

Redemption 304: Further Study on Japheth and Balaam



biblestudying.net

Brian K. McPherson and Scott McPherson

Copyright 2012

Melchizedek (Shem), Japheth, and Balaam

Summary of Relevant Information from Genesis Regarding Melchizedek and Abraham

This exploratory paper assumes the conclusions of section three of our “Priesthood and the Kinsman Redeemer” study which identifies Melchizedek as Noah’s son Shem.

Melchizedek was priest of Jerusalem (Salem) and possibly of the region in general. Shem was granted dominion over all the Canaanites by Noah.

Genesis 9:22 And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. 23 And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father’s nakedness. 24 And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. 25 And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. 26 And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

Melchizedek is clearly presented as a king. And Abraham clearly pays tithes or tribute to this king after a victory in battle.

Genesis 14:18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. 19 And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: 20 And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.

Melchizedek’s authority and dominion take on particular significance once we realize the royal dominion of the men Abraham has defeated.

Genesis 14:1 And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations; 2 That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar. 3 All these were joined together in the vale of Siddim, which is the

salt sea. 4 **Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled.** 5 **And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer, and the kings that were with him, and smote the Rephaims in Ashteroth Karnaim, and the Zuzims in Ham, and the Emims in Shaveh Kiriathaim,** 6 **And the Horites in their mount Seir, unto Elparan,** which is by the wilderness. 7 And they returned, and came to **Enmishpat, which is Kadesh,** and smote all the country of the **Amalekites, and also the Amorites,** that dwelt in Hazezontamar. 8 And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar;) and they **joined battle** with them in the vale of Siddim; 9 With Chedorlaomer the king of Elam, and with Tidal king of nations, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar; **four kings with five.** 10 And the vale of Siddim was full of slimepits; **and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there;** and they that remained fled to the mountain. 11 **And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah,** and all their victuals, and went their way. 12 And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed. 13 **And there came one that had escaped,** and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of **Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram.** 14 **And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants,** born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan. 15 And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, **and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus.** 16 And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people. 17 And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from **the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him,** at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale.

The kings of Shinar, Ellasar, and Elam come against the kings of the five cities later destroyed by God himself in Genesis 18-19. Shinar is "the ancient name for the territory later known as Babylonia or Chaldea." Ellasar is "a town in Babylonia." And Elam is "a province east of Babylon and northeast of the lower Tigris." The last king is identified as Tidal. He is not designated a particular city or region but simply referred to as "king of nations." We will discuss Tidal more later on. Yet in contrast to the greatness of these kings, Abraham pays homage to Melchizedek, showing Melchizedek to be greater than these kings.

It is also important to note that Sodom is "a Canaanite city, usually paired with Gomorrah, located in the area of the Dead Sea and the Jordan river" according to the Online Hebrew Lexicon. The other 3 cities included with Sodom and Gomorrah (Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar) are likely also Canaanite cities. In fact, Genesis 10:19 plainly states, "the border of the Canaanites was from Sidon, as thou comest to Gerar, unto Gaza; as thou goest, unto Sodom, and Gomorrah, and Admah, and Zeboim, even unto Lasha." Deuteronomy 34:1-4 lists Zoar as within the Promised land. Clearly, all 5 of these cities were Canaanite.

And, in fact, we can see that apart from these 5 kings, the other territories that Chedorloamer defeats include peoples and places in Canaan land, or at least along

its outskirts. Kadesh is the “same as Kadesh-barnea,” a city in the extreme south of Judah.” Enmishpat was “a place near southern Palestine coincident or the same place as Kadesh.” Hazezontamar, where these Amorites lived, was “a town situated in the desert Judah; probably Engedi.” The Zuzims were in “Ham,” which was the name of Canaan’s father, Shem’s brother. (Psalm 78:51 and 105:23 identify Egypt with the land of Ham. Perhaps Chedorloamer and his allies went partially into this area, maybe even the Sinai Peninsula based on references to Elparan.) Elparan was “at tip of Gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea,” which is at the very southern tip of Jordan, very near the southern tip of modern-day Israel. And the rest of defeated peoples were in the lands east of the Jordan, which were later given to the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh. Ashteroth Karnaim is “a city in Bashan east of the Jordan given to Manasseh.” This area was “probably in the territory of the Ammonites, east of the Jordan.” The Horites dwelled in Mount Seir, and were “the inhabitants of Edom before the descendants of Esau, the Edomites.” The land later ruled by the Amalekites (descendants of Esau) is also listed among those defeated. Edom was “south and south east of Palestine.”

Consequently, not only was Sodom a Canaanite city, but Chedorloamer and the kings allied with him are clearly depicted as conquering many of the Canaanites. And actually, according to Genesis 14:4-5, these Canaanite cities had already been ruled by Chedorloamer for some 12 years before they rebelled, bringing about this conquest. Still, apart from the Amorites, the rest of the seven Canaanite nations are not mentioned at all (Deuteronomy 7:1). This demonstrates that not all the Canaanites were subject to Chedorloamer and his allies from Babylonia. And Chedorloamer and his band do not attack Melchizedek or Jerusalem. Chedorloamer and his allies are clearly on a wide, sweeping conquest of a good portion of Canaan land. Why didn’t they attack Melchizedek and Salem or the rest of these Canaanite peoples? This strongly suggests that Chedorloamer and his allies recognized the territorial integrity of Melchizedek and did not attack the rest of the Canaanites that were ruled by him.

Ultimately, by defeating Chedorloamer and his allies, Abraham had literally conquered not only the rulers of Babylonia, but in defeating the rulers of these particular Canaanites, Abraham had effectively attained dominion over these portions of Canaan land. And immediately after obtaining dominion over parts of Canaan, he turns around and submits himself to Shem, also known as Melchizedek, ruler of Canaan and pays tribute to him.

Abraham’s newly acquired dominion is confirmed three chapters later in Genesis 17. At this point, Abraham is 99 years old. Shem would have been 549 years old and would still live for another 51 years to die at the age of 600 (Genesis 11:10-11), when Abraham is 150 years old. Notice the statements that God makes to Abraham at this point in history after Abraham has defeated the rulers of part of Canaan and when Shem, the current ruler of the rest of Canaan, has only 50 years left to live.

Genesis 17:1 And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD

appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. 2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. 3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, 4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, **and thou shalt be a father of many nations.** 5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. 6 **And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.** 7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, **to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.** 8 And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, **all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession;** and I will be their God.

First, notice that in verses 5-6 God promises Abraham that he will be the father of many nations. It's hard to miss how this promise parallels Shem himself. As one of only 3 sons of Noah, Shem was responsible for repopulating the earth after the Flood. Many nations literally came from Shem. And God was essentially promising a similar prominent role in history to Abraham.

Second, notice that God is promising to give Abraham the land of Canaan for ever. This is the very same territory that Noah proclaimed belonged to Shem whose 600 year reign was only 50 years from ending.

Third, keep in mind that Melchizedek was not only a king but a priest. One of the primary functions of a priest is to make intercession. Hebrews 5:1 states that "every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins." (Five verses later, Hebrews 5 begins the comparison of Melchizedek and Jesus.)

It is important to note that the 5 kings defeated by Chedorloamer are the rulers of the same cities destroyed by God in Genesis 18-19. (Zoar may have been the exception. Lot requests that Zoar be spared and the angel agrees. But Genesis 19 goes on to clarify that Lot does not actually stay in Zoar because he is afraid it will be destroyed also. So, Lot ends up going to the mountain as the angel originally commanded him. The point of these details might be that with Lot safe in the mountain, there was no reason to spare Zoar after all. And clearly Lot's daughters perceive that Zoar has been destroyed because they express their perception that Lot is the only man left alive on earth.)

