

3. The Blessings of Balaam in Numbers 22-24— Logotechnical Analysis

Guidelines

- Please read the [General Introduction](#) and the Introduction to the [Embedded Hymns](#).

The Blessings of Balaam in their Literary Context

The reason why I label the four Oracles of Balaam (Num. 23:7-10, 23:18-24, 24:3-9, 24:15-24) 'Blessings' is that they have everything to do with the blessedness of Israel. This is in fact how the story of the hiring of Balaam by king Balak to curse the Israelites, and the ensuing oracles are interpreted in Deut. 23:4-6 and Josh. 24:9-10 (compare also Neh. 13:2): it shows how Yahweh turned what was intended to be curses into blessings. This implies that in the Deuteronomistic History the story of Balaam and his Blessings should be viewed as belonging in the same vein as the Blessings of Jacob in Genesis 47-49 and the Blessing of Moses in Deuteronomy 33.¹ All three passages pave the way, each in their own fashion, towards the story in Joshua - Kings about the people of Israel reaching their ultimate destination: settling and living in the Promised Land as a nation blessed by YHWH.

Unfortunately the beautiful story of Balaam in Numbers 22-24 has been treated very roughly by scholars, who, spellbound by old-style literary criticism, dissected it into 'sources' such as J, E, and P, which reflect a 'southern' and a 'northern' or 'Ephraimite' picture of Balaam. Far from shedding light on the aim of the story, they have, in fact, wreaked havoc with this work of art and failed to appreciate its compositional unity and its literary function.²

The story of Balaam should first and foremost be studied as it stands in MT. In its literary context, positioned directly after the conquest of the land of Sihon and Og, at the beginning of the settlement, it is primarily intended to create the image of Israel as a people saved, helped and blessed by YHWH. This is essentially the message of both the Blessings of Jacob in Genesis 47-49 and the Blessing of Moses in Deuteronomy 33. Note in the story YHWH's command to Balaam:

"You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed" (22:12)

and Balaam's assertion in his dialogue with Balak:

"How can I curse whom God has not cursed?

How can I denounce whom YHWH has not denounced?" (23:8).

In addition to this, the Balaam story has another aim: to define true prophecy. In the story, which draws on traditions about a famous 8th century historical intermediary (known from the famous Balaam Text from Deir `Alla as Balaam, the son of Beor), this Balaam is backdated to the time of Moses, where he is presented as a model prophet, *who speaks only what YHWH tells him*. The picture of Balaam reflects the true prophet in contrast to the false prophets. Most significantly, this defining characteristic of the true prophet reverberates most emphatically no less than **14** times in the story (2 x 7, the number of fullness).³

¹ Contrary to the generally accepted view, since the time of Martin Noth, that the Deuteronomistic History comprises the books Deuteronomy through 2 Kings, I consider the entire story of Israel's fortunes and destiny in the books of Genesis through 2 Kings as the great literary work bearing this name. I regret to say that the most recent scholarly publication on the subject still adheres to the traditional view without even considering an alternative option. See Thomas Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction*, London: T&T Clark, 2007.

² For a survey of the research, see the article 'Balaam' by Jo Ann Hackett in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992), Vol. 1, 569-572.

³ Compare 22:8, 18f, 20, 35, 38, 23:3, 5, 8, 12, 16, 20, 26, 24:2, 13. I interpret this, along with other numerical features as evidence for the unity of the story. This also holds true for the use of precisely **7** instances of the designations Jacob/Israel (in this order) in the four oracular blessings. See further below.

Significant Numerical Features of Numbers 22-24

The following survey shows how the divine name numbers are woven into the fabric of the text to symbolically express YHWH's presence in the story. Moreover, it demonstrates to what extent they have been used to structure the speeches, and how the entire text, including the four oracular blessings, was conceived and meticulously composed as a structural unity. The Balaam story is anything but a conglomerate of sources!

