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The Secret of the Hidden Sacred Numbers 17 and 26

Significant Numbers In the Divine Speeches in Genesis

The logical follow-up of my inventory of the introductory and referring divine speech formulas in the Pentateuch was an investigation into the numerical aspects of the divine speeches themselves. Since I was particularly intrigued by the divine monologues at that time, I started with the divine deliberations in the Primeval History and counted the words both in the introductory formulas and in the eleven speeches. See the table in chapter 4 under “The Eleven Divine Monologues in the Pentateuch.” The result of the count astonished me.

number of words in the introductory formulas:	26
number of words in the speeches:	289 (17×17)

A closer examination brought to light the fact that there seemed to be a numerical system by which the Primeval History was divided into three sections:

a) The creation of human beings			
creation of male and female	Gen 1:26	17 words	
creation of Eve	Gen 2:18	9 words	
	<i>Total:</i>	26 words	
b) Crucial decisions before the flood			
to banish Adam and Eve	Gen 3:22	19 words	
to limit human life span	Gen 6:3	13 words	
to wipe out the human race	Gen 6:7	20 words	
	<i>Total:</i>	52 (2×26)	
	<i>Grand total before the flood:</i>	78 (3×26)	
c) Crucial decisions after the flood			
to spare the earth	Gen 8:21–22	23 words	
to confuse language	Gen 11:6–7	28 words	
	<i>Grand total after the flood:</i>	51 (3×17)	

There seems to be a difference between the use of the numbers 17 and 26; but it is not clear why, for instance, 26 was chosen for the number of words before the flood, while 17 was selected for those after the flood. This phenomenon is not limited to the Primeval History; I have detected this variation throughout those books of the Old Testament I have analyzed numerically up till now. The structure of the text of Isaiah 59 might serve as an example of such a conscious selection of these numbers.

The first 14 verses of Isaiah 59 are clearly built up around the number 26:

verses 1–8 having	104	(4×26) words;
verses 9–14 having	78	(3×26) words;
verses 1–14 having	182	(7×26) words altogether.

However, the 7 verses 15–21 are organized around the number 17:

verses 15–18 having	51	(3×17) words;
verse 19 having	17	words;
verses 20–21 having	34	(2×17) words;
verses 15–21 having	102	(6×17) words altogether.

Further study might shed light upon the reasons for such a choice. Whatever these may be, the fact remains that we cannot ignore the numerical structure of the text when we study its literary form and its redactional history.

Let us proceed with our survey of the eleven divine monologues. The total number of words in the four remaining divine decisions (160) does not seem to have any special significance, except that the particularly crucial decision to lead the Israelites out of Egypt comprises 17 words. This is not surprising, since the total number of 289 words in all eleven speeches had to be attained, leaving no room for a multiple of 17 or 26 in the total amount of words in these four monologues. They are dealing with the divine decisions.

to inform Abraham	Gen 18:17–19	42 words
to lead Israel from Egypt	Exod 3:17	17 words
to alter Israel's route	Exod 13:17	7 words
to hide his face	Deut 32:20–27	94 words

Total number of words: 160

The results of my inventory of the numerical aspects of the other divine addresses in the Pentateuch revealed an extraordinary high frequency of the numbers 17 and 26, which is so conspicuous that one can detect it without the help of a statistical analysis.¹ The preliminary results of these investigations have been published in a number of articles in which I did not have the pretension to offer a comprehensive survey of this complicated material. I merely intended to offer biblical scholars some insight in the use of these numbers as a structuring principle in this particular literary category.²

In addition to the figures already mentioned above, I shall now give a rough survey of the occurrence of these two numbers in the divine speeches in the Pentateuch. Far from claiming to treat the material exhaustively, my purpose is to give the reader an impression of their profuse use. These are the total numbers of words in divine speeches in Genesis 1–11.

all divine speeches in Gen 1:26 – 2:25	104 (4×26)
all divine speech formulas using “to say” in Gen 1–2	26
all divine speech formulas in Genesis 3	26
all divine speeches in Genesis 3–4	208 (8×26)
all divine speeches in the Story of the Flood	494 (19×26)
all divine speeches in Gen 9:8 – 11:9	156 (6×26)
all formulas and speeches in Genesis 4 (12 + 66)	78 (3×26)
all introductory divine speech formulas in Gen 1–11	102 (6×17);
the angel’s address to Hagar in Gen 16:11–12	26
the angel’s address to Hagar in Gen 21:17–18	26

It is interesting to note the fact that though the two addresses by the angel come from two parallel passages, which are phrased differently, they have exactly the same number of words.

Continuing our survey of the results of word counting in Genesis, we find the following.

in all divine speech formulas in Genesis 20–24	51 (3×17)
in all divine speeches together in Genesis 20–24	204 (12×17)
in all divine speeches together in Genesis 25–31	204 (12×17)
in the divine address to Rebecca in Gen 25:23	13
in the divine address to Isaac in Gen 26:2–5	55
<i>Divine words spoken to Rebecca and Isaac:</i>	68 (4×17)
in the address to Jacob in his dream (Gen 28:13–15)	52 (2×26)
in all divine speech formulas together in Gen 25–28	17
words to Jacob in Mesopotamia (Gen 31:3, 11–13)	51 (3×17)
words spoken to and quoted by Laban (Gen 31:24, 29)	17
words of God quoted by Jacob (Gen 32:10(9)-13(12))	17
divine oracle given to Jacob in Gen 35:10–12	26
divine oracle given to Jacob in Gen 46:3–4	26

The discovery of these numbers convinced me that 17 and 26 (and their multiples) are too consistently present in the text to be shrugged off as mere coincidence. Moreover, I realized that these numbers are a particularly dominant factor in the divine addresses in the book of Genesis. The next question regards the use of the numbers 17 and 26 in the rest of the Pentateuch.

