5. The Last Words of David in 2 Samuel 23—Logotechnical Analysis

The Testament of David in its Literary Context

As has been observed by many scholars, the so-called Last Words of David belongs to the Song of David in 2 Samuel 22 in very much the same way as the Blessing of Moses in Deuteronomy 33 belongs to the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. Contrary to the Blessing of Moses, which was, in my opinion, secondarily incorporated into the book, in which the Song of Moses already had its fixed place, the Testament of David was incorporated into the book of Second Samuel *together* with the Song of David.

This is the overall framework of 2 Samuel, which exhibits a near–perfect symmetric structure before the insertion of the Song and the Testament:

2 Sam. 1-8:14	The rise of David to kingship after the death of Saul
2 Sam. 8:15-18	David's officials
2 Sam. 9:1-13	David and the house of Saul
2 Sam. 10:1-19	David's wars
2 Sam. 11:1-20:22	The private life of David and the Story of the Succession
2 Sam. 20:23-26	David's officials
2 Sam. 21:1-14	David and the house of Saul
2 Sam. 21:15-22	David's wars
2 Sam. 22–23:7	The Song and the Testament of David
2 Sam. 23:8-39	David's warriors
2 Sam. 24:1-25	David's last days: the Census Plague and its aftermath.

The function of the Testament of David was obviously to depict him as the just messianic ruler and head of his dynasty, chosen by YHWH to rule over his people. See Observation 1.

Special Features of the Testament of David

- As it stands in MT, the passage is a well-planned and meticulously composed numerical work of art, comparable in many respects with the Oracular Blessings of Balaam. There is every reason to label this text The Oracular Testament of David.

- As in the Blessings of Balaam, the Testament of David exhibits a clear Central Core, in this case the Divine Oracle, consisting of **17** words, flanked by a deliberately designed significant number of words: **28** words before and **41** after the Core. The number **28** represents the numerical value of נְאֻם, 'oracle' (the very first word of the Testament), and **41** represents the numerical value of בֶּן־יִשַׁי, 'the son of Jesse'. See Observation 1.

- The three personages, the poet, David, and YHWH, fundamentally determine the Canto division and the strophic structure of the text, giving it an exceptionally regular structure.

Strophic structure - **Canto boundary: ||**

- Labuschagne: 1, 2-3b || 3c-4 || 5, 6-7 (3 cantos, 5 strophes, 10 verselines, 23 cola, and 86 words, leaving the text as it stands in MT, but for a minor correction in v. 4c).
- Fokkelman: 1, 2-3b, 3c-5a, 5b-e, 6-7 (5 strophes, 11 verselines, 23 cola - taking 4c-5a as a separate verseline - and 86 words, leaving the text as it stands in MT).
- Del Olmo Lete: 1, 2-3b, 3c-4, 5, 6-7 (5 sections or strophes, 23 cola, and 84 words, deleting 2 of the 19 words of MT in vs. 6-7, and reshuffling several others).

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".

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words attributed to the poet and David; **d**: words spoken by God.