Overview of the Speeches in the Dialogues Outside the Oracles:

Moab/Balak c.s.	Balaam	God/YHWH/Angel	Ass
22:4 11 22:5f. 12 } 51 (3x17) 28 22:14 4 22:16-17 26 22:37 14	22:8 1 10 22:10-11 2 25 } 34 (2x17) 22:13 3 9 22:18-19 4 32 22:29 5 10 22:30 6 1 } 26 22:38 7 15	22:9 1 4 22:12 2 10 } 26 22:20 3 16 22:32f. 4 33 = 16+17 22:35 5 11	22:28 8 22:30 15
22:1-41 95	22:1-41 102 (6x17)	22:1-41 74	Total: 23
23:11 9 } 26 23:13 17 23:17 3 23:25 8 23:27 13	23:1 1 12 23:3 2 13 } 34 (2x17) 23:12 3 9 23:15 4 7 } 17 23:26 5 10 23:29 6 12	23:5 6 6 23:16 7 5	
23:1-30 50	23:1-30 63	23:1-30 11	
24:10f. 21	24:12-14 7 46		
22-24 166	22-24 211	22-24 85 (5x17)	22-24 23

The overview reveals that the speeches in the dialogues were composed with minute care so as to seal them with the two divine name numbers. Note also that God/Angel/YHWH speaks **7** times, while Balaam speaks **14** times (**7** times in chapter 22 and **7** times in chapters 23-24). A tally of the name יהוה in Numbers 22-24 shows that it occurs altogether exactly **26** times, which I regard as additional evidence for the literary unity of the story. The same holds true, among many other texts, for the narrative framework to the Book of Job, where the name YHWH, as well as the name Job, appear **26** times.

Survey of the Divine Name Numbers woven into the text:

22:1-4	55 words: the double <i>kabod</i> number: 32 in vs. 1-3 and 23 in v. 4
22:4-5	51 (3 x 17) words in total
22:4-6	51 (3 x 17) words spoken by Moab (11) and Balak's messengers (40)
22:8-9	26 words in total, with 17 in v. 8
22:10-14	34 (2 x 17) words spoken by Balaam: 25 in vs. 10-11 and 9 in v. 13.
22:7-14	52 (2 x 26) words after <i>atnach</i>
22:1-14	221 (13 x 17) words in total
22:16-17	26 words spoken by Balak's messengers
22:15-20	51 (3 x 17) words before <i>atnach</i>
22: 21-30	153 (9 x 17) words in total in the scene with the seeing ass
22:21-23	51 (3 x 17) words, with 34 before, and 17 after <i>atnach</i>
22:26-28	43 words, with 26 before, and 17 after <i>atnach</i> ⁴
22:24-28	68 (4 x 17) words in total
22:29-30	34 (2 x 17) words in total
22:31 and 33	17 words in total in each
22:36	17 words in total
22:38-39	26 words in total
22:1-41	272 (16 x 17) in total after <i>atnach</i>
23:1-2	34 (2 x 17) words spoken by Balaam (12 [v. 1] + 13 [v. 3] + 9 [v. 12])
23:7-10	34 (2 x 17) words after <i>atnach</i>
23:11-13	26 words spoken by Balak: 9 in v. 11 and 17 in v. 13
23:13-15	43 words in total (compare 22:26-28)
23:18-20	17 words after <i>atnach</i>
23:18-22	26 words after <i>atnach</i>
23:20-22	26 words in total
23:18-24	34 (2 x 17) words before <i>atnach</i>
23:18-24	78 (3 x 26) words in total, including the introduction
23:15-26	17 words spoken by Balaam to Balak: 7 in v. 15 and 10 in v. 26
24:1-2	32 words in total (compare 22:1-3)
24:3-5	17 words after <i>atnach</i>
24:4-5	17 words in total
24:5-6	17 words in total
24:7-8b	17 words in total
24:8c-9	17 words in total
24:3-9	34 (2 x 17) words before <i>atnach</i>
24:14-16	34 (2 x 17) words in total, excluding the introductory
24:17-19	34 (2 x 17) words in total
24:20-22	17 words before <i>atnach</i>
24:20-24	51 (3 x 17) words in total
24:17-24	85 (5 x 17) words in total
24:15-24	52 (2 x 26) words before <i>atnach</i>
24:14-24	104 (4 x 26) words spoken by Balaam
24:10-25	104 (4 x 26) words after <i>atnach</i>
24:1-25	306 (18 x 17) words in total.

The oracular blessings, taken together, have an intriguing number of words:

23:7-10	53 words, excluding the introductory formula
23:18-24	75 words, excluding the introductory formula
24:3-9	70 words, excluding the introductory formula
24:15-24	<u>91</u> words, excluding the introductory formulae (Column d in the chart).
Altogether	289 (17 x 17) words.