Examples from the Book of Exodus

Investigation of the book of Exodus revealed the same compositional principles. Let me illustrate this with but one of numerous examples that could be cited.

story of Moses' birth (2:1–25; marked as Seder)	340 (20×17)
Moses' encounter with God (3:1 – 4:17; marked Seder)	650 (35×26)
all eight divine speeches together in 3:1–22	272 (16×17)
words commanded by God to be spoken to elders (3:16)	17
God's reference to his decision to set Israel free (3:17)	17
God's command to Moses to go to the king of Egypt (3:18)	26
God's promise to bring the Israelites into favor with the Egyptians (3:21–22)	26

Before we proceed with our survey, let us have a closer look at the 17 verses in which the story is told how God prepared Moses for his task (4:1–17). The reader will remember that we have already examined the seven divine speeches in this passage—see the end of chapter 3 above. Let us now carry out a more complete numerical structural analysis of this intriguing text, taking as criterion “*narrative*,” “*introduction*” and “*divine speech*.” The result is what follows.

Verses	Narrative	Introduction	Speech	
1–2	18	3	2	} 26
3	7	1	2	
4–5	4	4	18	
6	8	4	4	
7–10	9	1	43	
11–13	25	3	26	
14–17	11	1	58	
Total:	85 (5×17) +	17	+ 153 = 255 (15×17)	

The number 17 governs all three categories. The total number of words in the first four speeches is 26, as is the number of words in the sixth speech. The total number of words in the seven divine speeches, 153 (9×17), reminds us of the total amount of words in Psalm 111 and 112—see chapter 1 above

under the heading “Well-known Numerical Compositions: The Alphabetic Poems,” where I referred to the 153 fish mentioned in John 21:11.³

To show that the above passage does not stand alone, let me add two comparable texts, apart from the divine speeches in the book of Deuteronomy, which we shall examine later. The first example, Exod 15:25b-26, is structured as follows.

$$\text{Narrative } 7(25b) + \text{Introduction } 1(26a) + \text{Speech } 26(26ab) = 34 (2 \times 17)$$

The other example, Lev 17:10–14, consists of 102 (6×17) words organized as follows:

Prohibition (verse 10)	22		
Motivation (verse 11)	18		
<i>Introduction (verse 12a)</i>		5 - - - -	} 17
Speech quoted (verse 12b)		12	
Instruction (verse 13)	21		
Motivation (verse 14a)	7		
<i>Introduction (verse 14b)</i>		3 - - - -	} 17
Speech quoted (verse 14c-e)		14	
68 + 8 + 26 = 102			
(4×17) (34) (6×17)			

The total number of words God speaks are: 5+12 = 17 in verse 12, and 3+14 = 17 in verse 14b-e, which comes to 8+26 = 34 in the whole passage.

The Song of Moses in Exod 15:1–20, which is delimited by the Masoretes with so-called “paragraph” markers, has the following structure.

- ▶ the narrative (1a and 19) has 9+19 = 28 words
- ▶ the introduction (1a) and the song (1b-18) have 2+168 = 170 (10×17) words
- ▶ verses 1b-3 have 26 words: 9 in verse 1b and 17 in verses 2–3
- ▶ verses 11–13 have 26 words, verses 10–13 altogether 34 words
- ▶ verses 14–18 consist of 52 (2×26) words
- ▶ verses 20–21 have 26 words: 17 in the narrative and 9 in the quotation

The story about the Israelites putting the Lord to the test at Massah and Meribah in Exod 17:1–7 contains one divine speech consisting of 30 words (5–6a), which together with its 4-word introduction has 34 (2×17) words.

In the passage that follows—the story of the fight against Amalek (17:8–16)—we count exactly 119 (7×17) words.⁴

The crucial passage in Exod 19:3–8, dealing with the covenant, shows an exceptionally high frequency in the use of the numbers 17 and 26. Here are some examples.

- ▶ verses 3, 5 and 8 each have exactly 17 words.
- ▶ the divine speech in verses 3–6 consists of 51 (3×17) words.
- ▶ the divine speech in verse 9, with its introduction, has 26 words.

The situation is similar in Exodus 20, which has 26 verses.

- ▶ the passage containing the Ten Commandments, 1–17, has 17 verses
- ▶ the third commandment prohibiting the false use of God's name (Exod 20:7 and Deut 5:11) consists of 17 words
- ▶ moreover, these 17 words have a total of 51 letters
- ▶ the motivation of the sabbath rest in Exod 20:11 has 26 words
- ▶ in Deut 5:14 the commandment to stop work has 26 words

Though I could go on citing numerous other examples in the rest of the book of Exodus and in the books of Leviticus and Numbers as well, what we have presented so far must suffice to illustrate the extraordinarily high frequency of the numbers 17 and 26 and their multiples.⁵

Before we explore the numerical characteristics of the book of Deuteronomy, let me conclude the survey of the Exodus material with a brief examination of the very last chapter. I shall confine myself to 40:17–38, part of which (verses 17–33) we have studied above in regards the series of seven stereotyped formulas. As I promised there (see chapter 3 note 6), I shall now mention additional numerical aspects of these verses and of the concluding passage in 34–38. The latter passage is clearly delimited by the masoretes with a “paragraph”

marker. The most important numerical characteristics are the following.

- ▶ the pericope in verses 17–33 consists of 17 verses and 208 (8×26) words
- ▶ verses 34–35, telling how the Cloud/Glory filled the Tent/Tabernacle, have 26 words
- ▶ verses 36–38, describing the function of Cloud and Fire, have 34 words
- ▶ the text of 36–38 has an unmistakable chiasmic pattern
- ▶ “cloud” occurs 5× and “glory” 2×: together 7 times
- ▶ “tent” occurs 2× and “Tabernacle/tabernacling” 5×: together 7 times
- ▶ moreover, “go up” occurs 3× and “go onward” 4×: together 7 times

Conspicuous Numbers in the Divine Speeches in Deuteronomy

Since the book of Deuteronomy differs significantly from the other books of the Pentateuch both in form and content, one may wonder whether the numerical principles we detected in the divine speeches in Genesis–Numbers could be found in Deuteronomy as well. For the greater part, this book has the form of addresses by Moses, in which he often refers to words spoken by God, addressed to him or to the Israelites. Except for the divine speeches in 31:14 – 34:12, in which Moses is addressed directly, the divine speeches in Deuteronomy are *reported* speeches, references to God’s speaking in the past. My investigations into these speeches showed that there was no fundamental difference between the two types of addresses in regards the use of the numbers 17 and 26.

