

# 1. The Last Words of Jacob in Genesis 47-49

The traditional designation of Jacob's address to his twelve sons in Genesis 49:3-27 as the "Blessing of Jacob" is a misnomer based on a superficial comparison with the analogous address of Moses to the twelve tribes in Deuteronomy 33. Contrary to Moses' address, which is uniformly benign and explicitly called a "blessing", the tone of Jacob's pronouncements is not throughout benevolent. The false label "blessing" is also based on a too strict interpretation of the verb *brk* in v. 28, which simply means 'to greet', or 'to bid farewell' – compare Gen. 47:7-10, where it is said that Jacob 'greet(s)' (*brk*) Pharaoh (v. 7) and 'says farewell' (*brk*) to him (v. 10). A more appropriate designation of Jacob's pronouncements would be "Farewell Address" or "Last Words".

The logotechnical analysis of Genesis 49 has brought to light that Jacob's Farewell Address is not a uniformly composed numerical composition like Deuteronomy 33. The individual tribal sayings appear to have been incorporated into the address without reworking all of them so as to meet specific numerical requirements. The 55-word address to Judah may be an exception, as I shall show below. Therefore, I did not deem it necessary to present a detailed analysis of the Hebrew text. It may suffice to mention the numerical features it shares with other crucial passages in the Jacob story.

## The Last Words of Jacob in their literary context

In contrast to the Blessing of Moses in [Deuteronomy 33](#), which clearly stands out in its context as a secondary addition, the Farewell Address of Jacob in Genesis 49 is part and parcel of all the words attributed to him during his sojourn in Egypt (Genesis 47-49), which significantly lasted **17** years (47:28).<sup>1</sup> His last words cannot be isolated from its immediate context. Moreover, they should also be studied in conjunction with all words ascribed to him and spoken to him by God in the wider context of both the Jacob Cycle (the *toledoth yitshaq* in 25-35) and the Joseph Cycle (the *toledoth ya`aqob* in 37-50).

The immediate context of Jacob's Farewell Address (Gen. 49:1-27) is of course the deathbed episode, the account of the story of his last days and death (47:27 – 49:33).<sup>2</sup> The episode begins with the reference to Jacob's **17** years in Egypt and his life span of **147** years, followed by the solemn oath he let Joseph swear *not to bury him in Egypt* (47:27-31), and ends with the instruction to his sons *to bury him in Canaan* (49:29-33) into which it is embedded in the following way in terms of the word-count:

1. 47:27-31,	Jacob's last days: Joseph's pledge	76
2. 48:1-22,	Jacob blesses the sons of Joseph	350
3. 49:1-27[28],	Jacob says farewell to his 12 sons	251
4. 49:29-33,	Jacob's final instructions and his death	77
	Deathbed episode in total	601 + 153 = 754.

<sup>1</sup> Note that it is said of Joseph at the beginning of the *toledoth ya`aqob* (Gen. 37:2) that he was **17** years old. In both cases the number **17** has been deliberately chosen because it signifies YHWH's presence, being the numerical value of his name. Together with the other divine name number, **26**, this number premeates the story of Jacob and Joseph in a most intriguing way, as shall be demonstrated below.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond de Hoop, *Genesis 49 in its Literary and Historical Context*, Brill: Leiden-Boston-Köln, 1998, rightly divides the deathbed episode into four distinct parts, but in delimiting the first part (47:29-31) he leaves the preceding section (vs. 27-28) out of consideration, which, in my opinion, is integral to the first part. The four parts are:

47:27-31	Jacob's last days in Egypt: he makes Joseph swear not to bury him in Egypt
48:1-22	Jacob blesses Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph
49:1-27[28]	Jacob says farewell to his 12 sons (v. 28 stands apart as a colophon)
49:29-33	Jacob instructs his sons to bury him in the grave of his fathers in Canaan.

In my opinion, the striking numerical structure, which cannot be a matter of coincidence, can be used as decisive evidence to delimit the deathbed episode as the immediate context of the Farewell Address correctly as 47:27 – 49:33. The story dealing with Jacob's Blessing of the sons of Joseph and his Farewell Address is composed of 601 words, and is significantly surrounded by the two framing passages made up of exactly **153** (9 x 17) words. Thus the deathbed episode is composed of **754** (29 x 26) words. In light of this, it may confidently be used as evidence buttressing the supposition that the Farewell Address is not a later addition, but integral to the story of Jacob in Egypt.

## Striking Features of Crucial passages in Genesis 25-50

The following survey shows the structural role played by the divine name numbers **17** and **26** in the crucial passages of the Jacob Cycle (Genesis 25-35) and the Joseph Cycle (Genesis 37-50), especially in the speeches:<sup>3</sup>