⁴ The number **43** represents the numerical value of the name Balaam (2 + 12 + 16 + 13 = 43)!

This is not only hard evidence for the compositional unity of the four texts, but it also contains a stern warning against tampering with the text, even when we think – to use the words of G.B. Gray (ICC, 1903, p. 379) - that ‘obscurity and improbability of the text are sufficient to invite emendation’. The obvious coherence of the four texts is further attested by the logotechnical analyses, which reveal a conspicuous structural uniformity. All four have a striking, unmistakable central core, which expresses the gist of each blessing. Moreover, their unity is buttressed by a series of **7** instances (marked **red** in the charts) of Jacob/Israel (in this order!) occurring in 23:7, 10, 21, 23a-b, 23b-c, 24:5, 17).⁵ Note also that Balaam speaks altogether **14** times (**7** times in chapter 22, and **7** times in chapters 23-24), and that God/YHWH/Angel speaks exactly **7** times. See the overview below. Finally, there are **7** nations prophesied against in the Fourth Blessing: Moab, Edom Seir, Amalek, the Kenites, Asshur and Eber, with arch-enemy Amalek at the centre. The use of a series of seven instances is reminiscent of the **7** occurrences of the divine title Elyon in the Asaphite Psalms, of which the middle instance falls precisely within the middle verseline of Psalm 78: Ps. 78:35. For particulars, see Observation 3 in [Psalm 78](#). Another striking example, among many others, is [Psalm 92](#) with its **7** occurrences of the name YHWH, of which the middle instance falls precisely within the arithmetic centre.

I. The First Oracular Blessing: Numbers 23:7-10

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words in the framework; **d**: words in the central core.

		Total	a	b	c	d
7	וַיִּשָּׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר ¹	3	3		3	
	מִן־אֲרָם יִנְחֵנִי בְלֶקֶת	1 4		4	4	
	מִלֶּד־מוֹאָב מִהַר־רִי־קָדְדִים	4		4	4	
	לֵבָה אֶרְהֶ־לִּי יַעֲקֹב	2 4		4	4	
	וְלֵבָה זַעֲמָה יִשְׂרָאֵל ¹	3		3	3	
	Excluding the introduction, v. 7	15	= 0	+ 15	= 15	+ 0
8	Central Core: מִנָּה אֵקֵב לֹא קִבְּהָ אֱלֹהִים	3 5	5			5
	The people of Israel: וּמִנָּה אֲזַעֵם לֹא זַעֵם יִהְיֶה	5		5		5
9	cannot be cursed! כִּי־מִרְאֵשׁ צָרִים אֲרָאֵנִי	4 4	4			4
	They are a unique people וּמִנְבָּעוֹת אֲשׁוּרֵי־נִי	2 2	2			2
	standing out among הַיַּרְעִים לְבִגְדֵי יִשְׁכָּן	5 4		4		4
	the nations. וּבְנוֹיִם לֹא יִתְחַשְׁבּוּ	3		3		3
	(53 = 15 + 23 + 15)	23	= 11	+ 12	= 0	+ 23
10	מִן מְנַה עֵפֶר יַעֲקֹב	6 4	4		4	
*	וּמִן סִפֶּר תִּרְבַּע יִשְׂרָאֵל ²	4 4	4		4	
	תִּמְתַּת נַפְשֵׁי מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל	7 4		4	4	
	וּתְהִי אַחֲרֵיתִי כְּמִהוּ:	3		3	3	
	v. 10	15	= 8	+ 7	= 15	+ 0
	Total, v. 9-10	28	= 14	+ 14	= 15	+ 13
	Total, v. 7-10	53	= 19	+ 34	= 30	+ 23

⁵ Note that in the 8th reference (24:18b-19a) the names are conspicuously mentioned in the reverse order, obviously to avoid disturbing the series of seven.

