

The Numerical Features of the Book of Deuteronomy

A New Approach to its Compositional Structure

Please read the [General Introduction](#)

Part VII 31,1-34,12 Moses' Concluding Discourse and the Epilogue (Revised)

There is numerical evidence in the final form of the book showing that Chapter 34 should be regarded as a separate literary entity which functions as an Epilogue. From [Deut 1,1](#) until [33,29](#) my computer counted **14118** (543x26) words, which is a strong indication that we have to do with a consciously designed preliminary finalizing and sealing of the text until this point. For a similar rounding off, at [28,69](#) and [30,20](#), see Observation 6 in [Part V](#) and Observation 4 in [Part VI](#).

Part VII can be divided into four main sections:

- Section I 31,1-20 Moses' Last Measures and Provisions
- Section II 32,1-52 The Song of Moses and his Final Charge on the Eve of his Death
- Section III 33,1-29 The Testamentary Blessing of Moses
- Section IV 34,1-12 Epilogue: Moses' Death and his Necrology

Since I have already analysed Deuteronomy 31-34 (in 2007), I shall not duplicate my work but limit myself by referring the reader to my earlier analyses and presenting here only a bird's eye view of Part VII and commenting on some salient features and elaborating on interesting new insights. Therefore, I may advise the reader to first have a look at this overview before turning to the more detailed analyses (to be found below).

For a comprehensive logotechnical analysis of the Framework to the Song of Moses ([31,1-30](#) and [32,44-34,12](#)), see my article "[The Framework to the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy](#)".

The Song has pride of place at the centre of its six-branched framework (without the Blessing):

- 31:1-13 Outer framework: Moses' final provisions in view of his imminent death
- 31:14-23 Interior framework: YHWH charges Moses and Joshua in the tent
- 31:24-30 Inner framework: Moses' provisions regarding the Song
- 32: 1-43 The Song of Moses**
- 32:44-47 Inner framework: Moses' final charge to 'all Israel'
- 32:48-52 Interior framework: YHWH commands Moses to climb the mountain
- 34:1-12 Outer framework: Moses' death and funeral as well as his necrology

For my analysis of the Song itself, see my article "[The Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32](#)".

For the Blessing and its positioning, see my article "[The Blessing of Moses in Deuteronomy 33](#)".

For the sake of convenience I shall discuss the salient features of the four Sections separately. The word- and letter-count shall be presented as an uninterrupted string.

Section I 31,1-30 Moses' Last Measures and Provisions

Chapter 31 is a literary entity in its own right, neatly delimited by means of a strong layout marker, the **Petuchah**, and rounded off by the **78** (3x26) words at the end ([vs. 27-30](#)), in line with the well-known finalizing technique found elsewhere in the book. In terms of material content and with the help of layout markers I divide Section I into seven paragraphs arranged in a menorah pattern:

- | | | |
|---------------------|--|----------|
| §1 Vs. 1-6 | Moses encourages the people | P |
| §2 Vs. 7-8 | Moses encourages Joshua | |
| §3 Vs. 9-13 | Moses' provisions regarding the Torah | P |
| §4 Vs. 14-15 | YHWH appears to Moses and Joshua in the Tent | S |
| §5 Vs. 16-21 | YHWH commissions Moses and Joshua to write a Song | |
| §6 Vs. 22-23 | Moses writes the Song and YHWH commissions Joshua | |
| §7 Vs. 24-30 | Moses' instructions to the Levites regarding the Torah | P |