Genesis 14:2 That these made war with Bera king of **Sodom**, and with Birsha king of **Gomorrah**, Shinab king of **Admah**, and Shemeber king of **Zeboiim**, and the king of Bela, which is **Zoar**...8 And there went out the king of **Sodom**, and the king of **Gomorrah**, and the king of **Admah**, and the king of **Zeboiim**, and the king of **Bela** (the same is **Zoar**;) and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim;

Genesis 19:17 And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, **neither stay thou in all the**

plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed. 18 And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my Lord: 19 Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; **and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die:** 20 **Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one:** Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live. 21 **And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken.** 22 **Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.** 23 The sun was risen upon the earth when **Lot entered into Zoar.** 24 **Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven;** 25 **And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground...** 30 **And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain,** and his two daughters with him; **for he feared to dwell in Zoar:** and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters. 31 And the firstborn said unto the younger, Our father is old, and **there is not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth:**

Deuteronomy 29:23 And that the **whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning,** that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein, like **the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath:**

The main point here is that right after God designates Abraham as the heir of Shem's dominion over Canaan land in Genesis 17 and just 3 chapters after Abraham obtains dominion over these 5 cities through battle in Genesis 14, Genesis 18-19 depict Abraham as offering intercession before God for these same 5 Canaanite cities. Abraham is acting as an intercessor for the sin of the 5 cities that he has obtained dominion over. (In this sense, both Shem/Melchizedek and Abraham present a perfect picture of Christ's dominion and priestly service.) It would appear that these 6 chapters of Genesis are effectively explaining the transfer or inheritance of Shem's status as a father of nations as well as his dominion and priestly service to Abraham, one of his descendants, in the waning years of Shem's life.

Tidal, King of Nations

In addition to identifying Melchizedek as Shem, it may be possible to identify other biblical figures from these passages.

Earlier we made note of the last king mentioned in allegiance with Chedorloamer. This king was identified as "Tidal" and, unlike Chedorloamer, Amraphel, and Arioch, no particular city or region is designated for Tidal. Instead, he is referred to simply as "king of nations." It has been suggested that the title "king of nations" refers to being the king of nomadic peoples. But this title could more

effectively convey that he is a king of Gentile nations in general, not the more specific concept of nomadic tribes. But there are other interesting possibilities with the identification of Tidal.

First, “Tidal” (08413) is the Hebrew word meaning “great son.” So literally, this man is identified as “great son, king of nations.” Given that Melchizedek is a title and Shem is not mentioned by name in Genesis 14, it is possible that “great son, king of nations” is a titular reference to Japheth, the older brother of Shem, who like Shem was also the father of many nations after the Flood. Perhaps Japheth was ruler in the greater region to the east centered in Babylonia just as Shem was ruler over Canaan.

Second, the title “great son” could reflect the fact that Japheth was the oldest son of Noah.

Number one, according to Genesis 5:32, Noah was 500 years old when he began to beget children. Ham is the younger son of Noah in comparison to Shem and Japheth according to Genesis 9:22-24. This means that either Shem or Japheth must be the firstborn. Noah was 600 years old when the Flood came according to Genesis 7:11. According to Genesis 11:10, two years after the Flood, Shem was 100 years old. This means that Shem was 98 years old at the time the Flood came when Noah was 600 years old. Consequently, Shem was born when Noah was 502 years old and, therefore, Shem could not have been the oldest son who was born when Noah was 500 years old. These calculations of age indicate that Japheth must have been the oldest.

Number two, Genesis 10:21 says, “Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the brother of Japheth the elder.” In the English, this phrasing seems to apply the description “the elder” to Japheth. And this interpretation is corroborated by the numerical calculation of ages provided above. Consequently, Genesis 10:21 identifies Japheth as “the elder.” The Hebrew word for “elder” here is “gadowl” (Strong’s No. 01419), which means “great” or “large” and can refer to “large in number” or “older.” In fact, this word is used in Genesis 27:42, 29:16, 1 Samuel 18:17 and other passages to refer to older brothers or sisters. Not only could this relate to Japheth’s status as the firstborn but it could also relate Noah’s proclamation in Genesis 9:25-27 that Japheth would be enlarged. So, Japheth is the “gadowl” son and Genesis 14 describes Tidal, the great son.

Third, this phrase “king of nations” relates to another association with Japheth provided in Genesis 10. Genesis 10:1 begins “Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth: and unto them were sons born after the flood.” Verses 2-5 then list the sons of Japheth. Verses 6-20 list the sons of Ham, including Ham’s son Canaan. Verses 21-31 describe the sons of Shem.

If you compare the genealogical lists for each son, a pattern emerges at the end of each line of Noah’s three sons. Verse 20 concludes, “These are the sons of Ham, after their families, after their tongues, in their countries, and in their nations (01471).” Verse 31 similarly concludes, “These are the sons of Shem, after their

families, after their tongues, in their lands, after their nations (01471).” But when it comes to Japheth, Japheth’s line concludes in verse 5 with a slight variation, saying, “these were the isles of the Gentiles (01471) divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations (01471).”

There are several points worth noting. First, the word for “Gentiles” here is the same word for “nations” in the phrase “in their nations” at the end of each of the three lines of Noah’s sons. Second, while Shem and Ham’s lines conclude with the phrase “these are the sons of,” Japheth’s line does not contain this phrase but instead uses the phrase “these are the isles of the Gentiles (01471) divided in their lands.” Third, this shows that the phrase “these are the isles of the nations” is meant to parallel the phrase “the sons of.” Since Ham’s line does not begin until verse 6, it is clear that this phrase is meant as the concluding line for Japheth’s descendants. Fourth, the word for “isles” is “iy” (Strong’s NO. 0339), which means “coasts, islands, shores, or regions.” Here, since it is coupled with the “lands,” it most likely means “regions” and not only islands. The Hebrew word for “lands” here is “erets” (Strong’s No. 0776), which means “land or earth” and is the standard Hebrew word for the surface of the earth as well as countries and territories.

The question emerges, why is Japheth’s line given greater association with the “isles or regions of the nations” than Ham or Shem’s lines? The reason again stems from Noah’s proclamation in Genesis 9:25-27. Japheth would be enlarged, perhaps either in geographic size or in prominence over the nations. Consequently, Japheth’s sons were known as the “isles or regions of the nations.” In this context, referring to the “great son” who is “king of the nations” just 4 chapters later in Genesis should automatically invoke the idea of Japheth, the elder son whose tents were enlarged, and whose descendants were more greatly associated with the phrase “the nations” in Genesis 10:5.

Fourth, the identification of Japheth as “Tidal,” the great son and king of the nations also aligns with Noah’s earlier prediction from Genesis 9:25-27. In the same verses in which Noah curses Canaan and proclaims Shem will rule over Canaan, Noah also says that God will enlarge Japheth and that he will dwell in the tents of Shem. As we have stated, this concept of Japheth being enlarged could further explain the title “Tidal” or “great son.” Alternately, since this concept of enlargement conveys the idea that Japheth’s descendants spread out greatly over the earth, this enlargement could even correlate to the interpretation that “king of nations” refers to kingship over nomadic peoples. Lastly, Tidal’s involvement in the partial conquest over Canaan land in Genesis 14 could be a fulfillment of Noah’s proclamation that Japheth would share Canaan land with Shem.

Does this mean that Abraham and his forces are responsible for the death of Japheth?