What is rather typical of Deuteronomy is the conspicuous use of the number 10 as a structuring device. Another characteristic of this book is that in a number of cases it is difficult to distinguish between words spoken by God and words spoken by Moses. In five instances phrases are used in Moses’ addresses in which God himself seems to speak in the first person singular,

making it hard to decide whether such phrases should be regarded as “divine speech.”⁶

However, since there appears to be no intention to quote God here as speaking personally, these cases should be interpreted as a rhetorical technique in which Moses shifts from speaking on behalf of God to speaking as if God speaks in the first person. This technique is often used in the prophetic books, especially in Jeremiah. Therefore, when I counted the number of words in the divine speeches quoted by Moses, I disregarded these instances, since such “divine words” do not fit into the category “divine speech.”⁷

When I inventoried the divine speeches and introductory formulas in Deuteronomy and counted the words, I discovered that the 30 speeches were evenly divided over three main sections of the book: 10 in chapters 1–3, 10 in 4–26, and 10 in 27–34. They are structured as follows.⁸

Chapter	Introduction	Divine address	Total
1–3	31 words	463 words	494 (19×26)
4–26	27	415	442 (17×26)
27–34	27	465	492
1–34	85 words (5×17)	1343 words (79×17)	1428 words (84×17)

The obvious choice for multiples of 17 for the total number of words in both literary categories reminds us of what we have seen above in the case of Exod 4:1–17.

The use of 10 as a structuring device is typical of Deuteronomy. The reason for the use of this number is most probably the fact that the Ten Commandments play such a crucial role in the book. The number 10 was chosen to remind the attentive reader of the Constitution of the Covenant. Other instances of the use of 10 in Deuteronomy are:

- ▶ 20 instances of the phrase “YHWH our God”: 10 in 1–3 and 10 in 4–26;
- ▶ 10 instances of the name YHWH in the Ten Commandments; two series of
- ▶ 10 first person plural verbs in the “we-passages” in 1–3;
- ▶ 10 instances in the book of “saying” introducing divine speech;
- ▶ 10 references to God’s speaking “from the heart of the fire”;
- ▶ 10 “larger literary units” in chapters 1–3;
- ▶ 10 “larger literary units” in chapters 12–26.⁹

The principle of having a particular number of words in a given category appears to be one of the intentions of the biblical writers, which I shall illustrate with additional examples below. Meanwhile, let me demonstrate this principle by examining the divine speech formulas in Deuteronomy *referring* to what God has commanded, for instance, “as the Lord had spoken / said / commanded.” Such formulas appear to be pliable in the sense that they can differ in length.

“as he spoke”	2 words
“as he spoke to you”	3 words
“as the Lord spoke to me”	4 words
“as the Lord, your God, spoke to him”	5 words
“as the Lord, the God of your fathers, spoke to you”	6 words

This variation in the number of words can be explained by the desire of the author to achieve a particular number of words in a given phrase in order to attain the total number of words he needed. Thus the total number of words in the referring formulas using the verbs “to say” and “to speak” amount to 34 (2×17) in chapters 1–11 and to 26 in the rest of the book.

A survey of the use of the verb “to command” with God as subject shows that it occurs exactly 34 (2×17) times in the whole book. The total number of words in the “command-phrases” in chapters 1–11 amount to 85 (5×17), and in chapters 12–34, if I have delimited the phrases correctly, to 52 (2×26).¹⁰

The evidence gleaned from my study of the divine speeches in Deuteronomy corroborated what I discovered in the other

four books of the Pentateuch. The divine speeches appear to be woven like a thread through the text in order to give it a theological structure. Moreover, there appears to be a clear predilection for the use of the two numbers 17 and 26 to give structure to the divine speeches themselves. However, there is much more to it. Subsequent investigations have shown that the evidence adduced above, impressive as it is by the massiveness of the data and the weight of the facts, is only the tip of the iceberg. My study of the numerical aspects of the 34 chapters of Deuteronomy convinced me that the entire book is a numerical composition. And this does not apply to Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch only but to other books of the Bible as well, as further probing has revealed.

Counting Verses in Deuteronomy

Having seen the numerical aspects of the divine speeches in the Pentateuch, we might wonder whether the speeches in Deuteronomy attributed to Moses have the same numerical features. There is indeed something very significant about these addresses on the level of verses. A survey of the eight main addresses by Moses directed to “all Israel,” introduced by formulas using the verbs *ʾamar*, “to say,” and *dibber*, “to speak,” gives the following picture of their number of verses.¹¹

Number of verses

1.	1:6 – 4:40	147	} 676 (26×26)	} 170 (10×17)
2.	5:1 – 26:19	529		
3.	27:9–10 + 28:1–68	70	} 52 (2×26)	
4.	29:1(2) – 30:20	48		
5.	31:2–6	5	} 52 (2×26)	
6.	31:7–8	2		
7.	32:1–43	43	} 52 (2×26)	
8.	32:46–47	2		

The first two substantial addresses, which are of paramount importance in light of their content, are made up of 676 verses, the square number of 26.

The rest of Moses' addresses (3–8), dealing with Moses' imminent death and his succession by Joshua, are dominated by the tenfold of 17.

The last four addresses (5–8) are additionally governed by a double 26.

Though there seems to be nothing significant about the 112 verses in Deuteronomy 1–3, a survey of the number of “smaller literary units” in chapters 4–11 and the number of verses within the seven “larger literary units” reveals the following.

Larger units	Smaller units	Verses
1. 4:1–43	11	43 (17 + 26)
2. 5:1 – 6:3	11	36
3. 6:4–25	4	22- - - - -
4. 7:1–26	7	26
5. 8:1 – 9:6	7	26- - - - -
6. 9:7 – 10:11	8	34
7. 10:12 – 11:32	11	43 (17 + 26)

} 26 } 101
 } 26 } 103

What we have seen before in chapter 4 with regard to the central position of chapter 7 with its 7 “smaller literary units” in the menorah-pattern, is corroborated here on the level of both “smaller literary units” and verses. Chapter 7 is framed by 52 (2×26) “smaller literary units,” 26 before and 26 after, forming a perfectly balanced pattern. The number of verses preceding chapter 7 total 101 while those following it amount to 103, totaling 204 (12×17), showing once again a (nearly perfect) balanced pattern. For a closer study of Deuteronomy 4–11 and more examples of this pattern, see chapter 6 under the heading “The Numerical Menorah-Structure and the Balance-Model.”

