

The Numerical Features of the Book of Exodus

A New Approach to its Compositional Structure

Please read the [General Introduction](#)

Part IV Exod 21,1-24,18 The Book of the Covenant Made with Israel

There is no doubt in my mind about the correctness of the present delimitation of the so-called Book of the Covenant. The author/editor has finalized and sealed it with a total number of words that are a multiple of the divine name number **17** ($1462 = 86 \times 17$). This is a compositional technique we have encountered several times – see, e.g., in [Part I](#), p. 3. This means that the Book of the Covenant does not start in [20,22](#) as is generally accepted, but in Chapter 21,1 – see [Part III](#), Observation 1.

Moreover, it does not end at [23,33](#), but at [24,18](#). Chapter 24 as a whole is part and parcel of the Book of the Covenant which constitutes a literary entity in its own right: [21,1-24,18](#).

As regards the compositional structure of the Book of the Covenant, there is no consensus among scholars. The proposals that have been brought forward until now are generally based on the material content which inevitably involves a great measure of subjectivity. I shall refrain from discussing current views on the general framework – the reader can find an overview in C. Houtman's commentary, *Exodus 3* (COT), Kok: Kampen 1996, pp. 87-106.

In order to detect the compositional structure of Part IV, I shall focus especially on the Masoretic **Petuchahs** and **Setumahs**, distinguishing between their demarcating function (marked **P** and **S**) and their function of drawing attention. This proved to be a great help in combination with the structural use of the divine name numbers to demarcate a literary unit. We have encountered this particular compositional technique several times. For some examples, see [Part I](#), Observation 38. In the table below I shall demonstrate how different paragraphs have being demarcated by **P** or **S** and finalized by having **17** or **26** words (or their multiples) in the final verse or verses. There is only one exception to the rule, §10, [23,20-33](#), the Paranetic Epilogue which is concluded by **39** words representing the *YHWH-‘echad* formula, evidently to highlight the last verse which contains a warning against idolatry! After [23,8](#) we miss a **P** or **S**, but there is no doubt at all that §8 ([23,2-8](#)) is delimited correctly.

On the basis of the data gleaned from the logotechnical analysis, I suggest the following structure:

§1	Exod 21,1-11	Laws Regulating Slavery	concluded by 68 (4×17) words
§2	Exod 21,12-27	About Capital Offences	concluded by 26 words
§3	Exod 21,28-22,3	About Bodily Injuries	concluded by 26 words
§4	Exod 22,4-14	Protection of Property	concluded by 52 (2×26) words
§5	Exod 22,15-17	About Seduction and Witchcraft	concluded by 26 words
§6	Exod 22,18-26	Miscellaneous Laws	concluded by 17 words
§7	Exod 22,27-23,1	About Reviling God or the Ruler	consisting of 52 (2×26) words
§8	Exod 23,2-8	About Conduct in Legal Cases	concluded by 26 words
§9	Exod 23,9-19	Obligations Ensuing From the Exodus	concluded by 34 (2×17) words
§10	Exod 23,20-33	Paranetic Epilogue	concluded by 39 ($26+13$) words
§11	Exod 24,1-11	The Ratification of the Covenant	concluded by 51 (3×17) words
§12	Exod 24,12-18	YHWH Invites Moses to meet him	concluded by 68 (4×17) words.

In the overview on the following pages these concluding verses are displayed in **bold face** and furnished with an indication of their content. This also applies to the great number of other verses governed by divine name numbers.

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

Verses highlighted by **17** and **26** are in **bold face**.