* The MT reading וַיִּמְסַפֵּר אֶת־רִבְעָה in 10b is suspect. See ap. crit. in *BHS*, *HALOT*, Vol. 3, 1181, and Seebass, *Numeri* (BK, IV31, p. 19). The text should be read וַיִּמְי סָפַר תְּרַבַּע, ‘Yes, who can count the dust-cloud of Israel?’, which is a perfect parallel to ‘Who can calculate the dust of Israel?’ in v. 10a. The word תְּרַבַּע, ‘dust-cloud’, is a synonym of עָפָר, ‘dust’, and is derived from רִבַּע, ‘dust’. Compare Akkadian *tarbu’(t)u(m)*, *turbu’/ttu*, ‘dust, dust-storm’. Note that ‘dust’ is a metaphor for a troop on the move, raising clouds of dust. At the same time, both words for ‘dust’ allude to the uncountableness of Israel’s forces.

Observations

1. The caesurae in the text are to be found between vs. 7||8 and between vs. 9||10, which divide it into 3 sections, showing the pivotal positioning of the core, flanked by 15 words on each side (53 = 15 + 23 + 15):

v. 7	Balaam’s reference to his commission from Balak	15 words	4 cola
vs. 8-9	Balaam asserts that Israel cannot be cursed	23 words	6 cola
v. 10	Balaam desires to have the same fate as the Israelites	15 words	4 cola.

If my colometric division is correct, the oracle has 14 cola, which display a pattern that underscores the tripartite structure of the text: 14 = 4 + 6 + 4 cola.

There is every reason to assume that the choice for 23 words in the central core is due to authorial intent, since it represents the numerical value of *kabod*, ‘glory’ (11 + 2 + 6 + 4), which signifies YHWH’s presence: in this case, among his people. In fact, it is YHWH’s presence that renders Israel a unique people among the nations.

2. The middle word of the oracle, מִרְאֵשׁ, ‘from the top’, in v. 9a (53 = 26 + 1 + 26), which is also the middle word of the central core (23 = 11 + 1 + 11), has been positioned in pride of place with minute care, because it refers back to where Balaam is standing when he utters his first oracle: on Bamoth-Baal (cf. 22:41). From there, he can see the full extent of the Israelite host, which he describes here. In passing I may note that this is incontestable evidence for the interrelationship between the story and the oracle.
3. The numerical structure described above left little room for the author to weave the divine name numbers into the fabric of this text. There is only one occurrence of a multiple of the number 17: in the 34 (2 x 17) words after *atnach*.

II. The Second Oracular Blessing: Numbers 23:18-24

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words in the framework; **d**: words in the central core.

		Total	a	b	c	d
18	2 וַיִּשָּׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר ²	3	3		3	
	קוּם בָּלֶק וְשָׁמַע 1	3		3	3	
	הֲאִזְנִיחַ עֲדֵי בְנוֹ צִפּוֹר:	4		4	4	
	v. 18	7	= 0	+ 7	= 7	+ 0
19	לֹא אִישׁ אֶל וַיִּכְוֹב 2	4	4		4	
	וּבֶן־אָדָם וַיִּתְנַחֵם [^]	3	3		3	
	הִתּוּא אָמַר וְלֹא יַעֲשֶׂה 3	4		4	4	
	וַדְבַר וְלֹא יִקְמֹנֶה:	3		3	3	
	v. 19	14	= 7	+ 7	= 14	+ 0
	Total, excluding the introduction, v. 18-19	21	= 7	+ 14	= 21	+ 0
20	Central Core: הִנֵּה בִרְדִי לְקַחְתִּי [^] 4	3	3			3
	Balaam cannot revoke וַבִּרְדִי וְלֹא אֲשִׁיבֶנָּה: 3	3		3		3
	the blessing he uttered on Total, v. 18-20	30	= 13	+ 17	= 24	+ 6
21	YHWH's command. לֹא־הִבִּישׁ אֲנִי בַיַּעֲקֹב 3	4	4			4
	Because YHWH is וְלֹא־רָאָה עִמָּל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל [^]	4	4			4
	on their side, וַתִּהְיֶה אֶל־הֵיוֹ עִמּוֹ 6	3		3		3
	(middle word/verseline) וַתְּרוּעַת מִלֶּדֶךְ בּוֹ: 3	3		3		3
22	no enchantment אֵל מוֹצִיאֵם מִמִּצְרַיִם [^] 7	3	3			3
	works against Jacob כַּתּוּעַפַת רָאִם לוֹ: 3	3		3		3
	and Total, v. 18-22	50	= 24	+ 26	= 24	+ 26
23a-b	no divination כִּי לֹא־נִחַשׁ בַּיַּעֲקֹב 8	4	4			4
	against Israel! וְלֹא־קָסַם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל [^] 4	3	3			3
	Total, v. 20-23b	33	= 21	+ 12	= 0	+ 33
23c-d	כָּעֵת יֹאמַר לַיַּעֲקֹב 9	3		3	3	
	5 וְלַיִשְׂרָאֵל מִה־פָּעַל אֵל: 5	4		4	4	
24	הֲוֵעַם כְּלִבְיָא יָקוּם 10	4	4		4	
	וּכְאֲרֵי יִתְנַשֵּׂא [^]	2	2		2	
	לֹא יִשְׁכַּב עַד־יֵאָכַל מִטָּרֶף 11	5		5	5	
	וְדַם־חֲלָלִים יִשְׁתֶּה:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 23c-24	21	= 6	+ 15	= 21	+ 0
	Total 18-24	75	= 34	+ 41	= 42	+ 33
	Total, including the introduction, v. 18-24	78	= 37	+ 41	= 45	+ 33

