

## 4. The Priestly Blessing in Numbers 6— Logotechnical Analysis

### Guidelines

- Please read the [General Introduction](#) and the Introduction to the [Embedded Hymns](#).
- For common features found in the numerical analysis charts, see the "[Key to the charts](#)".

### The Priestly Blessing in its Literary Context

In the book of Numbers the Priestly Blessing is clearly demarcated by an open space, a *Parashah* (P), at the beginning and at the end. More importantly, it is positioned at the beginning of the third group of 7 divine speeches, introduced by the stereotyped formula **וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר** 'And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying'.

For particulars, see my study "The Pattern of the Divine Speech Formulas in the Pentateuch: The Key to its Literary Structure", *VT* 32/3 (1982), pp. 268-296, especially pp. 291-292.

1:1	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	1
1:48	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	2
2:1	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	3
3:5	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	4
3:11	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	5
3:14	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	6
3:44	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	7
4:1	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	1
4:17	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	2
4:21	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	3
5:1	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	4
5:5	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	5
5:11	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	6
6:1	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	7
6:22	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	1
8:1	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	2
8:5	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	3
8:23	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	4
9:1	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	5
9:9	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	6
10:1	<b>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר</b>	And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying	7

The positioning of the Priestly Blessing within this evidently regular pattern rules out any possibility that it may here be out of place, as has been suggested by many scholars. There is no shred of evidence for this supposition. The blessing of the Israelites, which functions here as the *dedication* of the people to YHWH by means of the pronouncing of his name over them, is the logical follow-up to the *dedication* of the Nazarites (6:1-21). At the same time it opens the series of *dedications* and instructions in connection with the altar and the tabernacle (7:1-10:10).

The whole section, Num. 6:22 – 10:10, is structured by the coherent series of 7 divine speeches (Note that the story of the departure from Sinai begins in 10:11.):

6:22-7:89	Dedication of Israel, and their offerings for the dedication of the altar	1
8:1-4	Positioning of the Seven Lamps and the Lampstand	2
8:5-22	The cleansing and dedication of the Levites	3
8:23-26	Instructions regarding the services of the Levites	4
9:1-8	Instructions for celebrating Pesach	5
9:9-23	Additional instructions and the story of the cloud over the tent	6
10:1-10	Instructions regarding the silver trumpets	7.

## Logotechnical analysis

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

		Total	a	b	c	d
22	וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:	5	5		5	
	Total, v. 22	5	= 5	+ 0	= 5	+ 0
23	דַּבֵּר אֶל-אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל-בָּנָיו לֵאמֹר	6	6		6	
	כֹּה תְבַרְכוּ אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ^	5	5		5	
	אָמֹר לָהֶם: ם	2		2	2	
	Total, v. 23	13	= 11	+ 2	= 13	+ 0
	Total, v. 22-23	18	= 16	+ 2	= 18	+ 0
<hr/>						
24	יְבַרְכֶה יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמְרֶה: ם	3	3			3
25	יֵאָר יְהוָה   פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיְחַנְּךָ: ם	5	5			5
26	יִשָּׂא יְהוָה   פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לָךְ שְׁלוֹם: ם	7	7			7
	Total, v. 24-26	15	= 15	+ 0	= 0	+ 15
	Total, v. 23c-26	17	= 15	+ 2	= 2	+ 15
	Total, v. 22-26	33	= 31	+ 2	= 18	+ 15
<hr/>						
27	וַשְׂמוּ אֶת-שְׁמֵי עַל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ^ וְאָנֹכִי אֶבְרַכְכֶם: פ	8	6	2	8	
	Total, v. 24-27	23	= 21	+ 2	= 8	+ 15
	Total, v. 22-27	41	= 37	+ 4	= 26	+ 15

