

1. The Song at the Reed Sea in Exodus 15 — Logotechnical Analysis

Guidelines

- Please read the [General Introduction](#) and the Introduction to the [Embedded Poetry](#).
- For common features found in the numerical analysis charts, see the [Key to the charts](#).

Exodus 15:1b-18 in its Literary Context

- The Song at the Reed Sea is the first of the ten embedded hymns outside the Book of Psalms. Like its counterpart at the end of the Torah, the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32, with which it shares several significant features, it was composed along with its surrounding framework. The poem was not simply inserted as an inset hymn into the existing account of the Reed Sea event, but was woven from the same fabric as the material surrounding it. There is a logical flow of thought from the concluding verse of the Reed Sea story in 14:31 through 15:21. Being in awe of YHWH's saving act, the Israelites put their faith in him and in Moses (14:31) and with a Song of Praise they demonstrate their faith and celebrate YHWH's triumph and his incomparability (15:1-18).

In the Epilogue to the Song (v. 19), the author recapitulates the Reed Sea event, significantly in exactly the same way as Deut. 32:44 recapitulates the recital of the Song of Moses. The *parashah petuchah* (P) after v. 19 in MT is an indication that the Epilogue strictly belongs to the Song, with which it constitutes a numerical unit of **187** (11 x **17**) words. The narrative that follows, vs. 20-26, is also closely connected to the Song. It divides into two sections which are both modelled on the Song: the **26**-word Miriam episode, vs. 20-21, and the **52**-word Marah episode, vs. 22-26.

The striking similarity between the numerical structure of the Song and the narrative in 20-26 unequivocally attests to the compositional unity of vs. 1-26:

- vs. 1b-3 in the Song, and vs. 20-21 in the narrative have **26** words;
- vs. 4-7 and 8-10 in the Song, and vs. 22-23 in the narrative have **32** words;
- vs. 14-18 in the Song, and vs. 24-26 in the narrative have **52** (2 x **26**) words.

Note also that the latter passage, vs. 24-26, is precisely divided into **26** words in the narrative and **26** in YHWH's speech!

In terms of numerical composition, it is important to note that the statement about Israel's faith in YHWH and in Moses in 14:31 – the motive for singing the Song - is composed of **17** words, giving **204** (**12** x **17**) words for 14:31 – 15:19 (**187** + **17**). The **204** words are the product of the number **12**, symbolically representing the **12** sons of Jacob, and the divine name number **17**, symbolically representing YHWH. This supposition is buttressed by the fact that the **12** springs and **70** palm trees mentioned in 15:27 symbolically signify, in my view, the **12** sons of Jacob and his **70** descendants - compare Exod.1:1-5.

But there is more: the word מַיִם, 'water', occurs **7** times in the entire text, with 4 instances in vs. 22-26. Being the dominant theme in the account of the continuation of the journey of the Israelites through the desert, the key-word 'water' connects vs. 20-26 to the Song. This also holds true of the **10** occurrences of the key-word יָם, 'sea', and the **17** occurrences of the divine name in vs. 1-26.

Special Features of the Song at the Reed Sea

- I regard vs. 1b-18 as the poem proper. It is concluded by a Coda (v. 18, suddenly phrased in the 3rd person after the 2nd person passage in vs. 6-17). The poem is followed by a semi-poetic Epilogue (v. 19) which is closely linked to the Song by the significant number of words in vs. 1b-19, **187 (11 x 17)**.
- As the first embedded hymn in the Torah, the Song at the Reed Sea is a high grade numerical composition. As such, it sets the fashion for its counterpart at the end of the Torah, the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. Like the Song of Moses, its strophic structure is clearly determined by the divine name numbers **17** and **26**, and by the *kbod* number **32**, the decimal value of *kbwd*, 'glory' (20 + 2 + 6 + 4 = **32**), as shown in the chart. These numbers are woven into the fabric of the text in various ways, most significantly by way of concatenation in vs. 1-13. Moreover, they determine the strophic structure to a great extent.
- Apart from its impressive numerical features, the most defining characteristic of the Song is its unique, markedly regular rhetorical structure. It has exactly **39** verselines which are deliberately divided into **26** in vs. 1b-13 (Cantos I-III) and **13** in vs. 14-18 (Canto IV), in order to constitute the *YHWH-èchad* formula: **39 = 26 + 13**, which clearly alludes to YHWH's uniqueness so forcefully expressed in the meaningful centre of the Song (v. 11). **39** happens to represent the numerical value of the name Moses! See Observation 3.