Observations

1. In terms of content and as suggested by the numerical structure, the strong caesurae in the Second Oracular Blessing are to be found between vs. 19||20 and between vs. 23b||23c, which give the text a tripartite structure. Excluding the 3-word introductory formula, as in the case of the First Oracular Blessing, we find a central core perfectly positioned at the arithmetic centre of the text ($75 = 21 + 33 + 21$):

vs. 18-19	Balaam alerts Balak to YHWH's steadfastness	21 words
vs. 20-23b	Balaam asserts that he cannot revoke his blessing	33 words
vs. 23c-24	Balaam announces what is to befall Israel: victory!	21 words.

In the first blessing, the number **33**, which represents the numerical value of the root *brk*, was used to *encompass* the central core, but now it serves to *constitute* the core. Note that the verb *brk* is used twice in v. 20, at the very beginning of the central core.

2. Exactly as in the first blessing, the middle word of the text as a whole, in this case עִמּוֹ, 'with him', in v. 21c ($75 = 37 + \boxed{1} + 37$), coincides precisely with that of the central core ($33 = 16 + \boxed{1} + 16$). Moreover, the middle word falls within the middle verseline, v. 21c-d ($11 = 5 + \boxed{1} + 5$), which is obviously the consciously designed meaningful centre. This statement is particularly meaningful, since it is because YHWH is *with* the people of Israel that they are uncursable and blessed:

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי עִמּוֹ וַיְתַרְעַת מֶלֶךְ בִּן:

YHWH their God is with them, and the King's acclaim is among them.

3. The metaphor of the lion in v. 24 in connection with the bright future of Israel clearly preludes what is said at the end of the third blessing (24:9). This is another indication of the interrelationship between the oracular blessings.
4. Since the second blessing is much longer than the first, the author could here weave some divine name numbers into the fabric of the text: **17** words after *atnach* in vs. 18-20, **26** words after *atnach* in vs. 18-22, and **78** (3×26) words in the entire text. Moreover, in terms of content, the 33 words of the central core divide into two parts, generating another divine name number:

26 words in vs. 20-22, Balaam's assertion that he cannot revoke his blessing, and

7 in v. 23a-b, his concluding statement about the invulnerability of the Israelites:

"Yes, there is no enchantment against Jacob, no divination against Israel."

It is important to note that the *middle* instance (the 4th) of the **7** occurrences of the name-pair Jacob/Israel, which permeate the text of the four blessings from the first to the last, falls precisely within this crucial statement (23:7, 10, 21, **23a-b**, 23c-d; 24:5, 17).

III. The Third Oracular Blessing: Numbers 24:3-9

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words in the framework; **d**: words in the central core.