Overview in Terms of Words, Letters, Speeches and the Divine Name

In Columns 1-3 the verses highlighted by **17** and **26** are in **bold face**

Vs	Text	Words	Letters	יהוה	Sum-W	Compositional Structure
1	Dt 31,1	9	33		9	§1 31,1-6 Moses' addresses All Israel Intro 11; Address 78 (3x26) words.
2	Dt 31,2	21	76	1	30	
3	Dt 31,3	19	78	2-3	49	
4	Dt 31,4	13	55	4	62	
5	Dt 31,5	10	44	5	72	
6	Dt 31,6	17	65	6	89/89 P	
7	Dt 31,7	27	102	7	116	§2 31,7-8 Moses addresses Joshua Intro 8; Address 34 (2x17) words.
8	Dt 31,8	15	53	8	131/42	
9	Dt 31,9	19	72	9	150	§3 31,9-13 Moses addresses the elders Intro 23; Address 75 words 31,9-13 Intro 23 + 75 Address
10	Dt 31,10	12	45		162	
11	Dt 31,11	19	74	10	181	
12	Dt 31,12	24	101	11	205	
13	Dt 31,13	24	92	12	229/98 P	
13	31,1-13	229	890	12x	229	31,1-13 Moses' addresses: Intro 42 + 187 (11x17) Address.
14	Dt 31,14	21	87	13	250	§4 14-15 YHWH tells Moses to call Joshua Narrative 21; Divine speech 11
15	Dt 31,15	11	42	14	261/32 S	
16	Dt 31,16	28	98	15	289	§5 31,16-21 YHWH addresses Moses He foresees Israel's apostasy: 67 words He orders Moses to write the Song: 73 words 31,16-21 Intro 4 + 140 Address
17	Dt 31,17	27	110		316	
18	Dt 31,18	16	56		332	
19	Dt 31,19	20	77		352	
20	Dt 31,20	22	92		374	
21	Dt 31,21	31	115		405/144	
22	Dt 31,22	11	43		416	§6 31,22-23 YHWH installs Joshua Narrative: 17 ; Address: 16
23	Dt 31,23	22	77		438/33	
10	31,14-23	209	797	3x	209	§§5-6 Narrative: 21; Divine Speeches: 156 (6x26) words.
24	Dt 31,24	12	41		450	§7 31,24-30 Moses addresses the Levites Narrative: 21; Address: 82 31,24-29 Intro 21 + 82 Address
25	Dt 31,25	9	34	16	459	
26	Dt 31,26	16	56	17	475	
27	Dt 31,27	21+	74	18	496	
28	Dt 31,28	18+	77		514	
29	Dt 31,29	27+	111	19	541/103	
30	Dt 31,30	12=78(3x26)	43		553/115 P	
30	31,1-30	553	2123	19x	553	

Observation 1 Moses' speech in **§7** ends at v. 29, since v. 30 is an editorial note introducing the Song in Chapter 32. However, in accordance with the delimiting function of the layout marker **P** after v. 30, the editorial note is structurally part of Section I. This is underscored by the fact that v. 30 is included in the **78**-word ending (vs. 27-30). The positioning of v. 30 is certainly not a matter of sloppy editing, but a deliberate decision in order to construct a cliffhanger. Since the introduction to the Song is positioned at the end of Chapter 30, it clearly functions as a cliffhanger anticipating the Song. Compare Num. 36,13, which refers primarily to Num. 22,1-36,12, but functions at the same time as a bridge and cliffhanger anticipating the book of Deuteronomy. For the scribal device I call a 'cliffhanger', see Observation 9 below.

Observation 2 What meets the eye immediately, from a numerical perspective, is that relatively few individual verses or groups of verses are highlighted by the divine name numbers. This is not surprising, considering that the author has reserved this for the seven speeches: Moses' first three speeches (**§§1-3**) are made up of **187 (11x17)** words (**78 + 34 + 75 = 187**), and YHWH's two addresses to Moses and Joshua (**§§5-6**) have altogether **156 (6x26)** words (**140 + 16 = 156**). This means that 22 of the 30 verses (73%) and 421 of the 553 words (76%) are highlighted by the divine name numbers.