The **39** verselines are consistently made up of strikingly terse bicola, giving **78** (3 x **26**) cola in total, divided into **52** (2 x **26**) in vs. 1b-13 and **26** in vs. 14-18.

The key to the understanding of the rhetorical structure is to be found in the three staircase parallelisms which appear at strategic points in the text: in v. 6, v. 11, and v. 16e-h (Perles, Cross & Freedman, Muilenburg, Howell, Fokkelman and others – see the Select Bibliography at the end of the file):

v. 6	נְאֻדְרֵי בְּכַח־ : תִּרְעַץ אוֹיֵב:	יְמִינֶךָ יְהוָה יְמִינֶךָ יְהוָה	Your right hand YHWH, majestic in power! Your right hand YHWH shattered the enemy!
v. 11	בְּאֵלִים יְהוָה נְאֻדְרֵי בְּקִדְשׁ־ : נוֹרָא תְהִלָּת עֲשֵׂה פִּלְא:	מִי־כְמֹכָה מִי־כְמֹכָה	Who is like you among the gods, YHWH? Who is like you majestic in holiness? Awesome in radiance working wonders!
v. 16e-h	עַמְּךָ יְהוָה : עַם־זֵו קָנִיתָ:	עַד־יַעְבֵּר עַד־יַעְבֵּר	Till they pass by: your people, YHWH! Till they pass by: the people you have produced!

This exceptionally terse staccato style (2+2 + 2+2; 2+2 + 2+2 + 2+2; 2+2 + 2+3, which can vary in terseness, e.g. in v. 2 (3+3 + 3+3) and v. 3 (3+2), has great power of expression. This also holds true for the unique phenomenon of the 1-word cola in v. 8d and 14b. The significantly longer second strophe in v. 5, which has 4 words, obviously functions to mark the end of Canto I and to focus special attention on the two extra words: כְּמוֹ־אֶבֶן, 'like a stone'. This phrase recurs in v. 16 as one word:

כְּאֶבֶן, 'as a stone'. Compare כְּעֹפֶרֶת, 'as lead', in v. 10c at the end of Canto II.

For an overview of the compositional structure of the Song, see Observation 2.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza: || Canticle/Section boundary: | Staircase: □

