

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
<u>2 Sam. 22-23:7</u>	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 **נֹאֵם**, 'oracle' (the very first word of the Testament), and **41** represents the numerical value of **בֶּן־יֵשׁוּעַ**, '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	וְאֵלֶּה דְבָרֵי דָוִד הָאֲחֻרָיִם	4	4			
	נֶאֱמַר דָּוִד בְּיָשׁוּ׃	1	4	4	4	
	וְנֶאֱמַר הַנֶּבֶר׃ הַקֶּם עָלַי	4		4	4	
	מִשִּׁיחַ אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב	2	3	3	3	
	וְנֹשֵׂים זְמֵרוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל׃	3		3	3	
	Strophe 1 v. 1	14	= 0	+ 14	= 14	
2	רוּחַ יְהוָה דִּבְרָבִי	3	4	4	4	
	וּמִלְתּוֹ עַל־לְשׁוֹנִי׃	3		3	3	
3a	אָמַר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	4	3	3	3	
3b	לִי דָבָר צִוֶּר יִשְׂרָאֵל	4	4		4	
	Strophe 2 v. 2-3b	14	= 11	+ 3	= 14	
	Canto I v. 1-3b	28	= 11	+ 17	= 28	
3c	Middle verselines, מוֹשֵׁל בְּאֲדָם צַדִּיק	5	3	3	3	
3d	meaningful centre. מוֹשֵׁל יִרְאֵת אֱלֹהִים׃	3		3	3	
4	(10 = 4 + 2 + 4) וּכְאֹרֶךְ בָּקָר יִזְרַח־שֶׁמֶשׁ	6	4	4	4	
	Middle words (86=41+4+41) בָּקָר לֹא עֲבוֹת׃	3		3	3	
	מִנְגֵּה מִמָּטָר דֶּשֶׁא מֵאֲרָץ׃	4		4	4	
	* See below Canto II Strophe 3 v. 3c-4	17	= 4	+ 13	= 0 + 17	
5	כִּי־לֹא־כֵן בֵּיתִי עַם־אֱלֹהִים	7	6	6	6	
	כִּי בְרִית עוֹלָם שָׁם לִי	5		5	5	
	עֲרוּכָה בַּכֹּל וּשְׁמֵרָה	3		3	3	
	כִּי־כָל־יִשְׁעֵי וְכָל־חַפְצֵי	8	5	5	5	
	כִּי־לֹא יִצְמִיחַ׃	3		3	3	
	Strophe 4 v. 5	22	= 6	+ 16	= 22	
6	וּבְלִיעַל פְּקוּזֵי מִנְדַּר פְּלִהָם	9	4	4	4	
	כִּי־לֹא בִנְד יִקְחוּ׃	4		4	4	
7	וְאִישׁ יִנַּע בָּהֶם	10	3	3	3	
	יִמְלֹא בְרָזָל וְעֵץ חֲגִיתָה	4	4		4	
	וּבְאֵשׁ שָׂרוּף יִשְׂרָפוּ בַשָּׂבֶת׃ פ	4		4	4	
	Strophe 5 v. 6-7	19	= 11	+ 8	= 19	
	41 בְּיָשׁוּ׃ 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 מִנְגֵּה מִמָּטָר are to be read: מְנִיחַ מְטָר, '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 ($86 = 41 + 4 + 41$):

מִגֵּיחַ מָטָר דָּשָׂא מֵאָרֶץ

As rain causing verdure to sprout from the earth.¹

A numerical computation brings to light that **41** represents the numerical value of בְּן־יִשָּׁי, '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 בְּאֲדָם צְדִיק	One who rules people in justice
מוֹשֵׁל יִרְאַת אֱלֹהִים:	Who rules in the fear of God.
^ וְכֹאזֶר בֹּקֵר יִזְרַח־שָׁמֶשׁ	Yes, as light of morning at sunrise,
בֹּקֵר לֹא עָבוֹת	A morning that is cloudless;
מִגֵּיחַ מָטָר דָּשָׂא 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
		v. 5	Strophe 4	2 verselines	22 words spoken by David
Canto III]	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, which is $4 + 6 + 4 = 14$. See Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 3](#), the first Davidic Psalm in the Psalter. Note also that the 14th word in both Strophe 1 and 2 is Israel.

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

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).

Select Bibliography

P.A.H. de Boer, "Texte et traduction des paroles attribuées à David en 2 S xxiii 1-7", in : *Volume de Congrès. Strasbourg 1956 (VT 4 (1956), pp. 47-56*

H.N. Richardson, "The Last Words of David: Some notes on II Samuel 23:1-7", *JBL* 90 (1971), pp. 257-266

T.N.D. Mettinger, "The Last Words of David. A Study of Structure and Meaning in II Samuel 23:1-7", *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 41-42 (1976-77), pp. 147-156

R.J. Tournay, "Les 'dernières paroles de David': II Samuel xxiii, 1-7", *RB* 88 (1981), 481-504

G. del Olmo Lete, "David's Farewell Oracle (2 Samuel xxiii 1-7): a Literary Analysis", *VT* 34 (1984), pp. 414-437

J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel* (Van Gorcum: Assen/Maastricht, 1990), Volume III, pp. 355-362.

© 2008

Dr. C.J. Labuschagne
Brinkhorst 44
9751 AT Haren (Gron)
The Netherlands

labuschagne.cj@planet.nl

Senior Lecturer in Semitic Languages (retired),
University of Pretoria, South Africa
and
Professor of Old Testament (retired),
University of Groningen, The Netherlands