	Text	Words	Letts.	יהוה	Sum-W	Sum-L	Contents
							§1 Laws Regulating Slavery Divine speech: 21,1-24,18
1	Exod 21,1	5	24		5	24	
2	Exod 21,2	11	40		16	64	
3	Exod 21,3	12	39		28	103	
4	Exod 21,4	17	63		45	166	A slave's wife and children are the master's.
5	Exod 21,5	14	46		59	212	
6	Exod 21,6	17+	70		76	282	S The slave may remain his slave for life.
7	Exod 21,7	10+	34		86	316	A daughter sold into slavery remains a slave.
8	Exod 21,8	15+	54		101	370	Her master may not sell her to strangers.
9	Exod 21,9	7+	29		108	399	She may become his son's wife, but may
10	Exod 21,10	9+	31		117	430	not be deprived if he marries another.
11	Exod 21,11	10=68	31		127	461	S If he deprives her, she may go free.
11	21,1-11	127	461				
							§2 About Capital Offences
12	Exod 21,12	5+	16		132	477	
13	Exod 21,13	12=17	44		144	521	S If by act of God, he may flee,
14	Exod 21,14	11	42		155	563	S but if with intent to kill, he shall die.
15	Exod 21,15	5+	19		160	582	Whoever strikes his parent shall die.
16	Exod 21,16	7+	28		167	610	S Whoever steals a man shall die.
17	Exod 21,17	5=17	20		172	630	S Whoever curses his parent shall die.
18	Exod 21,18	14+	53		186	683	When a man strikes another man and
19	Exod 21,19	13+	49		199	732	S the victim lives, he shall pay for it.
20	Exod 21,20	14+	43		213	775	When a man strikes a slave to death,
21	Exod 21,21	11+	32		224	807	S he shall be punished, not if he lives.
22	Exod 21,22	20=52	81		244	888	When men fight and hurt a pregnant woman,
23	Exod 21,23	7	25		251	913	the culprit shall pay for it.
24	Exod 21,24	12	32		263	945	
25	Exod 21,25	9	33		272	978	S
26	Exod 21,26	15+	52		287	1030	S When a man strikes his slave's eye,
27	Exod 21,27	11=26	38		298	1068	P the victim shall be set free.
16	21,12-27	171	607				
							§3 About Bodily Injuries
28	Exod 21,28	19	60		317	1128	
29	Exod 21,29	19	73		336	1201	
30	Exod 21,30	11	39		347	1240	
31	Exod 21,31	10	28		357	1268	
32	Exod 21,32	13	48		370	1316	S
33	Exod 21,33	16	50		386	1366	
34	Exod 21,34	9	34		395	1400	S
35	Exod 21,35	19	61		414	1461	
36	Exod 21,36	19	67		433	1528	S
37	Exod 21,37	18	59		451	1587	
38	Exod 22,1	9	32		460	1619	
39	Exod 22,2	13+	45		473	1664	If a stolen animal is found alive,
40	Exod 22,3	13=26	45		486	1709	S the thief shall pay double.
13	21,28-22,3	188	641				