First, unlike Shem, no age is given for the Japheth. Shem’s long life makes it reasonable to conclude that Japheth and Ham also lived long lives. So, it is possible that Japheth was still living at this time, especially since he was only 2

years older than Shem whom we know was still alive. Second, the text of Genesis 14 repeatedly singles out and focuses on Chedorloamer despite the fact that there are other kings allied with him. Verse 4 says that it was Chedorloamer who ruled these particular Canaanites for 12 years. While verse 5 says that these “kings” came with him, it is possible that Chedorloamer himself headed up the invasion and these other kings only “went with him” in the sense of sending troops. Third, even if the other kings came with Chedorloamer, verses 15 and 17 simply state that Abraham “smote” Chedorloamer and the kings with him. The word “slaughter” in verse 17 is “nakah,” Strong’s No. 05221, the same word for “smote” in verse 15. This word means, “to strike, beat, slay, attack, attack and destroy, conquer, subjugate” and here it is probably a simple reference to Abraham attacking and defeating these kings, rather than necessitating the death of all the kings themselves. For example, verse 10 says that the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah “fell” to Chedorloamer and his allies. This word for “fell” means “to fall, lie, be cast down, fail” and could convey the idea of death. However, verse 17 is clear that the king of Sodom is still alive after this battle. Consequently, while it is possible that Abraham’s forces were responsible for the death of these kings, including Tidal, it is also possible that Abraham merely attacked and defeated them without killing all the kings. So, there would be no need to conclude that Abraham was responsible for killing Tidal regardless of whether or not Tidal is Japheth.

If Tidal is Japheth, Abraham’s defeat of his forces alongside Abraham’s inheritance of Shem’s position and Shem’s reign over Ham’s descendants would explain why Abraham and his Seed are considered heirs of dominion over the entire earth. The proximity of these accounts in Genesis 10-14 along with parallels in the language they employ and the themes they present all provide good reason to consider the possibility that Tidal might be Japheth just as Melchizedek is Shem.

Balaam, the Prophet of God

In addition to Japheth, there is another ancient figure that this passage may help to further identify. Consider the following points.

First, if we conclude that Shem is Melchizedek, ruler of Canaan according to Genesis 9:25-27, then we might consider how these other Canaanite kings from Genesis 14 came to power. On this note, it is clear that Shem’s kingship was in part connected to his status as patriarch. In fact, it was almost universal ancient practice for kings to derive their authority from their parents. Although none of these kings are listed by name among Shem’s descendants in Genesis 10 and 11, this is not a problem.

In Genesis 11, only 1 descendant is named in each generation (possibly the oldest) and only one line of descent is mentioned. For example, only Arphaxad is listed for Shem. No brothers are named for Arphaxad. And the lines of descent from

such brothers are not listed, only the line of descent from Arphaxad. Yet we know Arphaxad had brothers because Shem is said to have lived many more years “begetting sons and daughters” after Arphaxad and because Genesis 10 lists 4 brothers. The catch-all statement “begetting sons and daughters” allows plenty of room for the kings named in Genesis 14 to be among Shem’s sons or descendants.

Genesis 10 provides more names, listing 5 of Shem’s sons including Arphaxad. Arphaxad and Aram’s sons are listed. But no sons are listed for Elam, Asshur, or Lud. Only one more generation is listed for Aram so that only Shem’s grandchildren are listed in Aram’s line. The rest of the listed names all come solely from Arphaxad’s line. Consequently, it is clear that individual passages were not necessarily intending to name every son. And there is plenty of room for unnamed grandchildren or great grandchildren from Elam, Asshur, or Lud.

In addition, it was common practice in the Old Testament to only list the first few sons, not all the children. Otherwise, we’d be forced to conclude that Adam only had three sons, Cain, Abel, and Seth. For example, although Ishmael and Isaac are famous and Isaac is understood to be Abraham’s only official son in terms of inheritance, Abraham was known to have other children later in life after the death of his wife Sarah (Genesis 1:1-4, 1 Chronicles 1:32-33). And while Absalom, Amnon, Nathan, Solomon, and Adonijah are famous sons of David, David is also known to have many other sons, some of whom are omitted in various passages while some of the sons through concubines may not have been named at all (1 Chronicles 3:1-9, 2 Samuel 5:13-16, 2 Chronicles 11:18).

Moreover, since Shem himself was obviously not Canaanite, there is no need to suppose that in this period of history the men who ruled Canaan were themselves necessarily of Canaanite ancestry. Consequently, it is plausible that these lesser rulers over Canaan land were descendants of Shem.

Second, the list of Shem’s descendants from Genesis 11:10-32 clearly depicts Shem’s offspring as retaining long lifespans for several generations. (See Table below.) In fact, Shem’s sons, grandson, and great grandsons all lived nearly 450 years or more.

| No. | Name | Total Age |
|-----|----------|-----------|
| | Shem | 600 |
| 1 | Arphaxad | 438 |
| 2 | Salah | 433 |
| 3 | Eber | 464 |
| 4 | Peleg | 239 |
| 5 | Reu | 239 |
| 6 | Serug | 230 |
| 7 | Nahor | 219 |
| 8 | Terah | 205 |
| 9 | Abram | 175 |

Third, the last of the 5 Canaanite kings from Genesis 14:2 is “king of Bela” who is king of Zoar.

Genesis 14:2 That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, **and the king of Bela, which is Zoar.**

The particular rendering in Genesis 14 suggests that at the time this account was written “Bela” was an alternate name for the city of Zoar. (The Hebrew word for “Bela” is Strong’s No. 01106.) However, the name Bela occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament. Genesis 36 lists the children of Esau, Jacob’s brother, a grandson of Abraham.

Genesis 36:19 These are the sons of Esau, who is Edom, and these are their dukes. 20 These are the sons of Seir the Horite, who inhabited the land; Lotan, and Shobal, and Zibeon, and Anah... 30 Duke Dishon, duke Ezer, duke Dishan: these are the dukes that came of Hori, among their dukes in the land of Seir. 31 And these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel. 32 And **Bela (01106) the son of Beor (01160) reigned in Edom:** and the name of his city was Dinhabah.

There are several relevant points worth noting.

Number one, the only timeframe identified specifically in the passage comes from verse 30, which states “these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel.” Notice that the reference is to the “land of Edom” not to the Edomites themselves. Also notice that Israel didn’t have a king until Saul in the eleventh century BC, some 8 or 9 centuries after Abraham, long after Moses died. If Moses wrote this verse, he clearly did not intend for it describe Edomite kings close to the time of Saul. Consequently, the purpose of this statement must be to identify these as the ancient rulers of the land of Edom long before Israel had a king. Such an ancient period of history could easily have included the rulers of this area from the time of Abraham.

Number two, while verse 19 explains that this passage is a list of the sons of Esau and “their dukes” or “rulers,” verse 20-21 begins with the Horites of Seir, who were in fact mentioned earlier in Genesis 14:6. Consequently, we know that this is the very area being described in Genesis 14.

Number three, verse 29 then proceeds to list the “dukes of the Horites.” Clearly these are not descendants of Esau but rather the rulers and peoples of the land of Edom leading up to the time of the Edomites. This makes sense because Esau’s descendants would not immediately be the dominant people in this area. Their first rulers would have been from the people who preceded them in the land. Clearly this passage is intending to cover an extended period of history long before the Israelite King Saul and starting from the time when the Horites of Genesis 14 were rulers over the land. Consequently, we know that the king lists

for this area cover the rulers of the people who occupied this area before the Edomites all the way back to the exact people described in Genesis 14.

Number four, notice that the first ruler “of the land of Edom” listed after the timeframe reference in verse 31 is “Bela the son of Beor,” which is very similar to “Balaam son of Beor” in Numbers 22:5. Notice that “Bela” and “Balaam” are very similar Hebrew words (“Bela” is 01106 and “Balaam” is 01109) and that the name for the father, “Beor,” is the exact same Hebrew word in both passages.