An inventory of the number of verses in Deuteronomy 12–26, has revealed the fact that something very significant is going on here. The text appears to have been modeled upon the Ten Commandments and structured into ten “larger literary units” made up of ten sets of laws. On the level of verses they are clearly governed by the holy numbers 17 and 26.

1. 12 – 13	Unity and purity of the cult	50	} 119 (7×17)
2. 14:1–21	Purity of the people of YHWH	21	
3. 14:22 – 16:17	Periodical obligations	48	
4. 16:18 – 18:22	The offices	46	} 221 (13×17)
5. 19:1 – 21:9	Manslaughter and bloodshed	50	
6. 21:10 – 22:12	Duties regarding family life	26	
7. 22:13–29	Marriage and sexual relationships	17	
8. 23:1–26	Exclusion and forbidden entrance	26	} 340 (20×17)
9. 24:1 – 25:4	Rights & duties regarding charity	26	
10. 25:5 – 26:15	Duties pertaining to survival	30	
	<i>Total:</i>	340 (20×17)	
26:16–19	Concluding admonition (epilogue)	4	

The tenth set of laws, together with the epilogue, has 34 (2×17) verses. All ten sets of laws are dominated by 17: sets 1–3 have 119 (7×17) verses and in sets 4–10 there are 221 (13×17), bringing the total to exactly 340 (20×17). Moreover, no less than four successive sets of laws, 6–9, are strikingly structured by the numbers 17 and 26.¹²

To conclude our survey of the numerical aspects of Deuteronomy on the level of verses let us examine the third major section of the book, chapters 27–34. The first part of this section, chapters 27–30, has a menorah-pattern comprising 143 verses, which do not seem to have any significant numerical features. The second part, however, chapters 31–33—in their original form without the Blessing of Moses in chapter 33, which was inserted later—is skillfully organized in a menorah-pattern with the Song of Moses at the center of a framework.¹³

A count of the verses gives the following picture.

1. 31:1–13	The outer framework A	13	} 17
2. 31:14–23	The interior framework A	10	
3. 31:24–30	<i>The inner framework A</i>	7	
4. 32:1–43	The Song of Moses	43	} 52 (2×26)
5. 32:44–47	<i>The inner framework B</i>	4	
6. 32:48–52	The interior framework B	5	
7. 34:1–12	The outer framework B	12	

The survey shows the most significant numerical aspects of the Song and its framework on the level of verses, as follows.

all six sections of the entire framework together:	51 (3×17)
the Song of Moses:	43 (17+26)
2 and 3, <i>the interior and inner framework A</i> :	17
1 and 5, four speeches by Moses:	17
2 and 3, 5 and 6, the entire interior and inner framework:	26
6 and 7, <i>the interior and outer framework B</i> :	17
4, 5, 6, the Song and its inner and interior framework B:	52 (2×26)
1, 4 and 7, the outer framework A and B and the Song:	68 (4×17)

The continual occurrence of the two numbers 17 and 26 demonstrates that they are woven into the text of the Song and its framework, giving them the structural unity that is commensurate with the underlying unity of concept.

The evidence adduced above witnessing to the high frequency of occurrence of the numbers 17 and 26 and their multiples on the level of verses in Deuteronomy appears to underscore the results of our investigations on the level of words. Before proceeding to probe deeper into the way in which these two numbers were used in the biblical writings to give structure to the text, we first must address the question regarding the reason why these specific numbers appear so frequently and so numerous in the text.

The Symbolic Meaning of 17 and 26

It stands to reason that the answer to the question must be the fact that the two numbers had special significance, which can only be explained in light of their symbolic meaning. What we have discovered in the case of the use of 7, that it was its symbolic meaning as the number of fullness and abundance that made it a useful structuring tool to imbue the text with deeper significance, applies to these two numbers as well. So the real question we have to address is the question as to their symbolic meaning and function.

At the beginning of the eighties when I was doing research on the divine speeches in the Pentateuch and time and again came across these two numbers, I had no idea of their meaning. However, through the publication of my 1982 article on the pattern of the divine speech formulas, I got into communica-

tion with the Austrian orientalist and biblical scholar Claus Schedl, whose pioneering work I shall discuss in the next chapter. Since the early sixties, he himself had independently done research on the numerical aspects of the Bible.

On the strength of the evidence that he found, he came to the conclusion that the biblical writings were numerical compositions. He was the person who inspired me most and who encouraged me to proceed with my investigations notwithstanding the negative and adverse reaction to my publications among colleagues, which he himself had also experienced with his own work. It was he who made me aware of the symbolic significance of the numbers 17 and 26, being the numbers representing the numerical value of the divine name YHWH.

As I have intimated above in chapter 1 under the heading “The Counting of Words and Verses in the Masoretic Tradition,” these two numbers derive their symbolic significance from the fact that they represent, each in its own way, the presence of God through his name YHWH. The name is derived from *yahweh*, an archaized form of the *third* person singular form of *yihyeh*, “he is,” of the verb *hayah*, “to be.” In ancient Israel and in the Jewish tradition, the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet function as numerical signs, whereby each letter has a specific numerical value depending upon their position in the alphabet. The sum of the numerical values of the four letters יהוה YHWH is 26.

$$(י = 10) + (ה = 5) + (ו = 6) + (ה = 5) = 26$$

The number 17 can best be explained as the numerical value of יהוה אהוה *yahweh*, which is analogous to the archaized form יהוה *yahweh*. The normal first person singular form of the supposed archaized form *yahweh*, “I am,” (*ehyeh*) occurs in the famous verse in Exod 3:14, where the divine name is revealed and defined. The numerical value of יהוה אהוה *yahweh* is 17:

$$(א = 1) + (ה = 5) + (ו = 6) + (ה = 5) = 17$$

The traditional explanation of 17 is that it is the sum of the digits of the numerical values of the letters Y H W H: 1 (+ 0) +

$5 + 6 + 5 = 17$. The 0-sign, which was probably unknown in biblical times, was consistently ignored in the kabbalistic tradition when it came to counting digits. In any case the two numbers have been explained as referring to the divine name in the Jewish tradition and their status of divine name numbers has been firmly established and accepted.