Section II 32,1-52 The Song of Moses and his Final Charge before his Death

Vs	Text	Words	Letters	יהוה	Sum-W	Compositional Structure
31	Dt 32,1	7+	32		560	Canto I YHWH is great; the Israelites are disloyal
32	Dt 32,2	12+	49		572	Invitation: Heaven and earth called to listen: 7 words.
33	Dt 32,3	7=26	25	20	579	32,1-3 Antiphon: 26 words.
34	Dt 32,4	14	50		593	
35	Dt 32,5	8	27		601	
36	Dt 32,6	15	51	21	616/63	Canto I: 32,1-6 63 words.
37	Dt 32,7	13	51		629	Canto II YHWH's benefactions in the past and present
38	Dt 32,8	12	51		641	
39	Dt 32,9	7	24	22	648	
40	Dt 32,10	11	56		659	
41	Dt 32,11	12+	49		671	
42	Dt 32,12	7+	24	23	678	32,11-14 YHWH carries his people and he alone leads them, providing them with milk and honey: 51 words.
43	Dt 32,13	13+	55		691	
44	Dt 32,14	19=51 (3x17)	68		710/94	Canto II: 32,7-14 94 words.
45	Dt 32,15	12	52		722	Canto III Israel's disloyalty
46	Dt 32,16	4+	24		726	
47	Dt 32,17	13=17	52		739	
48	Dt 32,18	6	22		745/35	Canto III: 32,15-18 35 words.
49	Dt 32,19	6+	27	24	751	Canto IV YHWH decides to punish Israel with restraint
50	Dt 32,20	15+	53		766	
51	Dt 32,21	13=34 (2x17)	54		779	
52	Dt 32,22	14+	55		793	
53	Dt 32,23	6+	22		799	
54	Dt 32,24	14=34 (2x17)	49		813	
55	Dt 32,25	13+	48		826	
56	Dt 32,26	5+	26		831	
57	Dt 32,27	16=34 (2x17)	57	25	847	Canto IV: 32,19-27 102 (6x17) words.
58	Dt 32,28	8+	27		855	Canto V The enemies of Israel lack under standing and wisdom
59	Dt 32,29	6+	27		861	
60	Dt 32,30	14+	53	26	875	
61	Dt 32,31	6=34 (2x17)	27		881	Canto V: 32,28-31 34 (2x17) words.
62	Dt 32,32	12+	47		893	Canto VI YHWH challenges the no-gods as futile and proclaims his uniqueness and his sovereignty over life and death
63	Dt 32,33	6+	25		899	
64	Dt 32,34	6+	23		905	
65	Dt 32,35	13+	43		918	
66	Dt 32,36	15=52 (2x26)	53	27	933	Canto VI: 32,32-36 52 (2x26) words.
67	Dt 32,37	6+	21		939	Canto VII YHWH firmly resolves to wreak vengeance on his enemies: there is no god beside him
68	Dt 32,38	12+	53		951	
69	Dt 32,39	18+	67		969	Canto VII: 32,37-42 Intro: 1; Speech 68 (4x17)
70	Dt 32,40	9+	30		978	32,39-42 YHWH declares his incomparability: 51 words.
71	Dt 32,41	12+	49		990	
72	Dt 32,42	12=51 (3x17)	47		1002/69(1+68)	32,2-42 Main body of the Song: 442 (17x26) words.
73	Dt 32,43	13	51		1015/82 P	Coda: The nations called to praise Israel: 13 words.
43	32,1-43	462	1796	8x	462	Compositional architecture: 462 = 7 + 442 + 13 words.
74	Dt 32,44	14+	50		1029	Moses' last charge to the Israelites before his death
75	Dt 32,45	10+	34		1039	
76	Dt 32,46	22+	85		1061	
77	Dt 32,47	22=68 (4x17)	76	--	1083 /68 P	32,44-47 68 (4x17) words.
78	Dt 32,48	8+	29	28	1091	YHWH commands Moses to climb Mount Nebo in order to see the land he is not allowed to enter
79	Dt 32,49	24+	80		1115	
80	Dt 32,50	18+	60		1133	
81	Dt 32,51	20+	69		1153	32,48-52 85 (5x17) words.
82	Dt 32,52	15=85 (5x17)	50	1x	1168 P	32,44-52 153 (9x17) words (68 + 85).
52	32,1-52	615	2329(137x17)	9x	615	32,1-52 has 52 (2x26) verses and 2329 (137x17) letters.