- Labuschagne: The canto structure of the Song is based on content and the direction of address, while the strophic structure is primarily based on numerical grounds: vs. 1b-3, 4-5 || □-7, 8-10 || □, 12-13 ||| 14-15 | 16a-d-□, 17-18 (4 cantos, with 9 strophes - v. 11 being the central strophe – and 39 verselines with 78 (3 x 26) cola – compare Fokkelman). In terms of content and verselines, I find a strong caesura - ||| - between vs. 1b-13 and 14-18 - See Observation 2.
- Pieter van der Lugt (private communication, 2014): 1-2, 3-5 || 6-8, 9-10 || 11-13, 14-16ab || 16cd-18 (4 cantos, 21 verselines, 44 cola, taking vs. 8 and 15 as tricola).
- Duane Christensen (BIBAL.net, 2006) takes v. 19 as part of the poetic body of the poem, which he arranges in a nested menorah pattern: 1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8, 9, 10, 11-12a, 12b-13, 14-15, 16, 17-18, 19 (13 strophes), with v. 10 at the centre.
- Jan P. Fokkelman (*Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible*, Volume I: Ex. 15, Deut 32, and Job 3, Assen, 1998, pp. 24-53) follows Perles, Cross & Freedman, and Muilenburg in broad outline: 1, 2-3, 4-5 || □, 7, 8, 9, 10, □ || 12-13, 14, 15a-d, 15e-16d || □, 17, 18 (4 stanzas with 16 strophes, 39 verselines and 78 cola).
- R.D. Patterson (“The Song of Redemption”, *WTJ* 57 (1995), 453-461): 1b-2 || 3-5, □ || 7, 8-10, □ || 12-16a, □ || 17-18.
- Maribeth Howell (“Exodus 15, 1b-18: A poetical Analysis”, *ETL* 65 (1989), 5-42): 1b, 2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-10, 11-12 || 13, 14-16, 17, 18. She finds 2 stanzas with 10 strophes, taking vs. 13 as a separate strophe and vs. 14-16 as one strophe. Though she uses the term bicolon (finding 72 cola), she does not explicitly refer to (verse)line, of which there are 36 in her colometric division, taking vs. 8c-f, 14a-d, and 16e-h as bicola: 8c-d, 14a-b, and 16c-d.
- C. Houtman (*Exodus*, 1989): 1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-10, 11, 12-17, 18 (6 strophes, regarding v. 1b as setting the stage, and v. 18 as a coda).
- D. N. Freedman (“The Song of the Sea”, in: *Pottery, Poetry and Prophecy*, Winona Lake IN, 1980, pp. 179-186): 1, 2 || 3-5, □ || 7-8, 9-10 □, 12-14, 15-16a-d □ || 17-18 (4 sections with 10 strophes). Compare F. Perles (1896) below.
- James Muilenburg (“A Liturgy on the Triumphs of Yahweh”, in: *Studia Semitica et Biblica Th. C. Vriezen dedicata* (1966), pp. 233-251): 1b | 2-3, 4-5, □ || 7-8, 9-10 □ || 12-14, 15-16b, □ || 17 | 18 (3 divisions concluded by hymnic responses).
- John D. W. Watts (*Vetus Testamentum* 7, 1957): 1b-3, 4-5 | 6-7, 8-10, 11-12 || 13 + 14a + 15a + 15b + 16bc | 17a + 15c + 16a + 14b + 17b + 17c (2 parts with two strophes each: 1b-12, in a strict sense the Song at the Sea, and 13-17 (reconstructed), the effect of Israel’s deliverance upon its later history).
- Marc Rozelaar (*Vetus Testamentum* 2, 1952): 1b, 2-5, 6-10, 11-13, 14-17, 18 (4 strophes, with 1b as a prologue and 18 as an epilogue).
- F.M.Th. de Liagre Böhl (*Tekst en Uitleg*, 1928) regards v. 19 as part of the poetic body of the poem in its present form: 1b-2, 3-5, 6-7, 8-9 || 10-11, 12-14, 15-16b, 16c-18 (2 sections with originally 8 strophes (4 + 4), to which v. 19 was later added to form the 9th strophe: v. 18-19).
- F. Perles (“Zur althebräischen Strophik”, *WZKM* 10 (1896), 103-114. He deserves the credit for being, as far as I know, the first to identify the structuring function of the three

staircase parallisms): 1b-3, 4-5, 6 || 7-10, 11 || 12-16a, 16b || 17-18. Compare also F. Perles, "On the Strophic Form of Exodus 15", *JQR* 17 (1926-27) 403-404.

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: the poem (2nd and 3rd person); **d**: words in the narrative framework.
- The numbers to the right of the Hebrew text relate to the **39 verselines**.