Genesis 36:32 And Bela (01106) the son of Beor (01160) reigned in Edom: and the name of his city was Dinhabah.

Numbers 22:5 He sent messengers therefore unto **Balaam (01109) the son of Beor (01160) to Pethor**, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me.

Consequently, Genesis 36 suggests that there was a very early king over the land of Edom named Bela son of Beor who was not a Horite. Since Genesis 14 mentions the Horites of Seir and a city associated with the term “Bela,” it is possible that Genesis 36 is intended to provide additional commentary and a full account of the peoples mentioned in Genesis 14. More specifically, Genesis 36 could be a record of contemporary, separate dynasties in this area spanning from the earlier period in Genesis 14 up through the time that the Edomites became numerous and beyond that to the period when Israel itself had a king. In short, Bela son of Beor may have been a contemporary of the Horites of Seir mentioned in Genesis 14 and may himself have been mentioned in Genesis 14 alongside the Horites, especially considering the fact that the name “Bela” is presented in the days of Abraham and Melchizedek.

Concerning Balaam, several facts must be accounted for with regard to any connection between Balaam and Bela.

First, Deuteronomy 22:5 states that messengers were sent “to Pethor of Mesopotamia” to bring “Balaam the son of Beor.” If Pethor is a location, and particularly if it is a far away location, it could undermine the connection between Balaam and geography identified in Genesis 14 (the Canaanite city of Bela or Zoar).

However, the word “Pethor” means “soothsayer.” Pethor (Strong’s No. 06604) occurs only in Numbers 22:5 and Deuteronomy 23:4. And it is possible that both of these occurrences are not referring to a location at all but to Balaam as the soothsayer of “Mesopotamia.” If the word “Pethor” does not refer to a location at all, then it certainly cannot create a geographic discrepancy between Balaam’s location in Deuteronomy 22:5 and the city of Bela in Genesis 14. However, what about the word “Mesopotamia” in Deuteronomy 22:5? If this is a reference to the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in modern-day Iraq, it could likewise

pose a problem for the possibility of connecting Balaam to the geography of Genesis 14.

Second, Balak, king of the Moabites, promised to promote Balaam to great honor (Numbers 22:17 and 23:11). Balak brings Balaam to Peor (Numbers 23:30) and the Midianites are also blamed for their involvement at Peor (Numbers 22:4-5, 25:17-18). Numbers 25:17-18 and Numbers 31:1-8 state plainly that Moses sent the Israelites to war against the Midianites, which resulted in the death of five Midianite kings and “Balaam the son of Beor they slew with the sword.” So, Balaam dies not long after he is rewarded by Balak. Consider the implications concerning the location of Balaam’s homeland. If Balaam’s homeland is far away closer to modern-day Iraq, then the only way he could have become the resident king of the city known as Zoar or Bela is if it was the result of being rewarded by Balak. However, since Balaam dies so shortly after receiving Balak’s reward, there would not have been enough time for him to relocate from faraway modern-day Iraq and establish himself as a resident king in the greater Canaanite region. Consequently, the timing of Balak’s death would pose an obstacle to Balaam’s association with Genesis 14 if Balaam’s homeland in “Mesopotamia” is a reference to modern-day Iraq.

The first step of investigation is to determine the meaning of the Hebrew word translated as “Mesopotamia” in Deuteronomy 22. As already indicated above, today the term “Mesopotamia” typically refers to “an ancient region in W Asia between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers: now part of Iraq” (dictionary.com). (For reference, “Bela” or “Zoar” is located at the southeast end of the Dead Sea along the eastern border of Israel.) So, the question is whether biblical references to “Mesopotamia” are to be identified exclusively with a specific region between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in modern-day Iraq.

We will start with the Hebrew word translated as “Mesopotamia” in Deuteronomy 22:5. The Hebrew word for “Mesopotamia” here is “Aram Naharayim” (Strong’s No. 0763), which means, “Aram of the two rivers.” Since the name means “Aram of the two rivers,” one initial question concerns the meaning of “Aram.” Aram is the name of one of the five sons of Shem listed in Genesis 10:22. Consequently, the designation “Aram of the two rivers” may simply designate a descendant of Shem who lived in an area between two rivers. And in any case, this would demonstrate that Balaam (as “the soothsayer of Aram of the two rivers”) was a descendant of Shem through Shem’s son Aram. Since Numbers 22:5 tells us that Balaam was living in “land of his people” and Mesopotamia in Deuteronomy 22:5 means “Aram of the two rivers,” this means that the descendants of Aram were Balaam’s people. But we still wouldn’t be able to determine exactly where Balaam was located geographically and whether this should be identified strictly speaking with Mesopotamia in Iraq between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. To determine this we will need to examine the other instances of “Aram Naharyim” in the bible.

The word “Aram Naharayim” occurs just 6 times in the bible.

The first occurrence of this word is in Genesis 24:10. The verse refers to the city of Nahor being in Mesopotamia or “Aram Naharayim.”

Nahor is the name for two, closely-related people in the bible, Abraham’s grandfather and Abraham’s brother. Nahor and Abraham’s father was Terah. According to Genesis 11:22, Terah’s son Nahor took a wife named Milcah. Genesis 24:15 refers to Bethuel, the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother. Consequently, the city of Nahor in Genesis 24 is Nahor, Abraham’s brother, not Abraham’s grandfather.

(This identification of a city by the name of the patriarch that lived there is also potentially paralleled in Genesis 14 where we have a city identified as Bela which may, like Nahor, be named for the patriarch of the city. This seems to be common method of naming and identification employed in Genesis beginning as early as Genesis 4:17 where Cain names a city after his son Enoch. If so, this would further corroborate our identification of Balaam with the city of Bela, also known as Zoar, in Genesis 14.)

Likewise, according to Genesis 11:28, Terah’s third son, Haran, died after the birth of his son Lot (Abraham’s nephew). The verse states that Haran died in Ur of the Chaldees where he was born. Then Terah took Abraham and Lot, moved from Ur of the Chaldees to go to Canaan land, and came to a place identified as Haran where they Genesis 14:17 dwelled until Terah died. (Notice that though Abraham’s brother Haran dies in Ur before the family moves, the next location of Terah’s household is identified as Haran. This again potentially suggests that cities came to be known by prominent familial names.) Today Haran (Strong’s No. 02039) is said to be located between two rivers, “between the Khabour and the Euphrates” in the area of “Padanaram,” which is “in northern Mesopotamia in Aram, a region of Syria” not Iraq. (On a side note, Abraham also seems to confirm his family’s time in or ties to Syria in Genesis 15:2, where Abraham complains that he has no heir and the steward or inheritor of his possessions is a man from Damascus.)

Similarly, Genesis 25:20, and 28:2, 5 all identify Padanaram as the home of Bethuel the Syrian who, according to Genesis 24:15, is the son of Abraham’s brother Nahor through Nahor’s wife Milcah. It is from their kin in Nahor’s family, particularly his son Bethuel, that Abraham and Isaac seek wives for their sons. It is worth noting that both Genesis 25:20 and 28:5 all identify the location of Bethuel as Padanaram and associate this location with Syria. Perhaps most importantly, notice that the word “Padanaram” includes the name “Aram.”

Genesis 25:20 And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of **Bethuel the Syrian of Padanaram**, the sister to Laban the Syrian.

Genesis 28:2 Arise, **go to Padanaram, to the house of Bethuel** thy mother’s father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother’s

brother... And Isaac sent away Jacob: and **he went to Padanaram unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian**, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother.

So, we have two uses of the name "Aram" so far. One ("Aram Naharayim") is associated with Nahor, which is most likely in Syria near the Khabour and Euphrates Rivers.