			Total	a	b	c	d
1		וְאֵ֜לֶּה דִּבְרֵ֥י דָוִ֖ד הָאַחֲרֹנִ֑ים^	4	4			
	נְאֻם = 28 **דָוִד** = 14 **בֶּן־יִשַׁי**	נְאֻ֧ם דָּוִ֣ד בֶּן־יִשַׁ֗י	1	4		4	4
	בֶּן־יִשַׁי = 41	וּנְאֻ֤ם הַגֶּ֨בֶר֙ הֻ֣קַם עָ֔ל		4		4	4
	(2+14 + 10+21+10 = **41**)	מְשִׁ֨יחַ֙ אֱלֹהֵ֣י יַעֲקֹ֔ב	2	3		3	3
		וּנְעִ֖ים זְמִר֥וֹת יִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃		3		3	3
		Strophe 1 v. 1	**14**	= 0	+ 14	= 14	
2		ר֥וּחַ יְהוָ֖ה דִּבֶּר־בִּ֑י^	3	4	4		4
		וּמִלָּת֖וֹ עַל־לְשׁוֹנִֽי׃		3		3	3
3a		אָמַר֙ אֱלֹהֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל	4	3	3		3
3b		לִ֥י דִבֶּ֖ר צ֣וּר יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל^		4	4		4
		Strophe 2 v. 2-3b	**14**	= 11	+ 3	= 14	
		Canto I v. 1-3b	**28**	= 11	+ **17**	= 28	
3c	Middle verselines,	מוֹשֵׁל֙ בָּאָדָ֣ם צַדִּ֔יק	5	3		3	3
3d	meaningful centre.	מוֹשֵׁ֖ל יִרְאַ֥ת אֱלֹהִֽים׃		3		3	3
4	(10 = 4 + 2 + 4)	וּכְא֥וֹר בֹּ֖קֶר יִזְרַח־שָׁ֑מֶשׁ^	6	4	4		4
	Middle words (86=**41**+4+**41**)	בֹּ֚קֶר לֹ֣א עָב֔וֹת		3		3	3
	בֶּן־יִשַׁי = 41 מִנֹּ֥גַהּ מִמָּטָ֖ר דֶּ֥שֶׁא מֵאָֽרֶץ׃			4		4		4
	* See below **Canto II Strophe 3** **v. 3c-4**			**17**	= 4	+ 13	= 0	+ **17**
5		כִּי־לֹא־כֵ֥ן בֵּיתִ֖י עִם־אֵ֑ל^	7	6	6		6
		כִּ֤י בְרִ֨ית עוֹלָ֜ם שָׂ֣ם לִ֗י		5		5	5
		עֲרוּכָ֥ה בַכֹּ֖ל וּשְׁמֻרָ֑ה		3		3	3
		כִּֽי־כָל־יִשְׁעִ֥י וְכָל־חֵ֖פֶץ	8	5		5	5
		כִּי־לֹ֥א יַצְמִֽיחַ׃		3		3	3
		Strophe 4 v. 5	22	= 6	+ 16	= 22	
6		וּבְלִיַּ֕עַל כְּק֥וֹץ מֻנָ֖ד כֻּלָּ֑הַם^	9	4	4		4
		כִּֽי־לֹ֥א בְיָ֖ד יִקָּֽחוּ׃		4		4	4
7		וְאִישׁ֙ יִגַּ֣ע בָּהֶ֔ם	10	3	3		3
		יִמָּלֵ֥א בַרְזֶ֖ל וְעֵ֣ץ חֲנִ֑ית^		4	4		4
		וּבָאֵ֕שׁ שָׂר֥וֹף יִשָּׂרְפ֖וּ בַשָּֽׁבֶת׃ פ		4		4	4
		Strophe 5 v. 6-7	19	= 11	+ 8	= 19	
	בֶּן־יִשַׁי = 41	**Canto III** v. 5-7	**41**	= **17**	+ **14**	= 35	+ **17**
		Total, v. 1-7	86	= 32	+ 54	= 69	+ **17**
		Including the heading: Total, v. 1-7	90	= 36	+ 54	= 73	+ **17**

* V. 4c, being a matter of double dittography, the incomprehensible words מִנֹּ֥גַהּ מִמָּטָ֖ר are to be read:
מֵגִ֣יחַ מָטָ֖ר, 'rain causes to sprout' (HALOT, Vol. I, p. 189), which does not affect the number of words.

Observations

1. The search for the arithmetic centre of the text on word level reveals that v. 4c contains the 4 middle words, which are flanked by 41 words (86 = **41** + **4** + **41**):

    <div align="center">

    מַגִּיחַ מָטָר דֶּשֶׁא מֵאָרֶץ

    As rain causing verdure to sprout from the earth.[1]
    </div>

    A numerical computation brings to light that **41** represents the numerical value of בֶּן־יִשַׁי, 'the son of Jesse', which strongly suggests that this is authorial intent. The striking metaphor of the rain causing lush green vegetation to depict the just ruler was obviously designed to be the meaningful centre of the text on word level.