		Total	a	b	c/c	d
1 a	Narrative	אֲזַיִשִׁיר־מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	5	5		5
	Framework	אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לִיהוָה ¹	4	4		4
		וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְאַמְרָה	2	2		2
1b	The word ים , כִּי־נָאֲחַ נֹאֲחַ	אֲשִׁירָה לִיהוָה ²	5		5	
	'sea', occurs 10x	סוּס וּרְכָבּוֹ רָמָה ¹ בָּיָם:	4		4	
	in vs. 1-26	Hymnic Introitus, v. 1b	9	= 0	+ 9	= 9 + 0
2		עָזַי וְזִמְרַתִּי יְהוָה ³ וַיְהִי־לִי לִישׁוּעָה	3	6		6
		זֶה אֱלֹהֵי וְאַנְוָהוּ אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי וְאַרְמְנָהוּ:	4		6	6
3		אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה יְהוָה ⁴ אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה יְהוָה ⁵ שְׁמוֹ:	5	5	3	2
		Total, v. 2-3	17	= 9	+ 8	= 17 + 0
	Strophe 1	Total, v. 1b-3	26	= 9	+ 17	= 26 + 0
4		מִרְכַּבַּת פָּרְעֹה וַחִילוֹ יָרָה ² בָּיָם	6	5		5
		וּמִבְחַר שְׁלֹשׁוֹ טָבְעוּ ³ בָּיָם־סוּף:	7	5		5
5		תַּהֲמַת יִכְסִּימוּ [^] יָרְדוּ בַמְצוּלָת כְּמוֹ־אָבֹן:	8	6	2	4
	Strophe 2	Total, v. 4-5	16	= 7	+ 9	= 16 + 0
	Canto I	Total, v. 1b-5	42	= 16	+ 26	= 42 + 0
6		יִמְיִנְדָּה יְהוָה ⁶ נֹאדְרֵי בַפֶּחַי	9	4	4	4
		תִּרְעַץ אוֹיֵב: יְהוָה ⁷ יִמְיִנְדָּה	10	4		4
7		וּבְרַב גְּאוּנָה תַחַרֵּס קַמִּיָּה	11	4	4	4
		תִּשְׁלַח חַרְנֶנְךָ יֹאכְלֵמוֹ כִּקְשׁ:	12	4		4
	Strophe 3	Total, v. 6-7	16	= 8	+ 8	= 16 + 0
		Total, v. 4-7	32	= 15	+ 17	= 32 + 0
		Total, v. 1b-7	58	= 24	+ 34	= 58 + 0
8	The word 'water',	וּבְרוּחַ אַפְיֶךָ נִעְרַמוּ ¹ מַיִם	13	4	4	4
	occurs 7 times	נִצְבּוּ כְמוֹ־נֶדַד נוֹלִים	14	4	4	4
	in vs. 1-26	קָפְאוּ תַהֲמַת בְּלֵב־אָיִם:	15	4		4
9		אָמַר אוֹיֵב אֶרְדָּף אֲשִׁיג	16	4	4	4
		אֶחְלַק שְׁלָל [^] תִמְלֵאמוּ נַפְשֵׁי	17	4	2	2
		אֶרְיֵק חַרְבֵי תוֹרִישְׁמוּ יָדַי:	18	4		4
10	Middle words:	נִשְׁפַּת בְּרוּחְךָ כְּסָמוּ ⁵ יָם	19	4	4	4
	82 + 4 + 82	צָלְלוּ כְעוֹפֶרֶת ² בַּמַּיִם אֲדִירִים:	20	4		4
	Strophe 4	Total, v. 8-10	32	= 18	+ 14	= 32 + 0
	Canto II	Total, v. 6-10	48	= 26	+ 22	= 48 + 0