However, in my opinion, there is more to the symbolic significance of the two numbers in question, since they also happen to represent the numerical values of the Hebrew word *kabod*, “glory,” more particularly the Glory of God, also signifying his Presence. The sum of the numerical values of the letters **כבד** *kbd*, since Hebrew words were written without vowel signs, adds up to 17: $k = 11 + b = 2 + d = 4$, but *kabod* has an additional numerical value: 26. Let me explain. The letters k to t of the Hebrew alphabet have a double function: apart from their normal alphabetical value representing the numerals 11 to 22, they were also employed to represent the tens and the hundreds: kaph = 20; lamed = 30; mem = 40; nun = 50; samekh = 60; ‘ayin = 70; peh = 80; tsadeh = 90; qoph = 100; resh = 200; shin = 300; taw = 400

In accordance with these two principles the three letters of *kabod* have two numerical values.

their alphabetical value:	$k = 11 + b = 2 + d = 4 = 17$
their value as numerical sign:	$k = 20 + b = 2 + d = 4 = 26$

If the biblical writers were familiar with these principles, which in my opinion they were, since I do not believe that such numerical principles emerged as late as Maccabean times, they had an extra reason for using the divine name numbers. These numbers signify not only the name but also the Glory of God. So there is every reason to believe that in biblical times the two divine name numbers were closely associated with the *kabod* symbolism. The name of God and his Glory were regarded as belonging inextricably together. The intimate connection between them is most effectively demonstrated by the story in Exod 33:17–23 where Moses asks God to show him his *Glory*, but God proclaims his name.

Moses prayed: “Show me your glory.” And the Lord answered: “I shall make all my goodness pass before you, and I shall pronounce in your hearing the name YHWH.”

Incidentally the divine speech in verses 21–23 has 26 words: 17 in verses 21–22 and 9 in verse 23. Could these two numbers, occurring in a context in which the name and the Glory are mentioned together, have been deliberately chosen to refer symbolically to both? If so, the numerical evidence underlines the intimate relationship between God’s name and his Glory. This is strikingly corroborated by the numerical features of the four passages in the Old Testament in which the words *shem*, “name,” and *kabod*, “glory” (of God) are explicitly mentioned *together*, more or less as synonyms.

Isa 59:19–21 51 (3×17) words: 17 in verse 19 and 34 in verses 20–21
 Ps 72:18–19 17 words
 Ps 102:13–23 85 (5×17) words
 Neh 9:5b 17 words spoken by the Levites

Since this cannot be mere coincidence, I interpret the consistently recurring use of the number 17, representing both the name and the Glory of God simultaneously in all five contexts, as an indication that the selection of this particular number here was intentional and premeditated by the authors.

Since *kbd* was also written with four letters: *kbwd*, the word has two additional numerical values: 23 and 32:

alphabetical value: $k = 11 + b = 2 + w = 6 + d = 4 = 23$
 value as numerical sign: $k = 20 + b = 2 + w = 6 + d = 4 = 32$

The use of these two numbers shall be explained in chapter 6, where we shall find them in many instances.

Let us round off our answer to the question regarding the symbolic function of the numbers 17 and 26. It was once again Claus Schedl who suggested to me an explanation of the literary and theological function of these constantly occurring numbers in the text of the biblical writings. Shortly before his tragic death in an automobile accident in June 1986 he wrote to me—in what would be his very last letter—telling me that he had reread my articles about the numerical aspects of the

divine speeches in the Pentateuch (cited in note 2 above). What struck him particularly was that I had brought to light the high frequency of occurrence of these two numbers, which according to him have something to do with the divine name. Referring to Gershom Scholem's book *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala*, in which he briefly mentions the Jewish tradition that the name of God was interwoven in the fabric of the text of the Torah, Schedl wondered whether this "interweaving" was carried out by means of these two numbers.¹⁴

The Divine Name Interwoven In the Fabric of the Text

In my opinion, Schedl's suggestion offers the most plausible explanation ever put forward of the medieval kabbalistic tradition concerning the name of God interwoven in the Torah as in a fabric. The divine name numbers were the instruments employed by the biblical writers to interweave the holy name in the text of the Torah. In Schedl's opinion, we should consider the medieval tradition a reminiscence of a compositional technique that goes right back to biblical times. Therefore we must look beyond the medieval kabbalistic tradition for its origin. The relationship between the name of God and the text of the Torah did not originate in medieval kabbalistic circles. It goes back to the time of the formation of Scripture itself, the time between the Babylonian Exile and the completion of the Hebrew canon and the finalization of the text of Holy Scripture in the first century of the Common Era.¹⁵

Gershom Scholem refers to the kabbalistic writing *Sepher ha-Temunah*, "The book of the form," that is, the "shape," "likeness" or "representation" of the letters of the alphabet, as one of the sources for the idea of the name of God being interwoven in the Torah. The book was written most probably in Provence not later than the beginning of the thirteenth century and offers an explanation of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet on a kabbalistic basis, maintaining that the name of

God was included and preserved in a mystical way in the Torah. Scholem states that the thirteenth-century kabbalist Gikatilla was probably the first to formulate this tradition more specifically by saying that “the name of God was interwoven in the Torah as in a fabric.”¹⁶

It is not easy to establish the precise connotation of the word Torah in this context. It might denote the Torah of Moses, the books of the Pentateuch, but it can certainly have a wider connotation signifying Holy Scripture, the entire Hebrew Bible, which I believe is the case in this context. This connotation is attested in both Jewish and Christian sources at the beginning of the Common Era. The results of my investigations into the numerical aspects of the Bible so far point definitely to a wider interpretation of the *‘arigah* tradition: the name of God was interwoven in the texture not only of the Pentateuch but of the other canonical books as well. In any case we may conclude confidently that the investigations carried out thus far have established beyond any doubt the close relationship between the name of God and the biblical text. At the same time they underscore the kabbalistic tradition about the interweaving of the name in the texture of Scripture and set it in a new light.

The Purpose of the Hidden Numerical Structures

The question arises why the biblical writers made it so difficult for themselves in composing their texts. In other words, what was the purpose of the complicated numerical structures they produced in their writings. In the first place, we should realize that in antiquity the use of numbers was taken for granted in the composition of texts and was accepted as a normal compositional technique to organize a text. In biblical times, an author employed numerical devices to discipline his writing and to keep him from writing off the cuff.