							§4 Protection of Property
41	Exod 22,4	17	60		503	1769	S
42	Exod 22,5	16	56		519	1825	S
43	Exod 22,6	17	57		536	1882	Whoever lets a fire spread, shall pay for damage to another man's property.
44	Exod 22,7	15	52		551	1934	
45	Exod 22,8	31+	99		582	2033	S
46	Exod 22,9	20=51	59		602	2092	About misappropriation of property.
47	Exod 22,10	15+	56	1	617	2148	About deliberate theft, or no evil intent.
48	Exod 22,11	6+	24		623	2172	About a borrowed beast that dies: The keeper asserts his innocence by oath.
49	Exod 22,12	8+	27		631	2199	P
50	Exod 22,13	13+	44		644	2243	In case of theft, restitution shall be made.
51	Exod 22,14	10=52	32		654	2275	S
11	22,4-14	168	566				If killed by a wild beast, he shall prove it. If the owner is present: no restitution.
							§5 About Seduction and Witchcraft
52	Exod 22,15	13+	46		667	2321	Whoever seduces a girl shall pay or marry her.
53	Exod 22,16	10+	36		677	2357	S
54	Exod 22,17	3=26	11		680	2368	S
3	22,15-17	26	93		(40x17)		No witch shall be allowed to live. 21,1-22,17 680 (40x17) words.
							§6 Miscellaneous Laws
55	Exod 22,18	6	18		686	2386	S
56	Exod 22,19	6	26	2	692	2412	Whoever commits bestiality shall die.
57	Exod 22,20	10	38		702	2450	Whoever sacrifices to another god shall die.
58	Exod 22,21	5+	19		707	2469	Do not oppress an alien nor a widow or fatherless child.
59	Exod 22,22	12=17	38		719	2507	If they appeal to God,
60	Exod 22,23	10+	47		729	2554	P
61	Exod 22,24	16=26	50		745	2604	he will execute judgement! Exact no interest from a poor man.
62	Exod 22,25	10	32		755	2636	A cloak taken in pawn
63	Exod 22,26	17	61		772	2697	S
9	22,18-26	92	329				shall be returned before sunset.
							§7 About Reviling God or the Ruler
64	Exod 22,27	7+	25		779	2722	Do not revile God; do not curse a ruler.
65	Exod 22,28	8+	29		787	2751	Give YHWH your first crops and sons
66	Exod 22,29	13+	48		800	2799	as well as your first oxen or sheep.
67	Exod 22,30	12+	47		812	2846	S
68	Exod 23,1	12=52	33		824	2879	S
5	22,27-23,1	52=2x26	182				Be holy: do not eat carrion! Do not spread baseless rumour!
							§8 About Conduct in Legal Cases
69	Exod 23,2	13+	45		837	2924	Do not side with the majority for evil.
70	Exod 23,3	4=17	14		841	2938	S
71	Exod 23,4	10	33		851	2971	S
72	Exod 23,5	13	45		864	3016	S
73	Exod 23,6	5+	19		869	3035	Nor show preference for a poor man in court.
74	Exod 23,7	11+	38		880	3073	Take your enemy's straying animal back.
75	Exod 23,8	10=26	39		890	3112	?
7	23,2-8	66	233				Help your enemy with a fallen animal. Do not deprive a poor man of justice. Avoid lies and let the innocent live. Do not accept bribes.
							§9 Obligations Ensuing from the Exodus