## Observations

1. From a numerical point of view, the 5-word introductory formula is an integral part of the body of the text. This means that the entire text was composed as a single literary unit: the introduction (v. 22), YHWH's command to Moses to instruct Aaron and his sons to bless the people of Israel (v. 23); the blessing, which is literally cited (vs. 24-26), and YHWH's instruction to dedicate the people by pronouncing his name over them (v. 27).
2. The 15-word blessing is enveloped by 26 words (18 before and 8 after). This is not surprising, since the use of the divine name numbers and their multiples to encompass the kernel of a text is a well-attested scribal device, which I have encountered in a considerable number of psalms. Compare also, e.g., Deuteronomy 33, where the 52-word kernel of the text, 33:13-17, the blessing of Joseph, is

preceded by **156** (6 x **26**) words and followed by **136** (8 x **17**). See my analysis of [Deuteronomy 33](#), pp. 2 and 10. Compare also my analysis of [Genesis 47-49](#), where the story about Jacob's Blessing of the sons of Joseph and his Farewell Address, Genesis 48 and 49:1-27, is surrounded by **153** (9 x **17**) words.

In this case the device is used to express the idea that the words of the blessing is literally enveloped by YHWH's name, which signifies his presence. This interpretation gains credibility since the *name* of YHWH is explicitly mentioned as having a function in the act of blessing (v. 27): it is to be laid upon the Israelites, i.e., pronounced over them. The act does not relate to some obscure ritual, but simply refers to the solemn thrice-repeated pronunciation of the name in the blessing. This is in fact an act of dedication and consecration: Israel belongs to YHWH and bears his name. Compare 2 Sam 12:28; Deut. 28:10; Isa. 63:19; Jer. 25:19, and 32:34.

3. The 15-word blessing itself is a meticulously composed, terse little text modelled in the form of a rectangular stepped tower, as observed by many scholars. This particular form is buttressed by some interesting numerical features, which have been brought to light by my former student G. Ruiterkamp, *Gezegend ben je! Een studie van achtergrond, vorm en functie van de Aäronitische zegen (Numeni 6:22-27)*, Doctoraalscriptie Oude Testament, Universiteit Groningen, 1988.

v. 24	יְבָרֵךְ יְהוָה וְיִשְׁמְרֵךְ:	3 words	15 letters
v. 25	יְאֹר יְהוָה   פָּנָיו אֵלָיךְ וַיְחַנְּךְ:	5 words	20 letters
v. 26	יִשָּׂא יְהוָה   פָּנָיו אֵלָיךְ וְיִשֵּׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם:	7 words	25 letters.

The structure displays an unmistakable progressive extension with 2 words in each case: 3 + 5 + 7, and with 5 letters: 15 + 20 + 25. Additionally, the first hemistiches of the three sentences are made up of 10 words (2 + 4 + 4), while the second hemistiches have altogether 5 words (1 + 1 + 3). Finally, in MT the *paseq slash* has been used to divide the **15** words into 5 + 5 + 5, probably to direct attention to the progressive extension of the text with 5 letters in each case. The exact function of the number 5 is unknown. The number **15** represents the gematric value of YH (10 + 5).

4. The remarkable 2-word introductory formula אָמַר לָהֶם, 'You shall say to them', in v. 23c, may appear to be redundant, but the two words were consciously used to bring the total number of words in the blessing to **17**. I interpret this as deliberately designed in order to weave this divine name number into the fabric of the blessing.
5. The introduction together with YHWH's command and the blessing, vs. 22-26, have **33** words, the numerical value of *brk*, 'to bless' (2 + 20 + 11 = 33), which was also deliberately designed. Note that שְׁלוֹם, 'piece', is the 33<sup>rd</sup> word! As observed above, the divine name number **26** features in the number of words surrounding the blessing.
6. The 15 words of the blessing, together with the 8 words in YHWH's command (v. 27), constitute the *kabod* number **23**, which has deliberately been contrived to signify YHWH's presence through his glory.
7. The name יְהוָה occurs 4 times, 1x in the introduction and 3x in the blessing.

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 Dr. C.J. Labuschagne Senior Lecturer in Semitic Languages (retired),  
 Brinkhorst 44 University of Pretoria, South Africa  
 9751 AT Haren (Gron) and  
 The Netherlands Professor of Old Testament (retired),  
[labuschagne.cj@planet.nl](mailto:labuschagne.cj@planet.nl) University of Groningen, The Netherlands