		Total	a	b	c	d
3	וַיִּשָּׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר³	3	3		3	
	נֶאֱמַר בְּלָעַם בְּנֹוֹ בְעֵר (14 + 1 + 13) = 28 נֶאֱמַר	4		4	4	
	וַיִּנָּאֵם הַנֶּבֶר שְׁתֵּם הָעֵינַן:	4		4	4	
	v. 3	8	= 0	+ 8	= 8	+ 0
4	נֶאֱמַר שָׁמַע אֲמַר־אֱלֹהִים	4	4		4	
	אֲשֶׁר מִחֲזֹה שְׂדֵי יַחֲזֶה	4		4	4	
	נִפְלַ וְגִלּוֹי עֵינַיִם:	3		3	3	
	v. 4	11	= 4	+ 7	= 11	+ 0
	Total, v. 3-4	19	= 4	+ 15	= 19	+ 0
5	Central Core: מִה־טָבוֹ אֶהְיֶה יַעֲקֹב	3	4		4	
	Balaam portrays Jacob/Israel by using a metaphor that is very reminiscent of the tree metaphor in Psalm 1.	2		2	2	
	v. 5	6	= 4	+ 2	= 6	+ 0
	Total, v. 3-5	25	= 8	+ 17	= 25	+ 0
	Total, v. 4-5	17	= 8	+ 9	= 17	+ 0
6	כְּנִחְלִים נִפְיוֹ	4	2		2	
	כְּנִגְתַּת עָלַי נִהְרֵה	3	3		3	
	כְּאֶהְלִים נִטְעַ יִהְזֶה	5	3	3	3	
	Middle words of the oracle : כְּאֶרְזִים עָלֵי־מַיִם	3		3	3	
	(70 = 34 + 2 + 34)	11	= 5	+ 6	= 0	+ 11
	v. 6	17	= 9	+ 8	= 6	+ 11
	Total, v. 5-6	17	= 9	+ 8	= 6	+ 11
7	Middle verseline and cola: וַיֹּלֵךְ מַיִם מִדְּלִיָּו	6	3	3		3
	(11 = 5 + 1 + 5)	3	3		3	
	וַיִּרְם מִמַּאֲנֵג מִלְּפֹו	7	3	3	3	
	(24 = 11 + 2 + 11)	2		2	2	
	וַתִּנְשָׂא מִלְּכָתוֹ:	2		2	2	
	v. 7	11	= 6	+ 5	= 0	+ 11
8	אֵל מוֹצִיאֹו מִמִּצְרַיִם	8	3	3	3	
	כְּתוֹעַפַּת רֵאִים לֹו	3	3		3	
	Total, v. 7-8b	17	= 12	+ 5	= 6	+ 11
	יֵאֱכַל גּוֹיִם צָרִיו	9	3	3	3	
	וְעֲצַמֹתֵיהֶם יִגְרֵם	2		2	2	
	וַחֲצִיו יִמְחָץ:	2		2	2	
9	כָּרַע שָׁכֵב כְּאֶרֶץ	10	3	3	3	
	וּכְלָבִיא מִי יִקִּימֶנּוּ	3	3		3	
	מִבְּרַכְיָה בְרִיָּה	11	2	2	2	
	וְאַרְרִיָּה אֶרְוֶה:	2		2	2	
	Total, v. 8c-9	17	= 6	+ 11	= 17	+ 0
	Total, v. 5-9	51	= 27	+ 24	= 23	+ 28
	Total, v. 3-9	70	= 31	+ 39	= 42	+ 28

Observations

1. In terms of content and as suggested by the numerical structure, the strong caesurae in the Third Oracular Blessing are to be found between vs. 4||5 and between vs. 7||8, which give the text a tripartite structure, as in the two preceding blessings:

vs. 3-4	Introduction to the Oracular Blessing	19 words
vs. 5-7	Portrayal of the Israelites as trees beside the waters	28 words
vs. 8-9	Israel envisaged as victorious over their enemies	23 words.

In this case, the central core (surrounded by 42 words: 19 + 23) is rather off-centre in comparison with the arithmetically perfect central cores of the two previous blessings. The **23** words in vs. 8-9 are probably deliberate to match the **23** words in the central core of the first blessing.

The **28** words in the core are undoubtedly based on the numerical value of **נְאֻם**, 'oracle', the very first word of the passage ($14 + 1 + 13 = 28$), precisely as in [2 Samuel 23!](#)

2. The arithmetic centre of the text as a whole is constituted by the 2 words **עַל־מַיִם**, 'beside the waters', in v. 6d, which are significantly flanked by **34** (2×17) words on either side ($70 = 34 + 2 + 34$). Since the two words allude to the metaphor of the trees beside the waters, they were evidently designed as the meaningful centre of the blessing, to highlight the metaphor. As noted above, the metaphor of the trees is highly reminiscent of Psalm 1, but there is more to it. Seeing that Israel's king is explicitly mentioned (v. 7c), the metaphor may also allude to the counterposed 'king' in Jotham's Fable of the trees.
3. From the viewpoint of the poetical structure, the middle verseline is v. 7a-b, which coincides with the 2 middle cola:

וַיִּזְלַמִּים מִדְּלֵיו וַיִּזְרְעוּ בְּמַיִם רַבִּים

Water shall flow from his buckets and his seed shall be in many waters.