76	Exod 23,9	13	46		903	3158	
77	Exod 23,10	8	30		911	3188	
78	Exod 23,11	14	64		925	3252	
79	Exod 23,12	15	63		940	3315	
80	Exod 23,13	14	54		954	3369	
81	Exod 23,14	5+	17		959	3386	Keep three times a year a pilgrim-feast.
82	Exod 23,15	21=26	79		980	3465	Keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
83	Exod 23,16	16	62		996	3527	

84	Exod 23,17	10+	36	3	1006	3563	All males shall come into YHWH's presence.
85	Exod 23,18	12+	35		1018	3598	Offer no blood with anything unleavened.
86	Exod 23,19	12=34	47	4	1030	3645 S	Bring firstfruits; don't boil a kid in its mother's milk.
11	23,9-19	140	533				
							§10 Paraneitic Epilogue
87	Exod 23,20	12+	50		1042	3695	YHWH will send an angel to bring Israel to a
88	Exod 23,21	14=26	47		1056	3742	land of their own. Heed him and listen to him.
89	Exod 23,22	15	54		1071	3796	
90	Exod 23,23	13	65		1084	3861	
91	Exod 23,24	14	62		1098	3923	
92	Exod 23,25	12	51	5	1110	3974	
93	Exod 23,26	9+	35		1119	4009	None shall miscarry or be barren in Israel.
94	Exod 23,27	17=26	58		1136	4067	YHWH will make their enemies flee.
95	Exod 23,28	12	50		1148	4117	
96	Exod 23,29	13	49		1161	4166	
97	Exod 23,30	10	37		1171	4203	
98	Exod 23,31	19+	71		1190	4274	YHWH will establish Israel's frontiers.
99	Exod 23,32	5+	21		1195	4295	Israel must not make a covenant with them.
100	Exod 23,33	15=39	51		1210	4346 P	The indigenous people must not stay there.
14	23,20-33	180	701	(5x)	(110x11)		
							§11 The Ratification of the Covenant
101	Exod 24,1	15	65	6	1225	4411	
102	Exod 24,2	12	39	7	1237	4450	
103	Exod 24,3	23	82	8 9	1260	4532	
104	Exod 24,4	19	73	10	1279	4605	
105	Exod 24,5	12	52	11	1291	4657	
106	Exod 24,6	11	39		1302	4696	
107	Exod 24,7	13	52	12	1315	4748	
108	Exod 24,8	19+	65+	13	1334	4813	Moses flings blood over the people.
109	Exod 24,9	8+	38+		1342	4851	The delegates see the God of Israel.
110	Exod 24,10	12+	53+		1354	4904	Under him is a pavement of sapphire.
111	Exod 24,11	12=51	48=204		1366	4952 S	24,8-11 51 (3x17) words, 204 (12x17) letters.
11	24,1-11	156	606				24,1-11 156 (6x26) words.
							§12 YHWH Invites Moses to meet him
112	Exod 24,12	19	72	14	1385	5024	
113	Exod 24,13	9	35		1394	5059	
114	Exod 24,14	19+	68		1413	5127	The Elders must wait till Moses returns.
115	Exod 24,15	8+	25		1421	5152	Moses goes up: a cloud covers the mountain.
116	Exod 24,16	17+	66	15	1438	5218	YHWH's Glory comes to rest on Mount Sinai.
117	Exod 24,17	10+	40	16	1448	5258	The Glory looks like a devouring fire.
118	Exod 24,18	14=68	54		1462	5312 P	Moses goes up the mountain and stays there.
	24,12-18	96	360				
	24,1-18	252	966	11x			
	21,1-24,18	1462	5312	16x			1462 = 86x17