11	Middle strophe:	מִי־כְמֹכָהּ בְּאֵלִים ⁸ יְהוָה	21	4	4	4	
	Designed meaningful	מִי כְּמֹכָהּ נֶאֱדָר בְּקִדְשׁ־אֱ	22	4	4	4	
	centre:	9 = 4 + 1 + 4	23	4	4	4	
		נוֹרָא תְהִלָּת עֲשֵׂה פְּלֹא־:					
	Strophe 5	Total, v. 11		12	= 8	+ 4	= 12 + 0
		Total, v. 8-11		44	= 26	+ 18	= 44 + 0
		Total, v. 6-11		60	= 34	+ 26	= 60 + 0
12		נְטִיתַי יְמִינֶךָ תִּבְלַעְמוּ אֶרֶץ־:	24	4	4	4	
13		נְחִיתַי בְּחִסְדֶּךָ עִם־זֵנוּ נֶאֱלַת־אֱ	25	5	5	5	
		נִתְלַת בְּעֹזֶךָ אֶל־גְּוָה קִדְשֶׁךָ:	26	5	5	5	
	Strophe 6	Total, v. 12-13		14	= 9	+ 5	= 14 + 0
	Canto III	Total, v. 11-13		26	= 17	+ 9	= 26 + 0
		Total, v. 8-13		58	= 35	+ 23	= 58 + 0
14		שָׁמְעוּ עַמִּים יִרְגְּזוּן־	27	3	3	3	
		חֵיל אֲחֹז יִשְׁבִי פְּלִשְׁת־:	28	4	4	4	
15		אֲז נִבְהַלּוּ אֱלֹהֵי אֲדוֹם	29	4	4	4	
		אֵילֵי מוֹאָב יֶאֱחַזְמוּ רַעַד־	30	4	4	4	
		נִמְנוּ כָּל יִשְׁבֵי כְּנָעַן־:	31	4	4	4	
	Canticle IV.1	Strophe 7	Total, v. 14-15	19	= 11	+ 8	= 19 + 0
16a-d		תִּפְּל עֲלֵיהֶם אֵימַתָּה וַפְּחַד	32	4	4	4	
		בְּגִדְל זְרוּעֶךָ יִדְמוּ כְּאֶבֶן־	33	4	4	4	
16e-h		עַד־יַעֲבֹר עִמָּךָ ⁹ יְהוָה	34	4	4	4	
		עַד־יַעֲבֹר עִם־זֵנוּ קְנִיית־:	35	5	5	5	
	Strophe 8	Total, v. 16		17	= 8	+ 9	= 17 + 0
17		תִּבְאָמוּ וְתִטְעֲמוּ בְּתֵר נִחְלָתֶךָ	36	4	4	4	
		מִכֹּזֵן לְשִׁבְתֶּךָ פִּעֲלֵת ¹⁰ יְהוָה־	37	4	4	4	
		מִקִּדְשׁ אֲדָנִי כֹונְנוּ יִדְיֶךָ:	38	4	4	4	
18	Coda	¹¹ יְהוָה וְיִמְלֶךְ לְעֵלְמֵם וְעַד־:	39	4	4	4	
	Strophe 9	Total, v. 17-18		16	= 12	+ 4	= 16 + 0
	Canticle IV.2	Total, v. 16-18		33	= 20	+ 13	= 33 + 0
	Canto IV	Total, v. 14-18		52	= 31	+ 21	= 52 + 0
		Total, v. 6-18		126	= 78	+ 48	= 126 + 0
	The Song	Total, v. 1b-18		168	= 90	+ 78	= 168 + 0
19		כִּי בֹא סוֹס פִּרְעֹה בְּרִכְבּוֹ וּבִפְרָשָׁיו ⁶ בָּיִם		7	7	7	
		וַיִּשָּׁב ¹² יְהוָה עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת־ ³ מִי ⁷ תְּנִים־		6	6	6	
		וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִלְכוּ בִּיפְשָׁה בְּתוֹךְ ⁸ תְּנִים־: פ		6	6	6	
	Epilogue: Recapitulation	v. 19		19	= 13	+ 6	= 19 + 0
	(Deut. 32:44!)	Total, v. 18-19		23	= 17	+ 6	= 23 + 0
		Total, v. 1b-19		187	= 103	+ 84	= 187 + 0
		Total, v. 1a-19		198	= 114	+ 84	= 187 + 11

20	Narrative	וַתִּקַּח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה אֶת־הַלֵּן	5	5	5
	Framework Continued	אֶת־הַתֹּף בְּיָדָהּ	3	3	3
		וַתִּצְאֵן כָּל־הַנָּשִׁים אַחֲרֶיהָ בַּתְּפִים וּבַמְּחֹלֶת:	17	6	6
21		וַתִּעַן לָהֶם מִרְיָם	3	3	3
	The Refrain	שִׁירוֹ ¹³ לַיהוָה כִּי־נָאֲחַ נָאֲחַ	5	9	5
	sung by Miriam	סוּס וּרְכָבוֹ רָמָה ⁹ כַּיָּם: ס	4	4	4
	Total, v. 20-21		<u>26</u>	<u>= 11 + 15</u>	<u>= 0 + 26</u>
	Total, v. 1b-21		<u>213</u>	<u>= 114 + 99</u>	<u>= 187 + 26</u>
	Total, v. 1a-21		<u>224</u>	<u>= 125 + 99</u>	<u>= 187 + 37</u>

At Marah YHWH put the people of Israel to the test

Column **c**: words in the divine speech; **d**: words in the narrative framework

