

15. Numerical Features of the Book of Esther

In 2002-2003 Duane Christensen and I worked on a joint project to map the DNA of a number of biblical writings in terms of their numerical features. Having scrutinized the text of Esther, we agreed on four minor emendations in order to restore the original canonical text. For the emendations in 2:22a and 5:4b, see below; in 6:4a we read **אלֹהֵי הַחֲזָר** instead of **לְהַחֲזִיר** and in 6:8b we omit **וְאִשָּׁר**. There is no need to delete the whole clause (with Gunkel, et al.), which is lacking in the Greek translations. It should be retained as a meaningful detail about the horse, as rightly pointed out by A. Loader (ATD 16/2, 1992, p. 256), but then, in my opinion, without **וְאִשָּׁר**. Moreover, the niph'al should be read as a participle: **נִתֵּן כִּפְתָר**, 'given, or provided with, a headdress'. I propose the following translation:

"Let there be brought a royal robe the king himself has worn, and a horse on which the king rides, provided with a royal headdress on its head." Cf. *HALOT*, Vol. 2, 506.

The emendations in chapter 6 have no effect on the total word-count, only on the words before and after atnach. The Book of Esther appears to be a meticulously designed numerical composition by means of the two divine name numbers **17** and **26**. Of special significance in particular is the striking numerical structure of chapter 7 dealing with the unmasking and conviction of Haman, and the amazing overall structure of the book on the basis of the verse divider atnach.

I sincerely hope that these numerical features will elicit a fresh discussion on the benchmarks for textual criticism and our estimation of the biblical text. My experience with the logotechnical analysis of biblical texts has led to a deeper understanding, on my part, of their compositional form and aroused in me a greater appreciation of the literary craftsmanship of the biblical writers. Inevitably this evoked in me a great measure of reticence and restraint when it comes to emending MT.

Chapter	Before atnach	After atnach	Total	Explanations
1	187	184	371	187 = 11 x 17
2	261 (BH 262)	176	437 (438)	Omit הַמַּלְכָּה in vs. 22a (LXX)
3	184	119	303	119 = 7 x 17
4	175	110	285	
5	139	125 (BH 126)	264 (265)	Omit הַיּוֹם in vs. 4b (MSS, Syr)
6	127 (BH 126)	136 (BH 137)	263	136 (8x17)
7	119 (7 x 17)	68 (4 x 17)	187	187 = 11 x 17
8	209	134	343	343 = 7 x 7 x 7
9	372	172	544	544 = 32 x 17
10	29	17	46	
Total	1802 (106 x 17)	1241 (73 x 17)	3043	3043 = 179 x 17

- Chapter 1 **187 (11x17)** before atnach; vv. 1-11 **170 (10x17)**; vv. 2-3 **26**; vv. 4-5 **34 (2x17)**; v. 11 **17**; vv. 14-15 **34**; v. 18 **17**
- Chapter 2 v. 1 **17**; v. 15 **34**; v. 18 **17**; vv. 19-20 **26**; vv. 19-23 **68 (4x17)**
- Chapter 3 **119 (7x 17)** after atnach; vv. 1-3 **52 (2x26)**; vv. 7-8 **52**; vv. 12-14 **85 (5x17)**
- Chapter 4 **17** verses; vv. 1-3 **52 (2x26)**; vv. 1-12 **204 (12x17)**; v. 5 **17**; v. 8 **26**
- Chapter 5 v. 5 **17**; vv. 9-12 **78 (3x26)**

- Chapter 6 **136** (8x17) after atnach; v. 3 **17**
- Chapter 7 total **187** (11x17); **119** (7x17) before atnach; **68** (4x17) after atnach
- Chapter 8 **17** verses; vv. 1-6 **119**; v. 5 **34**; v. 10/13 **17**; v. 11 **26**; vv. 15-17 **51** (3x17)
- Chapter 9 total **544** (32x17); v. 3 **17**; vv. 1-2 **51** (3x17); vv. 3-32 **493** (29x17); v. 22 **26**
- Chapter 10 **17** after atnach
- Chapters 1-5 **714** (42x17) after atnach
- Chapters 1-6 **850** (50x17) after atnach
- Chapters 1-7 **918** (54x17) after atnach
- Chapters 6-7 **204** (12x17) after atnach
- Chapters 1-9 **1224** (72x17) in total
- Chapters 1-10 total **3043** (179x17); **1802** (106x17) before, and **1241** (73x17) after atnach.