The other ("Padanaram") is associated with Haran and is also located between the Khabour and Euphrates in Syria. (Incidentally, not only is Bethuel the son of Abraham's brother Nahor, but according to Genesis 22:20-23 Nahor also had a son named Kemuel who, in turn, had a son named "Aram," which only further substantiates a connection to Syria, not Iraq.)

06307 **Paddan** or **Paddan 'Aram**

from an unused root meaning to extend; n pr loc; {See TWOT on 1735}

AV-Padanaram 10, Padan 1; 11

Padan or Padan-aram =" field"

1) a plain or tableland in northern Mesopotamia **in Aram, a region of Syria**

02039 **Haran**

perhaps from 02022;

AV-Haran 7; 7

Haran =" mountaineer"

n pr m

1) youngest son of Terah, brother of Abraham, father of Lot, Milcah, and Iscah; born and died in Ur of the Chaldees

2) a Gershonite Levite in the time of David, one of the family of Shimei

3) a son of Caleb by the concubine Ephah

n pr loc

4) name of **the place to which Abraham migrated from Ur of the Chaldees and where the descendants of his brother Nahor established themselves; probably located in Mesopotamia, in Padanaram, the cultivated district at the foot of the hills between the Khabour and the Euphrates** below Mount Masius

Although Haran is in Aram and between two rivers, two things are worth noting. First, as we can see, the rivers are not the Tigris and Euphrates but the Euphrates and Khabour, which is a tributary of the Euphrates River in Syria. This makes the location of Haran in Padamaran Syria, not Iraq. Second, the fact that we find that Nahor's family settled in Padanaram in Syria would possibly indicate that in Genesis 24:10, the phrase "Aram Naharayim," which is used in reference to the "City of Nahor, denotes a location near this area in Syria.

In summary, as we have seen, the details of these passages suggest that "Aram Naharayim" refers to an area near two rivers in Syria rather than to an area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in modern-day Iraq where Ur of the Chaldees was located. These observations open up the possibility that Balaam,

who Deuteronomy 22:5 describes as the soothsayer of “Mesopotamia” or “Aram Naharayim,” was not living in Iraq, but someone in Syria.

Later biblical references to “Aram Naharayim” also speak of modern-day Syria, much farther west and closer to the land of Israel (formerly Canaan land) than to modern-day Iraq.

The second occurrence of “Aram Naharayim” is Deuteronomy 23 concerning Balaam, the meaning and location of which is the subject of our present investigation.

The third and fourth two occurrences of this word are in Judges 3:8 and 10. There are no indications in the text about where this region is located, although the very next nation to suppress Israel is Moab. This could suggest a more southern location than Syria, especially since the fifth occurrence suggests ties to Ammon, which was situated between Syria and Moab. Likewise, the nations and kings used to oppress the Israelites throughout Judges are more local than Iraq and typically are immediately adjacent to Canaanite land. If this is the case, the mentions of “Aram Naharayim” in Judges also support the conclusion that Balaam’s location was much nearer to the land of Israel than between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Iraq.

The fifth occurrence of “Aram Naharayim” is in 1 Chronicles 19:6 where it refers to horsemen out of Mesopotamia and out of Syriamaachah and out of Zobah. However, the passage is a record of the children of Ammon hiring mercenaries. The children of Ammon dwelled just north of Moab in what is modern day Jordan, not Syria. But, in the ancient world Jordan and Syria were not only adjacent to each other, but also to the eastern border of Israel. “Zobab” (Strong’s No. 06678) refers to “the name of a portion of Syria which formed a separate kingdom in the times of Saul, David, and Solomon; located northeast of Damascus.” “Syriamaacah” (Strong’s 0759), refers to “Aram or Syria the nation.” As indicated above, the word for “Mesopotamia” means “Aram of the two rivers.” So, 1 Chronicles 19, “Aram Naharayim” seems to refer to an area near or in Syria, possibly even the rivers Euphrates and Khabour near Haran in Aram, rather than the Tigris and Euphrates in the middle of Iraq.

And the sixth and last occurrence of this word is in Psalm 60:1, where it is translated, not as Mesopotamia, but as “Aramnaharaim.” Here it is identified a people which David fought with and associated with Aramzobah (clearly the same as Zobah in Syria) at a time “when Joab returned and smote Edom.” David is never recorded as fighting against the Chaldeans or Babylonians or peoples from that region of modern Iraq. However, in 2 Samuel 8:6-13 describes how David put a garrison in “Syria of Damascus” and when he “returned from smiting the Syrians” he put garrisons in Edom. 2 Samuel 8:16 denotes that Joab was “over the host” of David’s armies at this time.

Consequently, biblical references to “Aram Naharayim” repeatedly denote

locations involving rivers in Syria or perhaps modern-day Jordan, not a location in Iraq between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

It is also possible that this word “Aram Naharayim” is not a proper name for a single, particular location but rather a general description for any place between two rivers (particularly in the region of modern-day Syria and Jordan near Israel) that was associated with or dwelled in by descendants of Shem’s son Aram. It should be noted that this same region contains the Jordan River valley and the Jordan River itself as well as several adjoining waterways. And, if the term can be applied as a description to various locations, this opens up another possibility in the case of Balaam. The quote from Encyclopedia Britannica below provides explains the reasons for locating Balaam’s “Aram Naharayim” to somewhere in the Jordan River valley instead of much further away in northeastern Syria.

When reading the quote below, it should be noted that Assyria “was located in what is now northern Iraq and southeastern Turkey,” which is also the same region as eastern Syria. This is right were the Euphrates and Khabour Rivers are located. However, for reasons outlined in the quote below, the article argues for locating Balaam’s home (“Aram Naharayim”) even closer, particularly near the Jabbok and Jordan rivers in what is modern-day Jordan.

“Meaning and etymology of the name Pethor – Pethor is known as the place where the prophet Balaam is from. Where Pethor is exactly is not known (BDB Theological Dictionary mentions an Assyrian city named Pitru on the west bank of the upper Euphrates)...Because it seems a bit unlikely that the Moabite king Balak sent all the way to Assyria for a prophet, and that Balaam hence came all the way to Canaan on a donkey (although there was plenty traffic between these locations) scholars have been looking for ways to place him closer. In 1967 an extra-Biblical text was found in Deir Alla in the Jordan valley. It mentions the 'cursing prophet' Balaam son of Beor, which makes it likely that he lived there and not in Mesopotamia. In 1989 a tablet was found at the same location, which seemed to bear the name Pethor. Many conclude that the Two Rivers mentioned in Deuteronomy 23:4 may very well refer to the Jabbok and the Jordan. In Joshua 17:11 we find precedential evidence that the name Balaam was used in the Jordanic area. In the western territory of Manasseh - which stretched east of the Jordan, north of the Jabbok, and west of the Jordan into the central hills - is a town called (Ibleam; Joshua 17:11 and on) and in 1 Chronicles 6:70. English Bibles transliterate this town as Bileam but in Hebrew this name is spelled and pronounced exactly like the name Balaam.” – <http://www.abarim-publications.com/Meaning/Pethor.html>

For comparison, here are the two biblical passages mentioned above identifying a town in Manasseh (modern Jordan) by the name Balaam. We should note that the second reference (1 Chronicles 6:70) simply uses the same word that is used to refer to the prophet Balaam himself throughout Numbers 22-24.

Joshua 17:11 And Manasseh had in Issachar and in Asher Bethshean and her towns, and Ibleam (02991) and her towns, and the inhabitants of Dor and her

towns, and the inhabitants of Endor and her towns, and the inhabitants of Taanach and her towns, and the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns, even three countries.