		Total	a	b	c	d
22	וַיֹּסַע מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל ¹⁰ מֵיַם־סוּף	6	6			6
	וַיִּצְאֹו אֶל־מִדְּבַר־שׁוּר	4	4			4
	וַיִּלְכְּוּ שְׁלֹשַׁת־יָמִים בַּמִּדְבָּר	4		4		4
	Middle of 7 instances of	3		3		3
	the word מַיִם, 'water', in vs. 1-26.	17	= 10	+ 7	= 0	+ 17
23	וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְּבַר־וְלֹא יָכֹלוּ	4	4			4
	לִשְׁתֹּת ⁵ מֵיַם מִמַּדְּבַר כִּי מַרִּים הֵמָּה	6	6			6
	עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמֹה מַרְהָ:	5		5		5
	Total, v. 22-23	<u>32</u>	<u>= 20</u>	<u>+ 12</u>	<u>= 0</u>	<u>+ 32</u>
24	וַיִּלְנֹו הָעָם עַל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר מַדְּנִשְׁתָּה:	7	7			7
25a	וַיִּצְעַק אֶל־ ¹⁴ יְהוָה וַיִּזְרְחוּ ¹⁵ יְהוָה עֵץ	6	6			6
	וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶל־ ⁶ הַמַּיִם וַיִּמְתְּקוּ ⁷ הַמַּיִם	5	5		26	5
25b	שָׁם לֹו חֶק וּמִשְׁפָּט וְשָׁם נִסְהוּ:	7		7		7
26	וַיֹּאמֶר אִם־שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָע לְקוֹלִי ¹⁶ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ	7	7		6	1
	Divine speech addressed to Israel	5	5		5	
	וְהִישָׁר בְּעֵינָיו תַּעֲשֶׂה וְהִאֲזַנְתָּ לְמִצְוֹתָיו	3	3		3	
	וְשָׁמַרְתָּ כָּל־חֻקָּיו	5		5	5	
	כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר־שָׁמַתִּי בְּמִצְרַיִם	7		7	7	
	* לֹא־אֲשִׁים עֲלֶיךָ כִּי אֲנִי ¹⁷ יְהוָה רַפְּאֵךְ: ס					
	Total, v. 26	<u>27</u>	<u>= 15</u>	<u>+ 12</u>	<u>= 26</u>	<u>+ 1</u>
	Total, v. 25a-26	<u>45</u>	<u>= 26</u>	<u>+ 19</u>	<u>= 26</u>	<u>+ 19</u>
	Total, v. 25b-26	<u>34</u>	<u>= 15</u>	<u>+ 19</u>	<u>= 26</u>	<u>+ 8</u>
	Total, v. 24-26	<u>52</u>	<u>= 33</u>	<u>+ 19</u>	<u>= 26</u>	<u>+ 26</u>
	Total, v. 19-26	<u>129</u>	<u>= 77</u>	<u>+ 52</u>	<u>= 45</u>	<u>+ 84</u>
	Grand Total, v. 1a-26	<u>308</u>	<u>= 178</u>	<u>+ 130</u>	<u>= 213</u>	<u>+ 95</u>

* The divine name occurs **17** times in the Song, the Epilogue and the narrative (vs. 20-26). It shares this feature with the Song of Moses and its Framework. See Observation 4 below.

Observations

1. The Meaningful centre of the Song

In terms of the 168 words of the Song, the middle words are to be found in **v. 10ab** (168 = 82 + 4 + 82):

נִשְׁפָּתָ בְּרוּחָהּ כַּסּוּמוֹ יָם You blew with your blast: the sea covered them

In themselves, these words are meaningful, since they describe the practical side of YHWH's saving act. For the gist of the poem, representing its quintessential idea, we have to look for another deliberately designed meaningful centre. This is to be found on the level of the strophic structure: the middle Strophe 5, **v. 11** (9 = 4 + 1 + 4):

מִי־כַמֶּנְכָה בְּאֵלִים יְהוָה	Who is like you among the gods, YHWH?
מִי כַמֶּנְכָה נֹאדָר בְּקִדְשׁוֹ	Who is like you majestic in holiness?
נֹרָא תְהִלַּת עֲשֵׂה פְלֵא:	Awesome in radiance working wonders!

The meaningful centre, Strophe 5, **v. 11**, stands out for several reasons.

First, it contains the pivotal instance of the three conspicuous staircase parallelisms (vs. 6, 11, and 16e-h) – in box in the chart. Its striking form makes it noticeable as being of crucial importance.

The first staircase parallelism, v. 6, stands at the beginning of Canto II dealing with YHWH's powerful deed, shattering the enemy.

The staircase parallelism in v. 11 stands at the beginning of Canto III dealing with the meaning of YHWH's triumphant manifestation, the salvation of his people and *leading* them to his holy dwelling-place.

The third one, v. 16e-h, is positioned in a **17**-word strophe (v. 16) which stands at the beginning of Cantic IV.2 dealing with the fulfilling of YHWH's intention to *plant* them in his dwelling-place.