Observation 3 Chapter 32 has **52 (2x26)** verses and a significant number of letters: **2329 (137x17)**.

The most salient feature of the Song as such (vs. 1-43) is that in its main body (vs. 2-42) no less than 41 of its 43 verses (**95%**) and **442** of its 462 words (**96%**) are governed by the divine name numbers. Moreover, 31 of the individual 43 verses (**72%**) and 333 of the 462 words (**72%**) are *additionally* highlighted by the divine name numbers (see the astonishing word-count in Columns 3 and 7).

As I have explained in the quantitative structural analysis of the Song, the **7-word v. 1** is an **Invitation** to heaven and earth to listen, while the **13-word v. 43** has the function of a **Coda**, the main body of the Song as such (vs. 2-42) are made up of **442 (17x26)** words (**7+442+13 = 462**).

Observation 4 Moses' very last charge to the Israelites (vs. 44-47) consists of **68 (4x17)** words, while YHWH's command to Moses to climb Mount Nebo (vs. 48-52) is made up of **85 (5x17)** words. This means that the last nine verses of Section II are for **100%** governed by the number **17**.

Section III 33,1-29 The Testamentary Blessing of Moses

Vs	Text	Words	Letters	יהוה	Sum-W	Compositional Structure
83	Dt 33,1	12	45		1180	The 12 words refer to the 12 tribes.
84	Dt 33,2	16+	65	29	1196	Canto I 2-5 43 words represent the letter value of הברכה 'the blessing' (5+2+20+11+5=43).
85	Dt 33,3	11+	41		1207	
86	Dt 33,4	7+	26		1214	
87	Dt 33,5	9=43	37		1223/55	
88	Dt 33,6	7	26		1230/7	S Reuben: Intro 0 ; Blessing: 7 words.
89	Dt 33,7	16	63	30	1246/16	S Judah: Intro 3 ; Blessing: 13 words.
90	Dt 33,8	13	54		1259	Levi: Intro 2 ; Blessing: 52 (2x26) words.
91	Dt 33,9	18	68		1277	
92	Dt 33,10	11	53		1288	
93	Dt 33,11	12	50	31	1300/54	
94	Dt 33,12	14	55	32	1314/14	S Benjamin Intro 2 ; Blessing: 12 words.
95	Dt 33,13	11+	46	33	1325	Joseph: Intro 2 ; Blessing: 52 (2x26) words. Blessings from above, below, sun, months: 17 words.
96	Dt 33,14	6=17	26		1331	
97	Dt 33,15	6	26		1337	
98	Dt 33,16	12	53		1349	
99	Dt 33,17	19	72		1368/54	
100	Dt 33,18	7+	35		1375	Zebulon/Issachar: Intro 2 ; Blessing: 19 words.
101	Dt 33,19	14+	53		1389/21	
102	Dt 33,20	11+	40		1400	Gad: Intro 2 ; Blessing: 26 words.
103	Dt 33,21	17+	62	34	1417/28	
104	Dt 33,22	8+	26		1425	Dan and Naphtali: Intro 2+2 ; Blessing: 15 words. Vs. 18-23 Altogether 68 (4x17) words.
105	Dt 33,23	11/68 (4x17)	45	35	1436/19	
106	Dt 33,24	11	43		1447	Asher: Intro 2 ; Blessing: 14 words.
107	Dt 33,25	5	25		1452/16	
24	33,2-25	272 (16x17)		7x	272 (16x17)	272 (16x17) = 153a (9x17) + 119b (7x17).
108	Dt 33,26	8+	35+		1460	Canto II 26-29 52 (2x26) words with 208 (8x26) letters.
109	Dt 33,27	11+	47+		1471	
110	Dt 33,28	14+	50+		1485	
111	Dt 33,29	19=52 (2x26)	76/208 (8x26)	36	1504/52 (2x26)	
29	33,1-29	336	1343 (79x17)	8x	336	Blessing finalized and sealed by 1343 (79x17) letters.
81	32,1-33,29	951	3672 (216x17)	17x	951	Song+Blessing sealed: 3672 (216x17) letters; 17x יהוה א .
111	31,1-33,29	1504	5795	36x	1504	At this point (33,29) the book as a whole was rounded
947	1,1-33,29	14118 (543x26)	54260	543	14118 (543x26)	off, finalized and sealed by 14118 (543x26) words.