In the second place, we should appreciate that numerical principles offer an author the opportunity to imbue his text

with a symbolic significance and to give it an extra dimension. The structuring numbers speak a language of their own and tell their story in their own way. In virtue of the symbolism of the numbers, the texts contain a latent message hidden in the text that can only be unlocked by the reader who is familiar with such techniques or who knows how to look for these devices and find them.

In the third place, the biblical authors must have had an aesthetic aim as well: to compose works of art, literary architecture complying with their idea of perfect form and their sense of beauty. In my numerical research, I came across many passages deserving the label “compositional gem,” of which I shall give a few further examples below. Psalm 19 is such a gem, in which it is said of the Torah of the Lord that it is *temimah*, “perfect” (verse 7), a term that primarily regards the contents of the Torah, but undoubtedly refers to the perfect literary form of the text as well. For the biblical authors, it was not a matter of literary beauty for the sake of beauty, but a matter of beauty in the service of the contents. Form and content belong inextricably together. In order to create such works of art, the texts were composed, irrespective of their size, according to premeditated designs suitable for the purpose and appropriate to their contents.

Claus Schedl coined the term “logotechnique” to describe the art of numerical composition, which he derived from the Greek term *logotechnia* meaning “literature,” more particularly a skillfully designed literary work of art conforming to certain laws governing its form. So “logotechnique,” denotes in fact “word-art,” “language-art,” “compositional art.”¹⁷

Though some evident logotechnical aspects of a text may be easily detected, especially in smaller texts, they do not readily meet the eye, since they are hidden in the inmost structure of the text. The average reader cannot detect them unless he counts verses, words and other items and looks for the center of a text, knowing how to do this. However, I am not sure whether the biblical writers intended the numerical aspects of

their texts to be understood and appreciated by the average reader. They knew that the artfully designed compositions could only be comprehended and prized by readers familiar with the compositional techniques, by insiders. As a matter of fact, it concerns the high technology of professional scribes, esoteric knowledge accessible to the initiated only.

It is by no means a matter of coincidence that the Hebrew word for “writing,” “document” and “book,” *sepher*, and the word for “scribe,” *sopher*, which also means “enumerator” and “secretary,” derive from one and the same verb: *sipper*, meaning both “to count,” “to number” and “to recount.”¹⁸

The “scribes” were certainly men of learning. 1 Chr 2:55 mentions families of *sopherim*, “scribes” and 2 Chr 34:13 specifies *sopherim* as Levites. They formed a professional class of craftsmen (see 1 Chr 27:32; Jer 36:26, 32 and Ps 45:1). A man of such learning and professional skill was the priest and scribe Ezra, qualified as “a scribe versed in questions concerning the commandments and the statutes of the Lord” (Ezra 7:11). The biblical scribes like Ezra were the predecessors of the *sopherim*, “the Scribes,” the Pharisaic teachers of the Torah and guardians of the canonical text of the Bible, counting its verses, words and letters in order to preserve its numerical features.

We can imagine that the biblical scribes took pride in their numerical compositions. They did so in the same way as the architects and craftsmen responsible for the medieval cathedrals were proud of what they had achieved. However, such works of art were not intended primarily to satisfy the aesthetic desires and the pride of the craftsmen; they were constructed essentially to the glory of God. The scribes believed that the hidden aspects of the text, the holy numbers giving it its artful structure, which did not meet the eye of the average reader, were visible to God to whom their work was dedicated after all.

This sheds unexpected new light on one of the most enigmatic texts in the book of Deuteronomy, 29:28 in the Hebrew text (29:29 in English translations); which appears on the cover of this book, as written in the Leningrad Codex.

The *hidden things* belong to the Lord our God; the *things revealed* belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.

The full connotation of the “hidden things” and the “things revealed” is not clear. The primary message of this verse is that in adverse and incomprehensible situations in life, that are understood only by God, the people of Israel should leave those situations to God and just keep to his commandments, which have nothing secret, enigmatic or incomprehensible about them. However, the author may also have intended to convey an additional message for those who have ears to hear. The “hidden things” *in the Torah*, the esoteric aspects of the text, are there for God’s benefit to honor him; but the “things revealed,” the plain and manifest features of the Torah, are there for our benefit and for that of our descendants so that we may observe them. In other words, the message is also: do not spend too much time and energy trying to discover the hidden secrets of the text, but apply yourselves to observing the prescriptions of the Torah.¹⁹

The Divine Name Numbers Signifying God’s Presence

As I have suggested above, the purpose of the interweaving of the name of God in the texture of the biblical texts was to symbolize his presence. In biblical times, the name of God was regarded as signifying his presence in person: where God’s name dwells, it was believed, he himself resides. By weaving God’s name symbolically into the fabric of the text of their writings the biblical authors fitted the text with the *sign* of his presence. This does not mean, however, that they thought God was actually present in the text, so to speak contained in it. On the contrary, they fully realized that God cannot be accommodated in any object, whether it is a carved image, a book, a temple or heaven itself. The presence of God’s name in the text can render it sacred but does not make it divine.

The name is nothing but a symbol referring to God's presence among his people and witnessing to his involvement in what is said in the text.

The setting of the name in the text can best be compared with the placing of the name upon the Israelites when the priests solemnly pronounced the Aaronic blessing (Num 6:27): "They shall put my name upon the people of Israel and I will bless them."²⁰ God's blessing is not effectuated by some magical power emanating from his name, but by God himself, whose presence is symbolically represented by his name.²¹

In the same way, the setting of God's name in the fabric of the biblical text was not intended to imbue it with mystical features or magical powers. What the biblical writers intended was to install in the text a continuous witness to God's presence, a permanent latent message: He is here! As a matter of fact, the meaning of the name YHWH is "He is," that is, "He is present." As I have explained above, the Hebrew verbal form *yahweh*, used here as a name, is an archaized form of *yihyeh*, "he is," the normal third person singular of the verb *hayah*, "to be." The meaning of the name is defined in this way in the famous passage in Exod 3:14, where Moses asks God what he should tell the Israelites the name of his Sender was.

And God said to Moses: "*I AM THAT I AM*," and He said: "This is what you shall say to the people of Israel: '*I AM* has sent me to you.'"