For the function of the striking rhetorical device of the staircase parallelism, see James Muilenburg, "A Liturgy on the Triumphs of Yahweh", in: *Studia Semitica et Biblica Th. C. Vriezen dedicata* (1966), pp. 233-251, as well as David Noel Freedman ("The Song of the Sea", in: *Pottery, Poetry and Prophecy*, Winona Lake IN, 1980, pp. 179-186, and more recently J. P. Fokkelman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible*, Vol. I: Ex. 15, Deut 32, and Job 3, Assen, 1998, pp. 24-53.

Second, v. 11 contains the only rhetorical question in the poem, the strongest possible mode of expression. In comparison with an ordinary statement, the rhetorical question, which implicitly elicits a response from the hearer, is far superior when it comes to power of expression.

Rhetorical questions are frequently used in the Old Testament to express the absolute power, uniqueness, singularity and incomparability of a person, especially of YHWH. The rhetorical question is one of the most forceful and effectual ways employed in speech for driving home some idea or conviction. Because of its impressive and persuasive effect, the hearer is not merely listener: he is forced to frame the expected answer in his mind, and by doing so, he actually becomes a co-expressor of the speaker's conviction. See my dissertation *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament*, E.J. Brill: Leiden, 1966, p. 23.

Third, in the Masoretic tradition the word כַּמֶּנְכָה, 'like you', is written in an unusual way: the word is normally written כְּמִנְךָ. The present form may have been intended as a graphic indication that v. 11 is of special importance.

As I have argued in my dissertation - dealing with the idea of YHWH's incomparability within the framework of corresponding expressions used in the daily speech of

Biblical times, and against the background of similar utterances in the religious languages of Mesopotamia, Egypt and Ugarit – the characteristics of YHWH associated with the idea that he is incomparable were considered his defining qualities that distinguish him from all other gods.

The first and foremost among these qualities are YHWH's saving acts in Israel's history as the redeeming God, the God of justice who frees the enslaved and helps the weak and the suppressed. In short, his peerlessness emerged through the events of the Exodus. This idea permeates the texts relating to YHWH's incomparability and reverberates particularly in the hymns praising him for this.

The relevant texts: **Ex. 8:6 (10); Ex. 9:14;**), The Song sung at the Reed Sea, **Ex. 15:11; Deut. 3:24; Deut. 4:7; Deut. 4:32-35;** The Song of Moses, **Deut. 32:39;** The Blessing of Moses, **Deut. 33:26-29;** the Song of Hannah, **1 Sam. 2:2;** the Prayer of David, **2 Sam. 7:22;** the Song of David, **2 Sam. 22:32** (cf. Ps. 18:32); the Prayer of Solomon, **1 Ki. 8:23.**

In the Book of Psalms: **Ps.35:9-10; Ps. 40:6; Ps. 71:14-19; Ps. 77:12-16; Ps. 86:8-10; Ps. 89:6-15; Ps. 113:5-7-9.**

And elsewhere: **2 Chron. 14:10; 2 Chron. 20:6; Isa. 40:18.25-26; Isa. 44:6-8; Isa. 46:5-13; Mi. 7:18.**

2. Overview of the compositional structure

In terms of content, the Song divides into two main parts:

- vs. 1b-13, dealing with the Exodus event
- vs. 14-18, the reaction of the nations and the fulfilling of YHWH's intention

The bipartite structure is underscored by the division of the **39** verselines into precisely **26** in vs. 1b-13, and **13** in vs. 14-18, which reflects the YHWH-'*echad*' formula: **39 = 26 + 13**. This numerical device buttresses the crucial idea of YHWH's uniqueness which is eloquently expressed in the meaningful centre in v. 11.

The compositional structure can be outlined as follows:

Canto I, vs. 1b-5	8 verselines	42 words	} 26 verselines
Strophe 1, vs. 1b-3	5 verselines	26 words	
Strophe 2, vs. 4-5	3 verselines	16 words	
Canto II, vs. 6-10	12 verselines	48 words	
Strophe 3, vs. 6 -7	4 verselines	16 words	
Strophe 4, vs. 8-10	8 verselines	32 words	
Canto III, vs. 11-13	6 verselines	26 words	} 13 verselines
Strophe 5, v. 11	3 verselines	12 words	
Strophe 6, vs. 12-13	3 verselines	14 words	
Canto IV, vs. 14-18	13 verselines	52 (2x26) words	
Strophe 7, vs. 14-15	5 verselines	19 words	} 13 verselines
Strophe 8, 16a-d e-h	4 verselines	17 words	
Strophe 9, vs. 17-18	4 verselines	16 words	

