

2. The Story of Moses at Mount Horeb in Exodus 1:1-4:17

This survey of the numerical features of the text is based on a comprehensive logotechnical analysis, but I shall only focus on the way prominence is given to crucial events by means of the divine name numbers **17** and **26**. For the use of this striking literary technique in other prose texts, see, e.g., the literary context of the [Song of Hannah](#) and the [Song of Daniel](#). The survey pays particular attention to the dialogues and specifically to the divine speeches.

The Sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob (1:1-7)

This section sets the tone for the meticulously organized compositional structure of the entire book, which is based on the numerical thinking of its author(s). It is made up of **7** verses, signifying the idea of fullness and abundance.

Moreover, the passage is governed throughout in a most sophisticated way by the number of fulfilment, **11**. The use of this number may have originated in the fact that the passage deals with the **11** sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, but its purpose is clearly to prelude the proliferation of the Israelites in Egypt after the death of Joseph: "The descendants of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them (v. 7).¹

1:1-3	the names of the sons announced	11 words
1:2-4	the names mentioned	11 words
1:5	the 70 descendants of Jacob in Egypt	11 words
1:6	the death of Joseph and his generation	7 words
1:7	the proliferation of the Israelites	11 words

Even the number of letters in the passage is a multiple of **11**, namely **209** (19 x 11).

And finally, it consists of **51** (3 x **17**) words, signifying Yahweh's presence through his name.

Pharaoh takes Measures to Curb the Proliferation of the Israelites (1:8-22)

1:9-10	Pharaoh's speech about his plans	26 words
1:11-12	Pharaoh's measures put into effect	26 words
1:14	The effects for the Israelites	17 words
1:18	Pharaoh summons the midwives	13 words
1:19	The response of the midwives	17 words
1:22	Pharaoh's command to kill every son	13 words

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The Birth of Moses, his Stay in Egypt and his Flight to Midian (2:1-25)

2:1-3	Moses is born and put into a basket on the Nile	40 words
2:4-6	Pharaoh's daughter saw and takes pity on him	40 words
2:9-10	Moses is nursed and taken to Pharaoh's daughter	34 (2x 17) words
2:11	Moses is confronted with violence against his kin	17 words
2:14-16	Moses' life in danger: he flees to Midian	51 (3x 17) words
2:19-20	Jethro's daughters tells their father about Moses	26 words
2:23-25	Yahweh notices the cries of the people under bondage	40 words
2:1-25	Total number of words in this part of the story	340 (20x 17) words

The use of **40** words in no less than 3 instances is intentional, obviously to prelude the three periods of **40** years in the lifetime of Moses: **40** years in Egypt, **40** years in Midian as a shepherd, and **40** years as the leader of his people in the desert.

¹ For the significance of **11** as the number of fulfilment, see my *Numerical Secrets of the Bible*, pp. 57-73.

Moses at Mount Horeb where Yahweh appears to him (3:1-22)

3:5	God tells Moses that he is standing on holy ground	17 words
3:4-8	God reveals to Moses his intention to deliver his people	68 (4x17) words
3:9-10	God commands Moses to carry out his intention	26 words
3:11-15	God encourages Moses and reveals his name	52 (2x26) words
3:9-16	All words spoken by God to reveal his salvific plan	102 (6x17) words
3:17	God refers to his intention to deliver his people	17 words
3:18	God instructs Moses to convey his intention to Pharaoh	26 words
3:17-22	All words spoken by God to let his plan be carried out	102 (6x17) words
3:4-22	Total number of words in the divine speeches	272 (16x17) words.

There are altogether 8 divine speeches: 7 in 3:4-14 (up to the revelation of Yahweh's Name), introduced by 7 introductory formulae (vs. 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, 14a, 14b), followed by an additional speech (vs. 15-22), introduced, however, by the formula containing 'also' (in v. 15a).

It is intriguing to note that v. 14a is made up of 7 words with altogether 26 letters (15 in the introduction and 11 in Yahweh's speech, which represent the numerical value of YH and WH respectively). The second part of the verse (v. 14b) has altogether 34 (2 x 17) letters. Compare the Third Commandment dealing with God's Name (Exod. 20:7 and Deut. 5:11), which has 17 words and 51 (3 x 17) letters!

This scribal device for giving prominence to crucial sections even on letter level is to be found many times in the Book of Psalms: E.g., the 26 letters in each of the two 7-word refrains in [Psalm 8](#) (v. 2a and 10), and the 17 letters in the mathematical centre of [Psalm 13](#) (v. 4a) and of [Psalm 25](#) (v. 11b), etc.²

Moses equipped for his task (4:1-17)

This story is made up of 17 verses and 255 (15 x 17) words, with altogether 7 speeches. The analysis in terms of the criteria *narrative*, *introductory formulae*, and *speeches*, reveals the architecture of the text, which is throughout governed by the divine name number 17.

Speeches	Sections	Narrative	Introductions	Speeches
1	4:1-2	18	3	2 +
2	4:3	7	1	2 +
3	4:4-5	7	4	18 +
4	4:6	8	4	4 + = 26
5	4:7-10	9	1	43
6	4:11-13	25	3	26
7	4:14-17	11	1	58
Total	4:1-17	85 (5x17)	17	153 (9x17)

Exodus 3:1 - 4:17 has altogether 650 (25 x 26) words (395 + 255).

The above features are representative of the whole book. They form the tip of the iceberg.

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² Loren F. Bliese has detected multiple 26-letter lines in the Minor prophets and elsewhere. See his paper "Analyzing and Translating Prominence in Hebrew Bible Texts", *JSOT* 27 (2002), pp. 223-235.