The text of this crucial verse in which the divine name is both revealed and explained, is meticulously structured on the level of letters so that both divine name numbers 17 and 26 are to be found in the text. Verse 14a is made up of 26 letters, divided into 15 and 11 on the basis of YH = 10 + 5 = 15 and WH = 6 + 5 = 11.

and God said to Moses, *wy'mr 'lhym 'l mšh* 15 letters
 "I AM THAT I AM," *'hyh 'šr 'hyh* 11 letters

Strikingly enough, verse 14b has a total of 34 (2×17) letters.

And He said: “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you’”

wy^lmr kh t^lmr lbny ysr^l ^lhyh šlhny ^llykm 34 letters

This technique of using in some crucial passages even the letters to weave the divine name numbers into the text reminds us of what we have detected above: the commandment prohibiting the false use of God’s name is made up of 17 words having exactly 51 (3×17) letters.

17 and 26 in the Life Spans of The Patriarchs and in the Genealogies

The presence of God, symbolized by the divine name numbers, is expressed in a particularly singular way in the names and life spans of the Hebrew patriarchs.²² The numerical values of the names Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, which are clearly artificial literary names, are all multiples of 26.

Isaac = יצחק (י = 10) + (צ = 90) + (ח = 8) + (ק = 100) = 208 (8×26)
 Jacob = יעקב (י = 10) + (ע = 70) + (ק = 100) + (ב = 2) = 182 (7×26)
 Joseph = יוסף (י = 10) + (ס = 60) + (פ = 80) = 156 (6×26)

The three successive factors, 8, 7, 6, in the three multiples of 26 show a *descending* order, which expresses the hierarchical order of the three patriarchs, a technique we shall come across again presently.

Another interesting feature is that the numerical value of Sarah’s alternative name *Sarai*, the only matriarch whose life span is explicitly mentioned, adds up to 510 (30×17).

Sarai = שרי (ש = 300) + (ר = 200) + (י = 10) = 510 (30×17)

Sarah’s life span of 127 years does not seem to have any symbolic meaning in itself, but perhaps this life span served another purpose. I discovered this specific function when I added her 127 years to the life spans of her husband, her son and her grandson, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and found that the four life spans together amount to 629 (37×17). This can

only mean that her life span of 127 years had the function of bringing the total up to a multiple of 17.

$$\begin{array}{rcl}
 \text{Abraham} & = & 175 \\
 + \text{Isaac} & = & 180 \\
 + \text{Jacob} & = & \underline{147} \\
 & & 502 \\
 \\
 + \text{Sarah} & = & \underline{127} \\
 & & 629
 \end{array}$$

Another remarkable feature is that the life spans of the three patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, 502 years, together with Joseph's 110 years also add up to a multiple of 17, namely 612 (36×17). These data can hardly be a matter of chance, but seem to have been computed intentionally to express the relationships between these ancestors from Abraham and Sarah through to Joseph as well as the indispensability of the first Israelite matriarch.

Apart from these significant features, the life spans of the four patriarchs have another special feature: they are computed in such a way that they set the patriarchs in a striking hierarchical sequence. It was Nahum Sarna (1966) and Stanley Gevirtz (1977) who brought to the notice of the scholarly world the discovery made by Schildenberger and Meysing that the life spans of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob appear to have been fashioned in accordance with a distinct pattern.²³ The pattern is the succession of the squares of the numbers 5, 6, and 7, having an ascending sequence ending with 7, multiplied by the uneven numbers 7, 5, and 3, starting with 7 and having a descending sequence. The three uneven numbers once again signify the hierarchy of the patriarchs.

$$\begin{array}{rcl}
 \text{Abraham's } 175 & = & 5 \times 5 \times 7 \\
 \text{Isaac's } 180 & = & 6 \times 6 \times 5 \\
 \text{Jacob's } 147 & = & 7 \times 7 \times 3
 \end{array}$$

James G. Williams has argued that the life span of Joseph should be included in the pattern, since Joseph symbolically brings the patriarchal narratives to an end and "combines and

embodies many of the features of the portrayals of the preceding patriarchs and matriarchs.” Joseph, with his life span of 110 years, is the successor in the pattern 7–5–3–1 and the sum of his predecessors multiplied by his own number in the hierarchy: $(25 + 36 + 49) \times 1 = 110$.²⁴

Duane Christensen has argued that the pattern is not complete, since we are missing the formula $8 \times 8 \times 1 = 64$. Who is the fourth person in the sequence, with his 64 years? Christensen has identified this person as Israel.²⁵ The problem is how to explain the number 64? In my opinion, the puzzle can best be solved by calculating the numerical value of the name Israel, which adds up to exactly 64 ($10 + 21 + 20 + 1 + 12$). In this case, the number does not represent the life span of Israel (which is the same as that of Jacob), but the presence of the alternative name of Jacob.

Christensen himself has suggested another possibility based on the work of the medieval Jewish scholar Rashi. According to Rashi’s calculations, Jacob left home when he was 63 years of age; but he did not go immediately to Haran. As Rashi put it, “After he had received the blessings he concealed himself in Eber’s school for fourteen years.”²⁶ Jacob served fourteen years in Laban’s house for his two wives, Rachel and Leah, and another six years for Laban’s flocks—before the birth of Joseph (Gen 30:25). Joseph was 30 years of age when he became ruler in Egypt, and nine years passed before Jacob came to Egypt. This would make Jacob 116 years of age when he came to Egypt, if one assumes “that the fifty-three years he spent with Laban etc. began immediately after he had left his father.”²⁷ But Jacob himself said to Pharaoh, “[I am] 130 years [old]” (Gen 47:9)—and thus fourteen years are missing. If we follow Rashi’s calculations, Jacob left Laban when he was 97 years old and spent two years en route back to Canaan. At age 99, he wrestled with the angel at the Jabbok, when his name was changed to Israel. The total of the years Jacob lived with his father Isaac and his uncle Laban was $63 + 20 = 83$ years. And since he died at 147, he lived 64 years in another “home”—14

years in “the school of Eber,” two years en route to Palestine, and 48 years as Israel in the land of Canaan and Egypt. The fourth person in the list of patriarchs according to the mathematical formula would then appear to be “Israel,” as distinct from Jacob, who lived 64 years on his own—outside of his father Abraham’s and his uncle Laban’s house.