3. Significant numerical features of the Song and its Framework

- There are **308** words in the Song and its Framework: **44 x 7 = 28 x 11**.
- Compare the **462** words in the Song of Moses: **66 x 7 = 42 x 11**.
- The Song and its Framework are divided into **26** Masoretic verses.
- There are **17** occurrences of the divine name in the Song and its Framework.
- The number **39** (verselines) also represents the numerical value of the name *mšh* 'Moses', the reverse of *hšm*, 'the Name' (revealed to Moses in Exodus 3!): the positional value of h (5) + š (21) + m (13) = **39**.
- The Song is made up of **78** (3 x 26) cola.

- Including the Recapitulation (v. 19), we find **187 (11 x 17)** words.
- The Song has **168 (24x7)** words; including the **2-word** introductory formula: **170**.
- The statement about Israel's faith in YHWH (14:31) is composed of **17** words.
- vs. 2-3 **17** words in total
- vs. 1b-3, Strophe 1 **26** words, with **17** after *atnach*
- vs. 1b-5, Canto I **26** words after *atnach*
- vs. 4-7, Strophes 2-3 **32** words, with **17** after *atnach*
- vs. 1b-7 **58** words, with **34 (2 x 17)** after *atnach* (concatenation!)
- the **26** words in Strophe 1 and the **32** in Strophes 2-3 constitute the well-known *kebod-YHWH* formula: **58 = 32 + 26**
- vs. 8-10, Strophe 4 **32** words in total
- vs. 8-11, Strophes 4-5 **26** words before *atnach*
- vs. 6-11, Strophes 3-5 **60** words, with **34 (2 x 17)** before, and **26** after *atnach*
- vs. 6-10, Canto II **26** words before *atnach*
- vs. 11-13, Canto III **26** words, with **17** before *atnach*
- vs. 8-13 **58** words, once again **58 = 32 + 26** (*kebod-YHWH*)
- vs. 16, Strophe 8 **17** words in total
- vs. 14-18, Canto IV **52 (2 x 26)** words in total
- vs. 6-18 **78 (3 x 26)** words before *atnach*
- vs. 1b-18, the Song **78 (3 x 26)** words after *atnach*
- vs. 18-19 **17** words before *atnach*
- vs. 20-21a **17** words in the introduction to Miriam's Refrain
- vs. 20-21 **26** words dealing with Miriam's Refrain
- vs. 25a-26 **26** words before *atnach*
- vs. 25b-26 **34 (2 x 17)** words about YHWH putting Israel to the test
- vs. **26** **26** words in YHWH's speech
- vs. 24-26 **52 (2 x 26)** words, with **26** in the narrative (Column d)
- vs. 19-26 **52 (2 x 26)** words after *atnach*
- vs. 1a-26 **130 (5 x 26)** words after *atnach*
- vs. 1a-27 **187 (11 x 17)** words before *atnach*, including the last verse of the chapter, referring to the **12** springs and **70** palm trees, symbolically alluding to the **12** tribes of Israel and the **70** 'sons of Israel'. For the **12** sons of Jacob, who accompanied him to Egypt, and his **70** direct descendants, see Exod. 1:1-5. Compare also Observations 3 and 5 in my [Analysis of the Song of Moses](#) in Deuteronomy 32 to see how the number **70** reverberates there in various ways.

4. The divine name in 15:1-26

In vs. 1-19, the name יהוה occurs **11** times (1a, 1b, 3a, 3b, 6a, 6c, 11b, 16f, 17d, 18a, 19b) and יה **1x** (2a), altogether **12** occurrences. Including the **5** instances in the rest of the narrative framework (21b, 25a (2x), 26a and 26b), the total number in 15:1-26 rises to exactly **17**. In order to achieve this number, the author employed the designation אֲדֹנָי, 'my Lord', in v. 17e, instead of the expected divine name.

The fact that the Song of Moses and its Framework in Deuteronomy have **34 (2 x 17)** occurrences of the name YHWH is additional evidence for the conspicuously close relation between the great Song in Exodus 15 at the beginning of the journey through the desert, and the major Song in Deuteronomy 32 at the end of the journey. This fact is one of the items in the massive evidence attesting to the conceptual and compositional unity of the Torah.

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