- Genesis 25-31, the divine speeches are made up of altogether **204** (12 x 17) words.
- Gen. 25:23 and 26:2-5, words spoken by God to Rebecca and Isaac: **68** (4 x 17).
- Gen. 27:26-29, Isaac's Blessing of Jacob: altogether **52** (2 x 26) words: **18** in the introduction (**17** in narrative and **1** in intro formula), and **34** (2 x 17) in the blessing).
- Gen. 27:39-40, Isaac's Blessing of Esau: altogether **26** words, and in terms of the *atnach*, the **26** words are divided into **11** (=WH) before, and **15** (=YH) after *atnach*.
- Gen. 28:13-15, God's address to Jacob in his dream: altogether **52** (2 x 26) words.
- Genesis 31, words addressed to Jacob in Mesopotamia: **7** words spoken by YHWH (v. 3) and **44** words spoken by the Angel (vs. 11-13), altogether **51** (3 x 17) words.
- Gen. 31:24 and 29, words spoken to and quoted by Laban: altogether **17** words.
- Gen. 32:10-13, words quoted by Jacob as spoken by God: **5** in v. 10 and **12** in v. 13, altogether **17** words.
- Gen. 35:10-12, divine oracle given to Jacob: **26** words.
- Gen. 46:3-4, divine oracle given to Jacob: **26** words.
- Gen. 47:6, Pharaoh puts land at the disposal of Joseph's family: **26** words.
- Gen. 47:5-10, Pharaoh speaks to Joseph (30 words) and Jacob speaks to Pharaoh (21 words): altogether **51** (3 x 17) words.
- Gen. 47:7-10, the episode of Jacob meeting Pharaoh: altogether **52** words (**26** before, and **26** after *atnach*).
- Gen. 47:28, Jacob is supposed to have lived **130** (5 x 26) years in Canaan and **17** in Egypt. His life span comprises altogether **147** years, which has a marked symbolic significance. As in the case of the life spans of Abraham and Isaac, that of Jacob can be factorised in a meaningful way as 3 x 7 x 7, of which the sum is **17**.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For the same phenomenon, compare the nativity story of Samuel in 1 Samuel 1:1-2:11, the literary context of the [Song of Hannah](#), and also the narrative context of the [Song of Daniel](#) in Daniel 1-3. For particulars about the use of the divine name numbers **17** and **26** in connection with the words attributed to God, see my article "The Literary and Theological Function of Divine Speech in the Pentateuch", in *Congress Volume Salamanca 1983* (VTSuppl 36, edited by J.A. Emerton, E.J. Brill: Leiden, 1985), pp. 154-173, especially pp. 157-162. See also my book *Numerical Secrets of the Bible*, BIBAL Press: North Richland Hills, 2000, pp. 75-78.

<sup>4</sup> See my article "The Life Spans of the Patriarchs", in: A.S. van der Woude (ed.), *New Avenues in the Study of the Old Testament* (OTS 25, Leiden, 1989), pp. 121-127. Compare also my book mentioned in the previous note, pp. 98-101. The life spans of the three patriarchs are derived from the number 17 in the following way:

Abraham: **17** = 7 + 5 + 5, which are the factors of **175** (7 x 5 x 5)

Isaac: **17** = 5 + 6 + 6, which are the factors of **180** (5 x 6 x 6)

Jacob: **17** = 3 + 7 + 7, which are the factors of **147** (3 x 7 x 7).

## Special Features of Jacob's Farewell Address

- Gen. 49:1-2, the speech in which Jacob summons his sons, is made up of **17** words.
- Gen. 49: 6-7 contains a veiled divine speech composed of **26** words, which divides into **15** words before, and **11** after *atnach*, representing the numerical value of the letters YH (10 + 5) and WH (6 + 5).
- Gen. 49:8-12, the **55** words spoken to Judah divides into **23** words in vs. 8-9 and **32** in vs. 10-12, precisely according to the double *kabod* formula. This can only be interpreted as deliberate design to compose the passage to comply with a particular numerical constraint. The more so, because the double *kabod* formula is also used to give structure to all words spoken by Jacob in Genesis 47-49.
- There are in total **550** words attributed to Jacob in Genesis 47-49:
  - Gen. 47:9 – 48:22      **230** words in total: **48** in 47:29-31 and **182** (7 x **26**) altogether in the four speeches in 48:3-7 (76), 48:8-12 (**17**), 48:15-16 (33), and 48:18-22 (56)
  - Gen. 49:1-31          **320** words in total: **17** words in vs. 1-2, **251** in vs. 3-27, and **52** (2 x **26**) in vs. 29-31.

I regard this as additional evidence supporting the supposition that the Farewell Address of Jacob in Genesis 49 is an integral part of the Joseph Cycle (the *toledoth ya`aqob* in 37-50).

- The concluding passage of the deathbed episode, Genesis 49:29-33, in which Jacob urges Joseph to swear an oath that he will bury him in Canaan, deserves special attention. It is made up of altogether **48** words, with **17** after *atnach*. In my opinion, it is not by chance that exactly 48 words have been used, because this number represents the numerical value of the name **Joseph** (10 + 6 + 15 + 17). The purpose was obviously to focus strongly on Joseph as the son responsible for fulfilling the very last wish of his father. At the same time this numerical device demonstrates the close relationship between the last days and death of Jacob and the last days and death of Joseph. The passage in question, Gen. 47:27 – 50:26, is a well-designed, coherent composition structured in a menorah pattern with the concluding passage of the deathbed episode at the centre of the menorah, which highlights its central position:

47:27-31	<i>Jacob's last days and Joseph's pledge <u>to bury Jacob in Canaan</u></i>
48:1-22	Jacob blesses the sons of Joseph
49:1-27[28]	Jacob says farewell to his twelve sons
<b>49:29-33</b>	<b>Jacob instructs his sons <u>to bury him in Canaan</u></b>
50: 1-14	Jacob is buried in Canaan by his sons
50:15-21	Joseph comforts his brothers
50:22-26	<i>Joseph's last days: he urges his brothers <u>to bury him in Canaan</u></i>

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