

A Personal Note

When I began to carry out my scholarly investigations into the numerical aspects of the Bible from approximately 1981 onwards, I was not sufficiently aware of the recent upsurge in kabbalistic mathematical exercises, number speculations, and other types of numerological practices and number juggling. Neither did I realize how deeply sceptical the biblical scholarly world was about numerical matters in general. What I could not sense either, was the danger of being associated with such unscholarly practices and having my work rejected out of hand. With hindsight, one of the mistakes I made in the beginning was that I failed to demarcate my numerical research at the outset clearly from these dubious numerological activities. It was only ten years later, in the Dutch version of the present book, that I dissociated myself explicitly from such practices. It is hard to say whether that would have changed the course of events.

What I did not realize and could not possibly foresee, was that the plain fact of my embarking on numerical research would put my scholarly reputation at risk and that I would be sidetracked from the inner circle of serious biblical scholarship. Knowing what happened to the Austrian orientalist and biblical scholar Claus Schedl during the sixties and seventies, whose numerical investigations were greeted with ridicule on the part of colleagues and summarily rejected, I was naively confident that the evidence I presented would enjoy favorable acceptance. However, I was faced with a very different reality from the outset by the totally unexpected negative reaction by two British scholars, P. R. Davies and D. M. Gunn, to my

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presentation of the numerical patterns of the Divine Speech Formulas in the Pentateuch in 1982.¹

I was sobered up particularly by the adverse response on the part of the majority of my colleagues to the two papers I read in the summer of 1983, the first at an international Deuteronomy Conference in Louvain (Belgium), and the second at the Eleventh Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament in Salamanca (Spain).²

In Louvain I was rather rudely reproached by the chairman of the session: "Do you want to lead us back to the Kabbalah?" After the lecture, only one Deuteronomy scholar, Duane Christensen, approached me to discuss my paper. Another colleague shook my hand saying: "Thanks for the lesson in mathematics, but I don't believe you!"

During my lecture in Salamanca, my wife and son, who were in the audience, counted no less than eleven attendants at the session who left the hall rather demonstratively. Some of them crumpled up my handouts and threw them on the floor. The tone of the discussion following the presentation of the paper was set by a colleague who expressed his disappointment that a reputed scholar could get himself involved in such futile activities. My work was greeted with such disbelief and contempt that I began to realize that it was destined to be ridiculed and dismissed.

After the session, I found myself completely alone, standing there on the square, out of earshot surrounded by groups of gesticulating colleagues obviously discussing the problem of Labuschagne. Nobody wanted to talk to me or to be seen in my company. There was one exception: the next day, during an excursion to Avila, a Jewish scholar laid his hand gently upon my arm and whispered the following words, which I would cherish during the years to come: "The ways of the Almighty are wonderful. To think that, after goys like Wellhausen and his followers had dissected the Torah, He once again uses a goy to open our eyes to its unity."

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It was in Salamanca that I fathomed the significance of the word outcast, and during the years that followed, I would also perceive what it means to be held up as an object of ridicule behind one's back. However, there was no doubt in my mind that if this was the price I had to pay for a scholarly discovery I believed in and considered significant, I was fully prepared to pay dearly. Any alternative would mean sacrificing my scholarly conscience. Therefore, despite the expectation among some of my colleagues that I would come to my senses and stop such activities, I confidently persisted in pursuing my numerical research, encouraged by what I discovered all along.

What I am presenting in this book is only a fraction of my discoveries, and merely the tip of the iceberg of undetected secrets of the biblical text. I have no illusions about any immediate effect my pleas may have on biblical scholars, but I do have confidence in the convincing power of truth on the basis of the massive amount of evidence I hereby lay on their desks.