1 Chronicles 6:70 And out of the half tribe of Manasseh; Aner with her suburbs, and Bileam (01109) with her suburbs, for the family of the remnant of the sons of Kohath.

02991 Yibla'am

from 01104 and 05971; ; n pr loc

AV-Ibleam 3; 3

Ibleam =" devouring the people"

1) a city of Manasseh apparently located in the territory of either Issachar or Asher

01109 Bil'am bil-awm'

probably from 01077 and 05971, Greek 903 Βαλααμ;

AV-Balaam 60, Bileam 1; 61

Balaam =" not of the people"

n pr m

1) **the son of Beor**, a man endowed with the gift of prophecy

n pr loc

2) **a town in Manasseh**

For further reference, the Jabbok river is frequently associated with the Ammonites, who dwelled in modern-day Jordan between Syria and the Moabites. We have already seen the word "Aram Naharayim" in proximity with Ammon in 1 Chronicles 19:6, Psalms 60:1 and 2 Samuel 8:6-13, where it is also in proximity with Edom.

Numbers 21:24 And Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from Arnon **unto Jabbok, even unto the children of Ammon: for the border of the children of Ammon was strong.**

Deuteronomy 2:37 Only **unto the land of the children of Ammon** thou camest not, nor unto **any place of the river Jabbok**, nor unto the cities in the mountains, nor unto whatsoever the LORD our God forbad us.

Deuteronomy 3:16 And unto the Reubenites and unto the Gadites I gave from Gilead even unto the river Arnon half the valley, and the border even unto **the river Jabbok, which is the border of the children of Ammon;**

We have also already seen a few factors indicating that Balaam was not as far away as Syria, including the unlikelihood that Moabite King Balak would send for someone so far away as Syria in such a crisis or that Balaam would ride a donkey for such a long journey. A few other factors can be mentioned in this regard. Consider the following passages.

Numbers 22:1 And the children of Israel set forward, and **pitched in the plains of Moab** on this side Jordan by Jericho. 2 And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites... 5 **He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor**, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me...13 **And Balaam rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Balak, Get you into your land: for the LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you...**15 **And Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honourable than they.**

Number one, Balak actually had to wait for two separate sets of messengers to bring Balaam. Balaam didn't go with the first messengers. This would have further increased the travel time while Moab waited on the brink of destruction at the hands of Israel who was already encamped in the plains of Moab. This again indicates that Balaam was much closer to Moab than northeastern Syria.

Numbers 24:25 **And Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place:** and Balak also went his way

Number two, after the last attempt to get Balaam to curse Israel, Numbers 24:25 states that "Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place: and Balak also went his way." Such a statement makes it seem as though Balaam's home was close at hand rather than such a long journey.

Numbers 31:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2 **Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites:** afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people. 3 **And Moses spake unto the people, saying, Arm some of yourselves unto the war, and let them go against the Midianites, and avenge the LORD of Midian.** 4 Of every tribe a thousand, throughout all the tribes of Israel, shall ye **send to the war.** 5 So there were delivered out of the thousands of Israel, a thousand of every tribe, twelve thousand armed for war. 6 **And Moses sent them to the war,** a thousand of every tribe, them and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war, with the holy instruments, and the trumpets to blow in his hand. 7 **And they warred against the Midianites,** as the LORD commanded Moses; and they slew all the males. 8 **And they slew the kings of Midian,** beside the rest of them that were slain; namely, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian: **Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword.**

Number three, Numbers 31:1-8 is clear that Balaam is killed when Israel makes war against the Midianites. If Balaam had returned home and home was all the way in Syria, how is Balaam present when the Midianites are destroyed? This suggests that Balaam's home was near to the Midianites, which is telling given that the Midianites were even farther south than Moab. According to the Online Bible Hebrew Lexicon, Midian was "located principally in the desert north of the Arabian peninsula; land to which Moses went when he fled from Pharaoh." Most modern maps show Midian just to the east of the Gulf of Aqaba, very near to the main body of the Red Sea and south of both Edom and Moab.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, Pethor means “soothsayer.” But if Pethor was indeed a city (rather than just a reference to Balaam as a soothsayer), then there are other candidates besides the commonly mentioned “Pitru on the west bank of the upper Euphrates” in modern-day Mesopotamia. We have already seen reference to a tablet found in the Jordan Valley in 1989, which mentions Pethor. Perhaps the most interesting candidate is Petra, in modern Jordan. Petra was on the trade route between Damascus, Syria and Bosra. (We have already seen Syria associated with the term “Aram Naharayim” and Balaam. A little while later and we will see evidence for associating Bosra with Balaam as well. As we will see, Bosra is located in the south.) Petra is also associated with Seir and the Horites, who were mentioned in both Genesis 14 and Genesis 36. And it is in the area of Edom. Some references even consider Petra to be perhaps the capital city of the land of Edom.

“Petra, Geography – Pliny the Elder and other writers identify Petra as the capital of the Nabataeans and the center of their caravan trade. Enclosed by towering rocks and watered by a perennial stream, Petra not only possessed the advantages of a fortress, but controlled the main commercial routes which passed through it to Gaza in the west, **to Bosra and Damascus in the north**, to Aqaba and Leuce Come on the Red Sea, and across the desert to the Persian Gulf. **History** – Evidence suggests that settlements had begun in and around Petra **in the eighteenth dynasty of Egypt (1550-1292 BC)**. It is listed in Egyptian campaign accounts and the Amarna letters as Pel, Sela or **Seir**. Though the city was founded relatively late, **a sanctuary existed there since very ancient times**. Stations 19 through 26 of the stations list of Exodus are places associated with Petra. **This part of the country was Biblically assigned to the Horites, the predecessors of the Edomites.**” – wikipedia.org

Petra (Gk. Petra) – **An ancient capital city in the southeastern desert of modern Jordan.** The Petra Basin was most certainly occupied from Neolithic times but gained its first prominence as **a stronghold, if not the capital city, of the biblical Edomites.** – books.google.com, Eerdmans dictionary of the Bible By David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, Astrid B. Beck, p. 1042

PETRA - The ruins of the “rose-red city” of Petra, capital of the Nabatean kingdom, were discovered and identified in 1812 by J.L. Burckhardt. it has been suggested that “ha-sela” (“the rock”), the Edomite town (2 Kgs. 14:7; Authorized Version: “Selah”; 2 Chr. 25:12), should be sought at Umm el-Biyara, one of the highest rocks rising above Wadi Musa. **Petra is the Greek form of this Semitic name. The ancient Nabatean name of the town was Rekem**, or Rekmu, as it is rendered in a Nabatean inscription. – books.google.com, Archaeological encyclopedia of the Holy Land By Avraham Negev, Shimon Gibson, p. 384

Strangely, as the quote immediately above attests, the Nabatean inhabitants of Petra called the city by the name “Rekem,” which is one of the Midianite kings slain alongside Balaam in Numbers 31:8.

Numbers 31:8 And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; namely, Evi, and **Rekem**, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian: **Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword.**

Although the ultimate picture is not precisely clear, again we reasons to associate Balaam with this region in modern-day Jordan, east of the Jordan River, near the Jabbok river, and in the ancient territories of Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Midian, situated by Bosra and Petra (or Rekem), a stronghold of the land of Edom.

Lastly, in the New Testament, Peter refers to Balaam as the “son of Bosor” (Strong’s No. 1007), which is “of Hebrew origin 01160.” The Hebrew word is “Ba’owr” (Strong’s No. 01160). (It should be noted that Strong’s No. 01160 is not the word for Bozrah. Rather, it is the Hebrew word “Beor” for Balaam’s father in Numbers 22:5 and the father of “Bela” who was the first man listed as ruling over the nearby land of Edom in Genesis 36:32.)

