

**BORROWING BALAAM'S BLESSING;
THE APPROPRIATION OF TRADITION IN NUMBERS 22-24**

THESIS ABSTRACT

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A certain ambivalence has always attended the interpretation of Numbers 22-24. In the main, scholarly approaches to this passage have attributed this ambivalence to the types of incongruities one might reasonably expect either from the conflation of two or more divergent literary sources or else secondary interpolations. Beyond the difficulties connected with any particular reconstruction, such an approach has left unanswered the question of how to read a text which is assumed to be at cross purposes with itself. Narratological approaches to the text, with their focus firmly fixed upon the literary artistry of the Balaam Pericope, have profitably highlighted aspects of its use of humor, irony and even satire. As alternatives to historical-critical methodologies, these approaches generally fail to consider the extent to which the passage may have been informed by the historical context of its composition or an authorial awareness of antecedent traditions.

Therefore this study will comprise a synthesis of the insights gleaned from an application of both narratological and historical-critical methodologies. It will be argued that the Balaam Pericope constitutes not only an artistically drawn literary unity, but that sufficient evidence exists to identify it as a narrative appropriation of establish blessing traditions and political apologetic. Within the wider context of the book of Numbers, the Balaam Pericope provides the occasion and warrant for a theological reconsideration not only of the persistence of God's blessing but also the consequences of infidelity upon the ability of God's people to appropriate that blessing.

