

The Chapter Arrangement in the Hebrew Bible

It is generally accepted that Stephen Langton of Canterbury (1150-1228) divided the books of the Vulgate into the chapters that became the standard, almost universally accepted arrangement. With hindsight, its subsequent introduction into the Hebrew Bible was probably necessary and useful, but in my opinion it was most unfortunate, because it does not correspond with the structural design of the books of TNK that emerged through scholarly structural analysis.

However, working recently on the quantitative structural analysis of the Biblical books, I was amazed to find that Langton's chapter arrangement in the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah are in broad outline in agreement with their structural design, which is based on the Masoretic layout markers *Petuchah* and *Setumah*, content, and numerical considerations. See <http://www.labuschagne.nl/prophets.htm>

The book of Isaiah divides into seven Segments:

- Segment 1: Chapters 1-12 Prophecies mainly concerning Judah and Jerusalem. **P**
- Segment 2: Chapters 13-23 Prophecies concerning foreign nations and Israel. **P**
- Segment 3: Chapters 24-27 YHWH's judgement of the world and his glorious reign. **[]**
- Segment 4: Chapters 28-35 Prophecies concerning YHWH's transformation of the world. **P**
- Segment 5: Chapters 36-39 A prophetic evaluation of the Assyrian onslaught of Judah. **P**
- Segment 6: Chapters 40-55 Prophecies concerning the exiles in Babylonia. **S**
- Segment 7: Chapters 56-66 Prophecies concerning restoration in postexilic Palestine. **Colophon**

The book of Jeremiah likewise divides into seven Segments:

- Segment 1: Chapters 1-6 Jeremiah's call and his first prophecies. **P**
- Segment 2: Chapters 7-12 Prophecies concerning the coming disaster. **S**
- Segment 3: Chapters 13-20 YHWH's plan to bring disaster over Judah. **P**
- Segment 4: Chapters 21-29 Prophecies concerning specific leaders in Judah. **S**
- Segment 5: Chapters 30-35 Future hope for Judah. **P**
- Segment 6: Chapters 36-45 Jeremiah's suffering in a besieged city. **S**
- Segment 7a: Chapters 46-51 Prophecies against foreign nations. **S**
- Segment 7b: Chapter **52** The destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation. **Colophon**

In all cases, the outer boundaries of the chapters coincide with those of the segments. Moreover, note that the book of Jeremiah as such has **51 (3x17)** chapters, and including the Appendix, **52 (2x26)**.

Turning now to the chapters of the five books of the Torah, we get the following intriguing picture:

The book of Genesis	50	153 (9x17) chapters
The book of Exodus	40	
The book of Leviticus	27	
The book of Numbers	36	
The book of Deuteronomy	34 (2x17) . Altogether 187 (11x17) chapters.	

The significant totals, multiples of **17**, cannot be a matter of coincidence, especially in light of the profuse use of **17** (and **26**) made by the Biblical writers for structuring purposes. This is amply illustrated by my quantitative structural analysis of about half of the Hebrew Bible. I must confess that it never occurred to me to count the chapters in the Torah, simply because I used to have a low estimation of Langton's arrangement.

However, my attitude changed when I was confronted with the structural design I found in the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah. And as a fortunate stroke of serendipity, the day before I started this article Sister Maria Hulsker of the Greek Orthodox Convent in Asten, the Netherlands, with whom I have a regular correspondence about Biblical matters, drew my attention to these conspicuous multiples in the Torah, and also to the fact that the new Testament has altogether **260 (10x26)** chapters.

Apart from what I discovered in Isaiah and Jeremiah, a cursory glance at the nine books of the Enneateuch, Genesis-Kings, shows that a considerable number of chapters match the structural design

based on scholarly insights; that is to say that the outer boundaries of the chapters coincide in many instances with those of the subdivisions of the text. Here is an overview and the statistics:

- in Genesis it is Chapters 3, 4, 10, 12-16, 20, 23, 24, 35, 38-42, 48 (18 of 36 = **50%**);
- in Exodus, Chapters 1-4, 10, 12, 17-20, 24, 30-37, 40 (20 of 40 = **50%**);
- in Leviticus, Chapters 1-3, 5-7, 11-24, 26-27 (22 of 27 = **81%**);
- in Numbers, Chapters 1, 4-8, 9-12, 14-20, 24, 26, 27, 31-36 (26 of 36 = **72%**);
- in Deuteronomy, Chapters 3, 4, 7-11, 19-20, 21-26, 27-28, 29-30, 31-34 (23 of 34 = **68%**);
- in Joshua, Chapters 8, 9-12, 13-19, 20-21, 22, 23, 24 (17 of 24 = **71%**);
- in Judges, Chapters 6-8, 9, 10-12, 13-16, 17-18, and 19-21 (14 of 21 = **67%**);
- in 1 Samuel, Chapters 1-2, 8, 9-16, 19-20, 21-24, 29-31 (20 of 31 = **65%**);
- in 2 Samuel, Chapters 1, 5-14, 21-24 (15 of 24 = **63%**);
- in 1 Kings, Chapters 6-7, 14-15, 17-18, 19 (7 of 22 = **32%**);
- in 2 Kings, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18-21 (12 of 25 = **48%**).
- In Genesis-Kings it is 194 of the 365 chapters (**53%**).

The statistics in the Enneateuch and two prophetic books show that a considerable number of the standard chapters are in agreement with the structural design of these eleven books. Future analysis of the other books of the Hebrew Bible may conform this. What do we do with the information presented here? It raises in any case a number of historical questions concerning Stephen Langton and his relationship with the Jewish scholarly elite at the time.

1) What did he know about the real structural design of the books of the Bible, which is based on the layout markers, content and numerical considerations?

2) Was he familiar with the use of certain symbolical numbers by the Biblical writers to give structure to their texts and to imbue them with symbolism? The numbers in question are **7**, the number of fullness, **11**, the number of fulfilment, and the divine name numbers **17** and **26**, which represent the numerical value of the name YHWH. See the [General Introduction to Quantitative Structural Analysis](#).

3) An important fact in Langton's life is that he lived in France for 25 years, where he earned a doctorate in arts and theology in Paris and also taught there for many years. Since the 13th century saw the rise of kabbalistic speculations in Spain and France, the question arises as to what extent he was informed by the Jewish scholars he met there about pre-kabbalistic, Biblical numerology. What did he learn from them? Was he acquainted with the Jewish *áriga* tradition that the name of God was woven into the text of the Torah as in textile, presumably by means of the divine name numbers **17** and **26**?

- This tradition was, as far as we know, first vented (certainly not invented!) by the great Spanish Kabbalist Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla, who was active during the second half of the 13th century. For his biography, see Elke Morlok, *Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla's Hermeneutics*, Tübingen 2011.

Seeking the answers to these questions may be an interesting research project. As for me, it must suffice to mention G.F. Moore's classic article, "The Vulgate Chapters and Numbered Verses in the Hebrew Bible", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1893), pp. 73-78, and the most recent article on the subject: J. van Banning, "Reflections upon the Chapter Divisions of Stephen Langton", in: M.C.A. Korpel et al., *Method in Unit Delimitation* (Pericope 6), Leiden/Boston, 2007, pp. 141-161.*

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