

Preface

Through the ages no literary work has received so much attention as the Bible, which has been handed down from generation to generation so carefully, studied so diligently and commented upon so thoroughly. Many avenues of its writings have been explored and numerous aspects investigated in detail. Especially during the past century biblical scholars have devoted much time and energy in addressing the many questions, both literary and historical, raised by this complicated body of literature. One would think that by now the Bible must have yielded all its secrets. Yet nothing is less true, judged by the discovery in recent times of a virtually undetected and practically unknown facet of the biblical writings.

This discovery concerns a hitherto unrecognized principle of composition: the use of specific numbers in the organization and formation of the text of the canonical books of the Bible. Scholarly research the last couple of decades led to the conclusion that the biblical writings are numerical compositions. This means that they were not written off the cuff, but carefully devised and meticulously composed and structured with the help of certain numbers. These numbers have a specific symbolic meaning, on the basis of which they seem to have been used to deepen and enhance the meaning of the text. Since I have been deeply involved personally in the discovery of the numerical aspects of the Bible, I intend to take the readers on an exploratory expedition in order to let them discover for themselves what has been uncovered in this respect.

Preface

The people responsible for handing down the canonical books of the Old Testament confront us with the fascinating phenomenon of counting verses, words, and letters. We shall survey the striking occurrence of certain explicitly mentioned numbers in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Moreover, exploring the structure of the text more deeply, we shall become aware of the exceptionally high frequency of a limited number of extremely holy numerical symbols, representing God's name and presence, woven into the very fabric of the text of Scripture. We shall become acquainted with the fascinating world of the biblical writers and with the way in which they constructed their literary compositions with great professional skill and craftsmanship.

The present book was not written for specialists. As a matter of fact, apart from a few tyros, including myself, there are no scholars with any specialized knowledge of these matters; for this is a completely new field of study. The book is intended for everyone who is interested in the Bible as literature, regardless whether the reader is a professional scholar or a lay reader, Jew or Christian, churchgoer or not. The reader might find some pages a bit technical—which was unavoidable—but I have tried to use clear and comprehensible language.

A previous version of the book was published in Dutch under the title *Vertellen met Getallen: Functie en symboliek van getallen in de bijbelse oudheid* in 1992 and has since then been reprinted. The publisher, Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, has kindly given me permission to publish it in English. Since I was free to bring about whatever changes I deemed necessary or desirable, and to add more detail, the present version is a total rewrite.

I am indebted to Professor Duane L. Christensen and Dr. William R. Scott, who showed interest in the book and willingness to include it in the publications of BIBAL Press. Duane Christensen, one of those Old Testament scholars who have come to realize that biblical study can benefit from taking the numerical aspects of the Bible seriously, has worked through

Preface

my translation and offered several valuable suggestions. Moreover, he brought my English to a higher level. For all this I wish to thank him most sincerely.

Haren, The Netherlands. Winter 1998/1999