Observation 1 In the Book of the Covenant as such (21,1-23,33) some paragraphs stand out by being made up of a significant *total number of words*, by which they have been highlighted as particularly important. Needless to say, the fact that the author has highlighted specific sections of the text is something that cannot be ignored in the interpretation of the text. These sections are:

- §5, 'About Seduction and Witchcraft', which has **26** words; it is additionally emphasized by the fact that until this point the text has **680** (40x17) words in total,
- §7, 'About Reviling God or the Ruler', with its **52** (2x26) words and **182** (7x26) letters,
- §9, 'Obligations Ensuing from the Exodus Experience', which has **140** (20x7) words,
- §11, 'The Ratification of the Covenant, with its **156** (6x26) words.

In my opinion, there are two reasons why a multiple of 7 was chosen in §9: first, because of the institution of the fallow year (every 7th year – v. 10-11) as a sabbatical year, and second, because of the 7-days' pilgrim-feast of Unleavened Bread.

The celebration of the three feasts functions as a reminder of, and more specifically as an obligation ensuing from, the exodus experience. Therefore, this paragraph has a clear paranetic character and serves as a bridge between the laws and the Paranetic Epilogue in §10 (23,20-33).

§§11-12 Exod 24,1-18 The Ratification of the Covenant

<p>1 וְאֶל־מֹשֶׁה אָמַר עֲלֵה אֵלַי יְהוָה¹ אֶתְהָ אֶתְהָ וְאֶתְהָן נָדָב וְאֶבְיָהוּא וְשִׁבְעִים מִזְקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם מִרְחֹק: 2 וּנְגַשׁ מֹשֶׁה לְבָדוֹ אֶל־יְהוָה² וְהֵם לֹא יִגְשׁוּ וְהָעָם לֹא יַעֲלוּ עִמּוֹ: 3 וַיִּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וַיְסַפֵּר לָעָם אֵת כָּל־דִּבְרֵי יְהוָה³ וְאֵת כָּל־הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים וַיַּעַן כָּל־הָעָם קוֹל אֶחָד וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר יְהוָה⁴ נַעֲשֶׂה: 4 וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֵת כָּל־דִּבְרֵי יְהוָה⁵ וַיִּשְׁכַּם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיְבִין מִזִּבְחַת תְּחִת־הַהָר וְשֵׁתִים עֶשְׂרֵה מִצְבָּחָה לְשָׁנִים עֶשֶׂר שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: 5 וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת־נְעָרָיו בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּעֲלוּ עֲלֵה וַיִּזְבְּחוּ זִבְחִים שְׁלָמִים לַיהוָה⁶ כְּרִים: 6 וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה חֲצִי הַדָּם וַיִּשֶׁם בְּאֵגְלֹת וַחֲצִי הַדָּם זָרַק עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: 7 וַיִּקַּח סֶפֶר הַבְּרִית וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנוֹ הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר יְהוָה⁷ נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע: 8 וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַדָּם וַיִּזְרַק עַל־הָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה הִסְדַּקְרִית אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת יְהוָה⁸ עִמָּכֶם עַל כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה: 9 וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶתְהָן נָדָב וְאֶבְיָהוּא וְשִׁבְעִים מִזְקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: 10 וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְתַחַת רַגְלָיו כַּמַּעֲשָׂה לְבִנְת־הַסִּפִּיר וַיִּכְעָצֶם הַשָּׁמַיִם לְטָהָר: 11 וְאֶל־אַצְיָלֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא שְׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיַּחֲזוּ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ: ם 12 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה⁹ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עֲלֵה אֵלַי הַיּוֹם וְהִנֵּה־שָׁם וְאֶתְהָ לֶף אֶת־לֶחֶת הָאֵבֶן וְהַתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתִּי לְהוֹרֹתָם: 13 וַיִּקַּם מֹשֶׁה וַיְהוֹשֶׁעַ מִשְׁרָתוֹ וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָר הָאֱלֹהִים: 14 וְאֶל־הַזִּקְנִים אָמַר שְׁבוּ־לָנוּ בְּזֶה עַד אֲשֶׁר־נָשׁוּב אֵלֵיכֶם וְהִנֵּה אֶתְהָן וְחֹרֵר עִמָּכֶם מִי־בַעַל דְּבָרִים יִגַּשׁ אֲלֵהֶם: 15 וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָהָר וַיִּכַּס הָעָנָן אֶת־הָהָר: 16 וַיִּשְׁכֵּן כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה¹⁰ עַל־הָרַ סִינַי וַיִּכַּסְהוּ הָעָנָן שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים וַיִּקְרָא אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִתּוֹךְ הָעָנָן: 17 וּמִרְאֵה כְבוֹד יְהוָה¹¹ כָּאֵשׁ אֲכָלַת בְּרָאשׁ הָהָר לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: 18 וַיִּבֹא מֹשֶׁה בְּתוֹךְ הָעָנָן וַיַּעַל אֶל־הָהָר וַיְהִי מֹשֶׁה בְּהָר אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה: ם</p>	<p>YHWH: 3 + 24 = 27</p> <p>Narrative: 16</p> <p>The Israelites: 1 + 6 = 7</p> <p>Narrative: 48</p> <p>The Israelites: 1 + 6 = 7</p> <p>Narrative: 7</p> <p>Moses: 1 + 11 = 12</p> <p>Narrative: 32</p> <p>Vs. 1-11 156 (6x26) words</p> <p>YHWH: 4 + 15 = 19</p> <p>Narrative: 9</p> <p>Moses: 3 + 16 = 19</p> <p>Narrative: 49</p> <p>The name יהוה occurs 11x.</p>
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Observation 2 The name Moses occurs no less than 14x (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13a.b, 15, 16, 18a.b).

Overview of the Narratives and the Speeches in §§11-12 Exod 24,1-18

Narratives	YHWH	Moses	Israelites
16	$3 + 24 = 27$	$1 + 11 = 12$	
48			$1 + 6 = 7$
7			
32			$1 + 6 = 7$
9	$4 + 15 = 19$	$3 + 16 = 19$	
49			
161	$7 + 39 = 46$	$4 + 27 = 31$	$2 + 12 = 14$

Observation 3 YHWH's two speeches stand out by having altogether **39** words ($24 + 15$), which correspond precisely to the **39** words spoken by Moses and the Israelites ($27 + 12$). The number **39** represents the *YHWH-echad* formula ($26 + 13$) which signifies the uniqueness of YHWH experienced by Moses and the Israelites at Mount Sinai.