For additional passages that juxtapose donkeys with destiny, see Gen. 36.24 (*hāmôr*); 2 Sam. 17.23 (*hāmôr*).

49. Cf. 2 Kgs 17.25-26; Isa. 15.9; Jer. 5.6; Hos. 5.14; 13.7-8. Note also how *seraph* serpents in Num. 21.6 act as agents of divine judgment.

50. Cf. Hos. 13.8.

51. For helpful remarks on 1 Sam. 6.7-12, see Alter 1999: 32-33; Gunkel 1987: 52; McCarter 1980: 134-35; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000: 288-89. Note Keel and Staubli's observation that the cows acted 'comme si elles obéissaient à une voix divine, autre que la voix maternelle qui leur était innée' (2003: 11; cf. Keel and Staubli 2001: 11).

52. Cf. Gen. 8.6-12; Prov. 30.17.

53. For possible additional cases of this motif, see Dan. 6 (lions) and Mt. 17.27 (fish).

54. See, for example, the Akkadian epic of Etana in which the eagle and serpent seem to function as agents of Shamash (cf. Hallo and Younger 1997: 453-57 [text 1.31]).

preclassical phase of biblical prophecy. The term ‘preclassical prophecy’ identifies the biblical prophetic phenomena, extending from roughly the eleventh through the eighth centuries BCE, in which the prophet primarily serves as an advisor to the king.⁵⁵ It may now also be said that the literary employment of animals as divine agents is yet another distinctive characteristic of the preclassical phase of biblical prophecy.

Summary

The story of Balaam’s donkey (Num. 22.22-35) is one that many scholars have explored over the years. Nevertheless, the literary analysis presented here is for the most part original. Perhaps this is due to the application of background knowledge about the donkey (i.e. its natural abilities, reputation and qualities) in conjunction with a literary sensitivity to the prominence of role reversals in the story.

The story about the unnamed prophet from Judah (1 Kgs 13) shares numerous similarities with the story of Balaam’s donkey. Many of these similarities have gone unnoticed until now. The most intriguing of these similarities are the literary characterization of animals and the portrayal of animals as divine agents. The latter motif may even qualify as a unique literary characteristic of the preclassical phase of biblical prophecy.

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55. See Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000: 582; cf. Schmitt 1992: 482, 486. The term ‘preclassical prophecy’ is often used to distinguish between the earlier prophets who have no anthologies preserved in their names and the later prophets (often referred to, somewhat artificially, as ‘classical’ or ‘writing’ prophets) who have a literary/canonical trail extending from the eighth to the fifth centuries BCE.

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