Observation 5 The entire Blessing (excluding the 12+1-word editorial note in vs. 1-2a) is made up of **323** (19x17) words, which means that the entire Blessing is governed by the number **17**. Including the editorial note, Section III as a whole has been finalized by **1343** (79x17) letters.

Observation 6 Section III (33,1-29) has inextricably been linked to Section II (32,1-52) by the fact that they have been finalized on letter level by having altogether **3672** (216x17) letters. This is reinforced by the string of **17** occurrences of the name YHWH (9 + 8) and by the fact that the text of the book as a whole until 33,29 has been finalized and sealed by having **14118** (543x26) words.

Observation 7 The Blessing for Levi (8-11) with its **52** words, the Blessing for Joseph (13-17) with its **52** words, and the Blessing for Gad (20-21) with its **26** words, stand out as being additionally highlighted. This also applies to Canto II (26-29) with its **52** (2x26) words and **208** (8x26) letters.

The **52-word Joseph Blessing** is a special case, because of its central position in the Blessing and its striking relationship with the **52-word Joseph passage** (symbolized by the vine) in Psalm 80. See Observation 4 in my analysis of the [Blessing](#) and Observation 3 in the analysis of [Psalm 80](#).

Section IV 34,1-12 Epilogue: Moses' Death and his Necrology

Vs	Texts	Words	Letters	יהוה		Compositional structure
112	Dt 34,1	22	72	37	1526	§1 Moses sees the land from Mount Nebo
113	Dt 34,2	14	50		1540	
114	Dt 34,3	10	36		1550	
115	Dt 34,4	18	83	38	1568/64	
116	Dt 34,5	10+	32	39-40	1578	§2 Moses' death and secret burial His death and burial: 26 words. His age, his condition when he died, and the 30 days' mourning for him: 26 words.
117	Dt 34,6	16=26	54		1594	
118	Dt 34,7	12+	40		1606	
119	Dt 34,8	14=26	52		1620/52	
120	Dt 34,9	22+	78	41	1642	§3 Moses' eulogistic necrology
121	Dt 34,10	12=34 (2x17)	43	42	1654	
122	Dt 34,11	14+	63	43	1668	
123	Dt 34,12	12=26	47		1680/60	
12	<u>34,1-12</u>	176	650 (25x26)	7x	176	The name YHWH occurs 7 times in Chapter 34.
123	<u>31,1-34,12</u>	1680	6445	43x	1680	
959	<u>1,1-34,12</u>	14294	54910 (190x17x17)	550x	14294	

Observation 7 The Epilogue is finalized and sealed by its **650** (25x26) letters, while the book as a whole (1,1-34,12) is finalized and sealed by its **54910** letters (190x17x17).

Moreover, Chapter 34 is rounded off by **60** (34+26) words (34,9-12) which conclude the book as a whole.

The book of Deuteronomy opens with **78** (3x26) words and is concluded by **34+26** words.

The book of Exodus opens with **51** (3x17) words (1,1-7) and is concluded by **26+34** words (40,34-38).