2. The arithmetic centre in terms of the 10 verselines falls on the two middle verselines, vs. 3c-4 (10 = 4 + 2 + 4), which evidently constitute the central core, and the larger meaningful centre of the text on verseline level:

מוֹשֵׁל בָּאָדָם צַדִּיק	One who rules people in justice
מוֹשֵׁל יִרְאַת אֱלֹהִים:	Who rules in the fear of God.
וּכְאוֹר בֹּקֶר יִזְרַח־שָׁמֶשׁ ^	Yes, as light of morning at sunrise,
בֹּקֶר לֹא עָבוֹת	A morning that is cloudless;
מַגִּיחַ מָטָר דֶּשֶׁא מֵאָרֶץ:	As rain causing verdure to sprout from the earth.

    The central core coincides precisely with the **17**-word divine oracle, which is preceded by **28** words in vs. 1-3b, and followed by **41** in vs. 5-7. The tripartite framework is reinforced by the fact that the three speakers govern the poetic structure: the poet, David, and YHWH, giving it a perfect symmetric pattern:

Canto I	v. 1	Strophe 1	2 verselines	**14** words 'spoken' by the poet
	vs. 2-3b	Strophe 2	2 verselines	**14** words spoken by David
Canto II	vs. 3c-4	Strophe 3	2 verselines	**17** words spoken by YHWH
Canto III	v. 5	Strophe 4	2 verselines	22 words spoken by David
	vs. 6-7	Strophe 5	2 verselines	19 words 'spoken' by the poet.

    Numerically, it is important to note that in Canto I **28** words are attributed to the poet and David, each of which speaks **14** words, and that they speak **41** words in Canto III (86 = **28** [14 + 14] + **17** + **41** [22 + 19]). The number **28** represents the numerical value of נְאֻם, 'oracle', the very first word of the Testament (14 + 1 + 13 = 28), exactly as in the Third and Fourth Oracular Blessings of Balaam in Numbers 24:3-9 and 24:15-24.

    But there is more to it, for **14** represents the numerical value of the name David, (4+6+4=**14**) his 'signature'. See pp. 2-3 in my analysis of 1 Samuel, and Observation 3 in my Analysis of Psalm 3, the first Davidic Psalm in the Psalter.

    As explained in Observation I, the **41** words spoken by David and the poet in vs. 5-7 represents the numerical value of בֶּן־יִשַׁי, 'the son of Jesse'.

3. The **17**-word divine oracle in the central core, about the prerequisites and characteristics of the messianic king, who rules people in justice, is strongly reminiscent of the vivid portrayal of such a ruler in Isa. 32:1-8. This passage has traditionally been interpreted as a messianic prophecy, but it is primarily a description of the circumstances concomitant to just rule, as I have argued elsewhere.[2]

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[1] Like the verb in v. 4a, the participle in 4c is governed by the preposition *k*, 'as', 'like', in 4a.

[2] See my study "The Particles *hen* and *hinneh*", in *Syntax and Meaning*: *Studies in Hebrew Syntax and Biblical Exegesis*, by C.J. Labuschagne, C. van Leeuwen, M.J. Mulder, H.A. Brongers, B. Jongeling, L. Dequeker, and P.A.H. de Boer (Oudtestamentische Studiën 18), E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1973), pp. 1-14, especially p. 11.

Taking the particle *hen* as introducing the protasis to an interrogative clause, the first part of the passage in question, Isa. 32:1-3, should be translated as follows:

> *When* a king reigns in righteousness and ministers rule with justice
>
> And each of them is a refuge from the wind and a shelter from the tempest
>
> Like streams of water in dry ground, like the shade of a great rock in thirsty land
>
> *Will not* the eyes of the seeing then see and the ears of the hearing hear?

Note the image of the 'streams of water in dry ground', which corresponds with the 'rain causing verdure to sprout from the earth'. And compare also the imagery of prosperity that permeates Psalm 72!

4. Apart from the **17**-word oracle, this divine name number features also in Canto I (**17** words after *atnach*), and in Canto III (**17** words after *atnach*).

5. The name יהוה occurs only 1x (v. 2a).

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