2 Peter 2:15 Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of **Balaam (903) the son of Bosor (1007)**, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.

There is also a town in the Old Testament called “Bozrah” or “Botsrah” (Strong’s No. 01224). In the Greek, the word “Bosor” is written as “βοσορ” in 2 Peter 2:15 and designated in the quote above by the Strong’s Concordance number 1007. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Hebrew word Bozrah (Strong’s No. 01224) is written identically in Greek as “βοσορ” and identified using the same Greek word (Strong’s No. 1007) in both Isaiah 63:1 and Jeremiah 48:24. (Below are the Greek texts of all three passages with the Online Bible’s Strong’s Notations turned on behind the relevant words.)

2 Peter 2:15 καταλιποντες ευθειαν οδον επλανηθησαν εξακολουθησαντες τη οδω του βαλααμ του **βοσορ (1007)** ος μισθον αδικιας ηγαπησεν

Isaiah 63:1 τις ουτος ο παραγινομενος εξ εδωμ ερυθημα ιματιων εκ **βοσορ (1007 N-PRI)** ουτως ωραιος εν στολη βια μετα ισχυος εγω διαλεγομαι δικαιοσυνην και κρισιν σωτηριου

Jeremiah 48:24 και επι καριωθ και επι **βοσορ (1007 N-PRI)** και επι πασας τας πολεις μωαβ τας πορρω και τας εγγυς

For reference, here is the English translation of the same passages.

Isaiah 63:1 **Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?** this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.

Jeremiah 48:24 And upon Kerioth, and **upon Bozrah, and upon all the cities of the land of Moab,** far or near.

As can plainly be seen from Isaiah and Jeremiah, this town was located in the adjacent territories of Edom and Moab. Although there is one other relevant issue that can be derived from Peter's use of "Bosor," the main point here is that Peter seems to identify Balaam in connection with a Greek word used in the Septuagint to refer to a city in or near Edom and Moab. Perhaps Balaam was simply a "son" of this city. Perhaps the city was named after Balaam's father. Or perhaps this merely illustrates that, like the name Balaam itself in 1 Chronicles 6:70, Beor or Bosor was a name used in the region of Moab and Edom. All of these scenarios further tie Balaam to this region in modern Jordan, rather than to Syria or Mesopotamia in modern-day Iraq.

Consequently, we have several facts indicating that in the case of Balaam, "Aram Naharayim" does not mean modern-day Mesopotamia in Iraq. First, in Psalm 60 "Aram Naharayim" refers to an area in or near Syria, north of Edom and in close proximity with Ammon. This shows that the term can simply be a way to describe a land between two rivers and may not be intended as a proper name to designate only one particular location. Second, 1 Chronicles 19:6 links the phrase "Aram Naharayim" to Ammon, which was situated between the Jabbok and Jordan rivers. Third, Judges 3:8 and 10 potentially relate "Aram Naharayim" with Moab. Fourth, it is unlikely that Moabite King Balak would wait to send two separate messengers to bring someone from as far away as Syria or that Balaam would travel such a distance on a donkey. Fifth, it is impossible that Balaam could have returned home to Syria and yet been present when the Israelites destroyed the Midianites who lived south of Moab and Edom. Sixth, Judges 17 and 1 Chronicles 6 identify a town west of the Jordan by the name "Balaam," showing that the name Balaam was used by the people of that region. In 1967 and 1989, two pieces of archeological evidence were found linking Balaam and Pethor to the Jordan valley. Seventh, "Pethor" means "soothsayer" and therefore may not be a reference to a particular city or region such as "Pitru on the west bank of the upper Euphrates." Eighth, even if Pethor was a city, there are fitting candidates in the area of modern Jordan, namely Petra and a tablet found in the Jordan Valley in 1989 uses the term Pethor, bolstering a Jordan Valley location. Ninth, while Numbers 23 indicates that Balaam came from "Aram, out of the mountains of the east," Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Midian are all east of the Jordan River and there are many mountains in that region. The reference to "Aram" here could simply mean a region occupied by descendants of Shem's son Aram, which Balaam seems likely to be, rather than to the area of ancient Assyria or Syria, which were also commonly associated with Aram's descendants. Tenth, Peter says that Balaam is "of Bosor," using a Greek term that is used in Isaiah and Jeremiah in the Septuagint when referring to a city of Moab and Edom, not Syria.

The vast majority of these ten factors point to the conclusion that Balaam was a descendant of Aram from the mountains east of the Jordan River in the modern-day country of Jordan, where Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Midian were all situated.

With this conclusion in mind, we now turn back to the mention of Bela in Genesis

14:2.

Genesis 14:2 That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and **the king of Bela** (01106), which is Zoar.

01106 Bela'

the same as 01105; ;

AV-Bela 13, Belah 1; 14

Bela =" destruction"

n pr m

1) a king of Edom

2) first son of Benjamin

3) a son of Ahaz, a Reubenite

n pr loc

4) one of the five cities of the plain which was spared at the intercession of Lot, and received the name of Zoar

Earlier we pointed out that Genesis 36 provided a list of the rulers of the land of Edom starting with the Horites of Sier mentioned in Genesis 14:6 long before Abraham's grandson Esau, the father of the Edomites. We also noted that among these kings of the land of Edom was a man named "Bela the son of Beor" and we compared this name side by side with Balaam of Numbers 22. The renderings were very similar.

Genesis 36:31 And these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel. 32 And **Bela (01106) the son of Beor (01160) reigned in Edom:** and the name of his city was Dinhabah.

Numbers 22:5 He sent messengers therefore unto **Balaam (01109) the son of Beor (01160) to Pethor**, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me.

01109 Bil'am

probably from 01077 and 05971, Greek 903 Βαλααμ; ;{ See TWOT on 251 @@ "251b"}

AV-Balaam 60, Bileam 1; 61

Balaam =" not of the people"

n pr m

1) the son of Beor, a man endowed with the gift of prophecy

n pr loc

2) a town in Manasseh

In fact, when we look up "Beor" (Strong's No. 01160), we see that this is the name of the father of Bela, king of Edom, and the father of Balaam.

01160 Ba'owr

from 01197 (in the sense of burning), Greek 1007 βουρο; ; n pr m

AV-Beor 10; 10

Beor =" burning"

1) father of Balaam

2) father of Bela, king of Edom

In fact, Genesis 36:33 states that when Bela the son of Beor dies, Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah (Strong's No. 01224) reigned in his place. This is the same word for Bozrah, which we saw earlier referred to a town in Moab and Edom and which Peter said that Balaam was from. Since the only timeframe provided in Genesis 36 is that these kings lived and died long before Saul, the first Israelite king, there is no restrictions placed on when Bela died. It could be closer to the days of Abraham and the Horites of Seir in Genesis 14 (who are also mentioned alongside Bela in Genesis 36) or closer to Saul who lived 8 or 9 centuries after Abraham. Or the timeframe of Genesis 36 could be somewhere in the middle, for example, around the time of the Exodus when Balaam was killed by the Israelites.

Lastly, another important detail concerns the name "Bela." Genesis 14:2 is rendered in a way that seems to indicate that this is the name of the city, not the king. However, it worth noting a few other occasions in which kings and cities appear to share names. In fact, these examples come out of the same accounts under consideration.

First, Genesis 14:6 mentions the "Horites in their mount Seir." In this case, Seir is clearly the name of a place. The same is true in Genesis 36:7, where Esau is said to dwell in mount Seir. However, in relating the history of this region, Genesis 36:20 begins with the "sons of Seir the Horite." Verse 21 confirms this rendering and again describes "the children of Seir." In this case, Seir appears to be the name of a man, the progenitor of the Horites. So, Seir is both the place of the Horites and the name of a prominent figure among the Horites.