This striking metaphorical reference to Israel's fecundity may be regarded as the consciously designed meaningful centre in terms of the poetical building blocks.

4. Apart from the **34** (2×17) words on either side of the arithmetic centre, there are more instances of **17** in the third blessing: the **17** words after *atnach* in vs. 3-5, the **17** words in vs. 4-5, in 5-6, in 7-8b, in 8b-9, and the **51** (3×17) words in vs. 5-9.
5. The use of the number **11** is conspicuous: the **11** verselines, the **22** words of the introduction in vs. 3-4 (divided into **11** in v. 3 and **11** in v. 4), the **11** words in vs. 6 and 7 respectively, the **11** words before *atnach* in vs. 3-5, and after *atnach* in vs. 8-9. This is not surprising, since **11** is the number of fulfillment, which subtly anticipates the concrete fulfilling of Israel's blessedness through the destruction of their enemies – the theme of the Fourth Blessing.

IV. The Fourth Oracular Blessing: Numbers 24:14,15-24

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words in the introductions; **d**: words in the oracles.
- The words spoken by Balaam in v. 14 are included for reasons given below.

		Total	a	b	c	d
14	וַעֲתָהּ הִנְנִי הוֹלֵךְ לְעַמִּי	4	4			4
	לָכֵה אִיעֲצֶךָ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה הָעָם הַזֶּה	6		6		6
	לְעַמֶּךָ בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים:	3		3		3
	v. 14	13	4	9	0	13
15	וַיִּשָּׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר	3	3		3	
	נֹאֵם בְּלִעָם בְּנֵי בְעֹר	1 4		4		4
	וְנֹאֵם הַנֹּכַח שְׂתֵם הָעֵינַן:	4		4		4
16	נֹאֵם שִׁמְעֵ אֲמֵר־אֵל	2 4	4			4
	וַיִּדַע קִדְעַת עֲלִיּוֹן	3 3				3
	מִחֲזָה שְׂרֵי יַחֲזָה	3 3		3		3
	נִפְלַ וּגְלוֹי עֵינַיִם:	3 3		3		3
	Total, v. 15-16	24	= 10	+ 14	= 3	+ 21
	Total, v. 14-16	37	= 11	+ 23	= 3	+ 34
17	Central Core: אֲרֹאנוּ וְלֹא עֲתָה	4 3	3			3
	Prophecy foreseeing אֲשׁוּרֵנוּ וְלֹא קָרוֹב	3 3	3			3
	that Jacob/Israel דָּרֹךְ כּוֹכֵב מִיַּעֲקֹב	5 3		3		3
	will crush their enemies וְקָם שִׁבְטֵ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל	7 3		3		3
	and dispossess them. וּמְחִץ פְּאֵתֵי מוֹאָב	6 3		3		3
	וְקָרַקַר כָּל-בְּנֵי-שֵׁת:	4 4		4		4
18	וְהָיָה אֲדוֹם יִרְשָׁה	7 3	3			3
	וְהָיָה יִרְשָׁה שְׂעִיר אִיִּבּוּי	4 4		4		4
	In the reversed order! וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל עָשָׂה חֵיל:	3 3		3		3
19	* וַיִּרְדָּם יַעֲקֹב	8 2	2			2
	וְהֶאֱבִיד שְׂרִיד מַעִיר:	3 3		3		3
	Total, v. 17-19	34	= 15	+ 19	= 0	+ 34
20	Prophecy against Amalek וַיִּרְא אֶת-עַמְלֵק	3 3	3		3	
	וַיִּשָּׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר	3 3	3		3	
	רֹאשֵׁית גּוֹיִם עַמְלֵק	9 3		3		3
	וְאַחֲרֵיתוֹ עַדִּי אֶבְרָד:	3 3		3		3
	v. 20	12	= 6	+ 6	= 6	+ 6
21	Prophecy against the Kenite וַיִּרְא אֶת-הַקֵּינִי	3 3	3		3	
	וַיִּשָּׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר	3 3	3		3	
	אֵיתָן מוֹשֶׁבֶךָ	10 2		2		2
	וְשֵׁים בְּסֹלַע קִנְיָד:	3 3		3		3
22	כִּי אִם-יִהְיֶה לְבַעַר קִיּוֹ	11 5	5			5
	עַד-מָה אֲשׁוּר תִּשְׁבֶּכֶךָ:	4 4		4		4
	Total, v. 20-22	32	= 17	+ 15	= 12	+ 20