Abraham’s 175 years are computed as: $(5 \times 5) \times 7$

Isaac’s 180 years are computed as: $(6 \times 6) \times 5$

Jacob’s 147 years are computed as: $(7 \times 7) \times 3$

“Israel’s” 64 years are computed as: $(8 \times 8) \times 1$

Joseph’s 110 years are computed as: $(5 \times 5 + 6 \times 6 + 7 \times 7) \times 1$

The question arises as to the origin of this remarkable computation. I myself have argued that the numbers 175, 180, and 147 are not to be considered the starting point of the graded arrangement of their factors but their result, since I discovered that the sum of all three sets of factors amounts to 17, which goes for the fourth set regarding “Israel” as well. This means that all four sets of factors derive from 17.

the factors of Abram’s 175 years: $17 = 5 + 5 + 7$

the factors of Isaac’s 180 years: $17 = 6 + 6 + 5$

the factors of Jacob’s 147 years: $17 = 7 + 7 + 3$

the factors of “Israel’s” 64 years: $17 = 8 + 8 + 1$

Joseph as the sum of his predecessors:

$$(5 + 5) + (6 + 6) + (7 + 7) + (8 + 8) = 52 (2 \times 26)$$

The life spans of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are therefore clearly governed by the divine name number 17, while that of Joseph is governed by 26, which seems to underline his distinct status and special position. The life span of Joseph, as the *sum* of his predecessors, is similar to what we found for the life span of Methuselah. I explained earlier that his 969 years is 840 (7 times the maximum of 120 years) plus the *sum* of the digits of the years mentioned with respect to Mahalalel, Jared, and Lamech (see chapter 4, “The Role of 7 in the Life Spans of the Patriarchs.”)

In this way, the lives of the ancestors of the Israelites appear to be governed by the divine name numbers 17 and 26, obviously to express numerically the idea that God was with them in accordance with his promise to them. There is additional evidence to substantiate this. First, right at the beginning of the Joseph Story, in Gen 37:2, it is said that Joseph was 17 years old. Second, in Gen 47:28 the author used exactly 17 words to tell that Jacob lived in Egypt for 17 years and died at the age of 147. Finally, in the passage dealing with the death of Abraham (Gen 25:7–11) we count exactly 68 (4×17) words.

The genealogies in Genesis 10 and 11 have a number of striking numerical features. I shall confine myself to mentioning only a few to illustrate the use of the two divine name numbers 17 and 26 in the genealogies as well, once again to express God's presence and involvement. The genealogy of the sons of Noah in Genesis 10 lists the following.

- ▶ 14 descendants for Japhet and 12 for Ham, together 26
- ▶ for Shem likewise 26 descendants: 5 sons for him, 4 for Aram, 1 for Arphaxad, 1 for Shelah, 2 for Eber, and 13 for Joktan
- ▶ Mizraim's 6 sons and Canaan's 11 add up to 17 descendants
- ▶ Gen 10:21–32 consists of 104 (4×26) words and 390 (15×26) letters
- ▶ The numerical values of the names of the 10 patriarchs from Noah through Terah
- ▶ Noah, Shem, Arphaxad, Shelah, Eber, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, Terah total $3383 = 58 + 340 + 605 + 338 + 272 + 113 + 276 + 509 + 264 + 608 = 199 \times 17$
- ▶ The numerical values of Adam (45), Noah (58) and Abraham (248), the three pillars of Genesis, add up to 351, which is the sum of the numbers from 1 to 26^{28}
- ▶ In Genesis 5 and 11 we count 26 names in Abraham's ancestry from Adam to Iscah
- ▶ There are 26 generations from Adam - Noah (tenth) - Abraham (twentieth) - Moses (twenty-sixth)
- ▶ In the book of Genesis exactly 26 women are mentioned by name

To show that such series of 26 are not limited to the book of Genesis, I would call attention to the fact that in the prose

framework of the book of Job: the introduction (1:1 – 3:1 in the Hebrew text) and the epilogue (42:7–17), the name *YHWH* and the name *Job* both occur exactly 26 times.

Oskar Goldberg, *Die fünf Bücher Moses ein Zahlengebäude* (Berlin, 1908), whose work I shall discuss briefly in the next chapter, has discovered that the number of letters of the 104 (4×26) words in Gen 10:21–32 is a multiple of 26, namely 390 (15×26). Moreover, he noted that the numerical values of the first 13 names add up to 3588 (138×26) and that those of the 13 sons of Joktan amount to 2756 (106×26).

The Watermark of the Name of God As the Hallmark of Holy Scripture

What I have brought forward above must suffice to give the reader an impression of the many ways in which the divine name numbers are woven into the text via names and life spans to express God's presence and involvement. Let me conclude this survey by remarking that the divine name numbers appear to have played an important role also in the formation process of Holy Scripture. With regard to the book of Psalms, Duane Christensen has discovered that at an earlier stage of its development the Psalter consisted of a collection lacking what is known as Book II, psalms 42–72, which was inserted at a later stage. This earlier collection was made up of 119 (7×17) psalms, which were structured as follows around the number 17.

Book I	(1–41)	41
Book III	(73–89)	17
Book IV	(90–106)	17
Book V	(107–150)	44
Total number of psalms:		$34 + 85 = 119$
		$(2 \times 17) + (5 \times 17) = (7 \times 17)$

The total number of psalms in Books I and V, 85, is a multiple of 17: (5×17), while Books III and IV each consist of 17

psalms. Moreover, of the 85 original “Davidic Psalter” (Books I and V) 51 (3×17) belong to David, while 34 (2×17) are attributed to other authors.²⁹ This is a clear illustration of the structuring role played by the divine name number 17 in the formation process of Scripture, of which the purpose seems to have been to “seal” the authoritative writings and preserve a canonical form of the sacred tradition.³⁰

In my own research, I detected a similar role for both 17 and 26 in the formation process of the book of Deuteronomy. This means that this “sealing” of a text by means of the divine name was practiced already during the earlier stages of the growth of the text, and also at the end of that process, when the text achieved its final form. What I have observed in Deuteronomy points to a relatively early date for the use of these numbers by the biblical authors as a technique to seal their writings as holy Scripture, by fitting them, so to speak, with the watermark of the name of God, the hallmark of canonicity. Further historical research, I firmly believe, will substantiate this supposition.³¹