Second, as we have seen, Peter describes Balaam as the son of "Beor" but uses a Greek word that is used in Isaiah and Jeremiah to refer to the city of Bozrah, which was near the land of Edom and Moab. Third, Joshua 17:11 and 1 Chronicles 6:70 demonstrate that the name Balaam was also the name of a town in the western territory of Manasseh. Fourth, the name "Pethor" means "soothsayer," which is likely a reference to Balaam himself, but, as we have seen, a tablet found in the Jordan Valley in 1989 shows that this may also be the name of a city in that area. And fifth, we have also seen that the Archaeological encyclopedia of the Holy Land identifies the city of Petra, which is located not far from where Midian is located on modern maps, by the name Rekem, which is the name of a king of Midian who was killed alongside Balaam in Numbers 31:8. Like Seir, the name Rekem appears to have been both the name of a king and a place of a particular people group.

Consequently, the name "Bela" in Genesis 14:6 may not be intended as strictly a designation for the city but could very well be a reference to the city and the ruler of that area named Balaam son of Beor, who is mentioned specifically in Genesis

36:32 and who seems to come after Seir the Horite, progenitor of the Horites of Genesis 14:6, but long before Saul the first king of Israel.

On a side note, Genesis 36 identifies the name of the city of Bela as “Dinhabah” (Strong’s No. 01838), which means, “give thou judgement.” Dinhabah is the “capital city of Bela,” which implies that other cities may have been under his power as well at some point, perhaps even Bozrah given the fact that his throne is inherited by a man from Bozrah. While a name meaning “give thou judgment” does not in anyway prove that this man is Balaam, it certainly would be a fitting name for the city of a man of whom it was known that “he whom thou bless is blessed and he whom thou curse is cursed” (Numbers 22:6).

At this point, we can begin to pull some known facts together.

First, the city of Zoar (Genesis 14:2, 19:22-30) was located very near to Moab and Ammon. Lot desired to flee to Zoar when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. Moab and Ammon are Lot’s descendants. Second, Zoar is also called or associated with the term Bela, which is also the name of a king whose father’s name was Beor. Bela of Beor was king of the land of Edom and reigned somewhere in the span of time starting with the Horites of Genesis 14 and ending with Saul, the first king of Israel. Consequently, Bela son of Beor from Genesis 36 may have been a contemporary ruler in the region of Edom at the time of the Horites of Seir mentioned in Genesis 14. Third, Balaam’s father was also named Beor and Balaam was from this same geographic region. And Balaam’s own name is very similar in spelling to Bela in Hebrew. It is possible that these are minor spelling variations for the same name or person. Fourth, as far as the destruction of Zoar, it is possible that Zoar was spared the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is also possible that Bela was only one of the cities ruled by Balaam. If he did not reside there, he would not have been present to die in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Fifth, Balaam was a descendant of Shem’s son Aram, as indicated by the description that Balaam was from “Aram Naharayim,” which means “Aram of the two rivers.” (Numbers 22:5 states that Pethor, where Balaam was from, was “by the river of the land of the children of his people.” The parallel of this phrase with the word “Aram of the two rivers” seems to provide further support for the idea that Balaam was a descendent of Aram and that he may have lived in the lands occupied by some of Aram’s descendents.)

Sixth, since Shem is depicted as Melchizedek the high priest of Canaan, it would make sense for Balaam, one of his descendants, to rule over a city or cities in Canaanite land. Seventh, close ancestry from Shem, the high priest over Canaan, would also explain Balaam’s otherwise inexplicable status as a prophet of the true God with inside access to God’s plan for the Israelites. Balaam could easily have learned this information from his patriarch Shem. Of course, this would require Balaam to be old enough to have known Shem. Balaam could also have learned this information indirectly passed down from his father (or mother) who could have easily known Shem. Eighth, Genesis 10 lists the names of Aram’s sons and neither Beor nor Balaam are among them. Consequently, Balaam would have to be a grandson or great grandson of Aram (depending on whether or not Beor is

Balaam's father or the city from which Balaam came and on whether or not the list of Aram's sons is complete in Genesis 11).

Nineth, judging from the line of Arphaxad as recorded in Genesis 11, at least the first, second, and third generations of Shem's descendants each lived to be around 450 years old. If Beor was Aram's son or grandson, Beor would be the second or third generation from Shem and certainly could have lived 450 years. This would make Balaam the third or fourth generation from Shem, which makes it plausible that he could have lived anywhere from 250 to 450 years himself. In addition, it is also possible that Beor was from one of the other lines of Shem or Ham or Japheth or, more likely, a later descendant from Aram but that Balaam's mother was a first or second generation daughter of Shem. We know that Shem had daughters but none of them are named in the genealogical lists (Genesis 11:11). This would make it possible that on his mother's side Balaam was a second or third generation from Shem, generations which lived around 450 years according to Genesis 11:12-17.

There are two scenarios available concerning the identity of Balaam.

In the first scenario, Bela, the son of Beor, king of the land of Edom in Genesis 36 is not the same as the "Bela" mentioned in Genesis 14. Consequently, Balaam son of Beor and Bela son of Beor, king of the land of Edom could still be the same individual without necessitating that Balaam lived for 500 years starting from the time of Genesis 14. As a descendant of Shem, Balaam may still have lived a long time prior to the time of the Exodus and then died when the Israelites destroyed Midian, perhaps being replaced as ruler by Jobab of Bozrah, just as Genesis 36:33 records. This first scenario explains Balaam's prophetic status by a connection to Shem and identifies Balaam prominently among the rulers of the land of Edom without requiring a lifespan that reaches from Abraham to Moses and without requiring Balaam to have known Shem personally.

In the second scenario, Balaam is the same as the Bela of Genesis 14. If this is the case, Balaam would have to have lived perhaps 500 years in order survive to the time of Moses and the Exodus.

Based on our "Timeline of Biblical World History," Abraham was born in 2008 Anno Mundi (years from creation) and the Exodus was 2508 Anno Mundi, 500 years later. (The Timeline's Addendum shows this period could be anywhere from 19-20 years shorter, for a total of 480 years.) According to Genesis 12:1-4, Abraham was at least 75 years old at the time of the events of Genesis 14. However, by Genesis 16:3, Abraham has been living in Canaan for 10 years, which would make him 85 years old. The events of Genesis 14 must have occurred when Abraham was somewhere between 75 and 85. If we subtract 75 years from 500, Balaam would be 425 years old at the time of the Exodus, if he were born in the year of Genesis 14. If we subtract 75 years from 480, Balaam would be 405 years old at the time of the Exodus, if he were born in the year of Genesis 14. Assuming that Balaam was old enough to rule as king, he would have to be at least 30 years old at the time of Genesis 14. Plus, we would potentially

have to add an additional 40 years of wondering in the wilderness before Israel arrives in Moab in Numbers 22. If we add these 70 years, Balaam would have to be between 475-495 years old when he dies. According to Genesis 11:16-17, Eber (a third generation from Shem) lived 464 years. So, 475-495 years is certainly plausible, especially if we can assume that the decrease in age may not have been completely uniform in each line from Shem or that Balaam was a second or third generation descendant of Shem on his mother's side (regardless of how far removed his father Beor was from Aram).

This second scenario is intriguing because it explains Balaam's status as a true prophet of God and his prominence in that region by means of a direct personal and biological relationship to Shem, who was Melchizedek, a true priest of God and ruler of Canaan. Thus, Balaam would have functioned in the role of a prophet and a ruler of the region of Canaan at a time before this inheritance was passed on to Abraham and ultimately to Abraham's descendants at the time of Moses and Joshua.