23	Prophecy against Asshur and Eber	וַיִּשָּׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲ אֹי מִן יַחֲדָה מִשְׁמוֹ אֵל:	12	3	3	3	5	5
24		וְצִיִּים מִיַּד פְּתִיִּים וְעִנּוֹ אֲשׁוּר וְעִנּוֹ-עֵבֶר וְגַם-הוּא עֲדֵי אֶבֶד:	13	3	3	4	4	3
	Prophecies against foreign nations, v. 20-24			51	= 27	+ 24	= 15	+ 36
	Total, v. 17-24			85	= 42	+ 43	= 15	+ 70
	Total, v. 15-24			109	= 52	+ 57	= 18	+ 91
	Total, v. 14-24			122	= 56	+ 66	= 18	+ 104

* In v. 19a, the MT reading **וַיִּרְדֵּי מִן יַעֲקֹב**, ‘And from Jacob shall dominion be exercised’, should be corrected to read **וַיִּרְדֵּם יַעֲקֹב**, ‘Yes, Jacob shall trample them down’, with Jacob as subject, as in 18c, where Israel is subject. For a discussion see Horst Seebass (BK IV/31, p. 25).

Observations

1. In terms of content, the Fourth Oracular Blessing differs significantly from the others, for it is in fact a prophecy. It deals with the blessedness of Israel based on the destruction of their enemies. Therefore, the term ‘Blessing’ is appropriate. The prophecy deals not only with Jacob/Israel (vs. 17-19), but also with **7** foreign nations (vs. 20-24). Moab, Edom and Seir, Israel’s nearest neighbours, are mentioned in the prophecy for Jacob/Israel, the remote nations are dealt with in separate oracles: Amalek, the Kenites, Asshur and Eber. In a strict sense and formally, the Fourth Blessing is introduced by the fourth stereotyped introductory formula in **v. 15a** (the middle instance of the series of **7**). However, viewed from the flow of the story, it has already been introduced by Balaam in v. 14, where he tells Balak what is going to happen “in the days to come”:

“And now, behold, I am going to my people; come, I will let you know what this people (Israel) will do to your people (Moab) in the days to come.”

Therefore, in terms of content, v. 14 is part and parcel of the Fourth Blessing, and should be included in the word-count. From a logotechnical viewpoint, the **13** words in v. 14 bring the total number of words spoken by Balaam about what is going to happen “in the days to come” (Column **d**) to exactly **104** (4 x **26**). This is another piece of evidence for the compositional unity of the story and the oracles. Additionally, in vs. 14-16, Balaam speaks **34** (2 x **17**) words to introduce the four prophecies in vs. 17-24 (see Column **d**).

2. In terms of form, however, the Fourth Oracle is very similar to the others, because it has a comparable tripartite framework, which is structured by significant numerical features:

vs. 15-16	Introduction to the prophecies	24 (2 x 12) words
vs. 17-19	Prophecy dealing with Jacob/Israel	34 (2 x 17) words
vs. 20-24	Prophecies against the remote foreign nations	51 (3 x 17) words.

In this case, the central core is Balaam’s prophecy about Israel’s victory over their enemies and the downfall and dispossession of Moab, Edom and Seir. The prophecies are made up of exactly **85** words (5 x **17** = 2 x **17** + 3 x **17**). For the relatively great number of divine name numbers and their multiples in the Fourth Oracle, see page 3.

Bibliography

For a full bibliography, see H. Seebass, *Numeri* (BK, IV/31), Neukirchen-Vluyn, 2004, pp. 2-9.

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