Seeing the dependence of Deuteronomy on Exodus, this is not surprising. But there is more:

The Enneateuch opens with **52** (2x26) words in Gen. 1,1-5 and is concluded by **153** (9x17) in 2Ki.25,23-30.

Observation 8 Not only Moses' necrology (34,9-12) is specifically focused on by **34+26** words. This also goes for his death and secret burial (34,5-8) which are highlighted by **26+26** words.

The name YHWH occurs **43x** in Part VII (31-34): **19 + 17 + 7 = 43**.

In Genesis 1– Deuteronomy 34 the name YHWH occurs **1820** (70x26) times.

The 10 Divine Speeches in Part VII (31-34)

DSs	Texts	Introductions	Speeches	Totals
1	31,2	3	5	8
2	31,14	4	11	15
3	31,16-21	4	140+	144
4	31,23	1	16/156 (6x26)	17
5	32,20-27	1	95	96
6	32,32-35	0	37	37
7	32,37-42	1	68 (4x17)	69
8	32,48-52	8	77	85 (5x17) 156 (6x26)
9	33,27	1	1	2
10	34,4	3	15	18
10	Total	26	465	491

Observation 9 The introductory formulae to the Divine Speeches have altogether **26** words. **DSs 3-4** concerning the commission of Joshua have altogether **156 (6x26)** words. Installing Joshua (**DS 4**), YHWH speaks 16 words; including the introductory formula: **17** words. **DS 7**, YHWH's address to the people concerning his vengeance on his enemies: **68 (4x17)** words. Altogether **156 (6x26)** words are devoted to **DSs 7-9**. In Part V, 27-28 and Part VI, 29-30, there are no Divine Speeches, only references to earlier divine utterances. For the Speeches in Part I, 1-3, and Parts II-IV, 4-26, see the analysis of 1-3 and 12-26.

Overview of the three series of 10 Divine Speeches in Deuteronomy:

DSs	Texts	Introductions	Speeches	Totals
10	1-3	31	463	494 (19x26)
10	4-26	27	415	442 (17x26)
10	31-34	26	465	491
30	Grand Total	84*	1343 (79x17)	1427*

* If we follow LXX and 4Q Deut^q in 32,37 (see BHS), reading **ואמר יהוה** instead of MT's **ואמר**, by inserting an extra instance of the name YHWH, the Grand Total becomes:

30	Grand Total	85 (5x17)*	1343 (79x17)	1428 (84x17)*
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which is of course a marvelous outcome, were it not that it disturbs the **1820 (70x26)** instances of the Name in the Torah – see above. Whatever the case may be, this remains a textcritical dilemma!

For the Divine Speeches, see my article "The Literary and Theological Function of Divine Speech in the Pentateuch", in: *Congress Volume Salamanca 1983*, edited by J.A. Emerton, pp. 154-173, especially p. 170, and "Neue Wege und Perspektiven in der Pentateuchforschung", *VT* 36 (1986), pp. 146-162, especially p. 156.

Observation 10 Deuteronomy has an open end, because the laudatory reference to Joshua as Moses' successor (34,9) clearly functions as a cliffhanger. This is a scribal device used to leave the audience/readers in suspense and anxious not to miss the next episode. For some striking examples of the cliffhanger, see the last page of my analysis of 2 Samuel.

At the same time the use of this cliffhanger is a strong indication of the way Genesis-Deuteronomy is linked to the following 'historical books', the so-called Former Prophets, of which the Torah is an integral part constituting the Story of Ancient Israel. See Genesis-Kings, the Enneateuch.

Here are the links to the more detailed analyses of Deuteronomy 31-34:

[“The Framework to the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy”](#)

[“The Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32”](#)

[“The Blessing of Moses in Deuteronomy 33”](#).

I would like to recommend Duane L. Christensen’s quantitative structural analyses in his two volume commentary in the Series *Word Biblical Commentary*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 2001-2002. For Deuteronomy 32 see Paul Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32*, E.J. Brill: Leiden-New York-Köln, 1996.