THE PATTERN OF THE DIVINE SPEECH FORMULAS IN THE PENTATEUCH

The key to its literary structure

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The purpose of this article is to present the results obtained from a study of the formulas denoting divine speech in the Pentateuch: the cases in which YHWH is the subject of the verbs 'āmar, dibbēr, qārā' and siwwāh, and where the noun dāhār is used in connection with YHWH. During the course of this investigation I discovered that these formulas have an unmistakable literary function and, what is more, form a distinct pattern in the books Genesis-Numbers on the one hand, and in Deuteronomy on the other, where the formulas function in a different way. When I became aware of the significance of the pattern I discovered, I decided to inform the scholarly world as soon as possible about what might prove to be the key to the solution of the problem of the literary structure of the Pentateuch, more particularly of the Tetrateuch. Since it is impossible at this stage to evaluate the full meaning of this discovery for the whole Pentateuch problem and for the literary analysis of these texts, it must suffice here to offer an over-all picture of the distribution of the divine speech formulas, putting forward my observations with regard to their literary function and drawing some preliminary conclusions.

The starting-point for this work was the observation that there were clusters of divine speech formulas in the book of Genesis. In addition to the ten formulas in the story of Creation in Gen. i and in the Flood story (Gen. vi-ix), clusters of seven occur in Gen. iii, xv, xvii, xviii, xxii, xxxi and xxxv, which seem to be deliberately so constructed, since the subject matter cannot always dictate seven divine speeches at a time. Moreover, some formulas give the impression of being superfluous in those instances where they occur in
one continuing divine speech (e.g. Gen. xv 4; Ex. iii 6; vi 2 and xx-
xxiii 20f., xxxiv 1). In between there seemed to be smaller clusters of
three in Gen. xii and xlvi 1-4, and four in Gen. iv, xvi, xviii 1-15 and
xxxii 23-33. Having marked the formulas in the text of my Biblia
Hebraica throughout the Pentateuch, I decided to type them out in
the order in which they occur. Then the pattern, found in the
synopsis at the end of this article, gradually emerged. A closer ex-
amination revealed that the smaller clusters in Genesis consist of
four divine speech formulas almost always belonging together
either as 4 or 3 + 1. It appeared that three clusters of seven formulas
occur in the Primeval story, each of which is followed by the smaller
cluster of four, resulting in the pattern 7 + 4 + 7 + 4 + 7 + 4. In Gen.
xii-xviii this pattern is reversed, but from Gen. xx onwards till the
end of the book it reverts to that of the Primeval story, but a cluster
of seven precedes, bringing one again symmetry in the pattern and
resulting in the following double symmetric pattern:

\[ 7 + 4 + 7 + 4 + 7 + 4 + 7 + 4 + 7 + 4 + 7 + 4 + 7 + 4 + 7 + 4 + 7 + 4. \]

It appeared further that from Exodus onwards the clusters of four
are abandoned and that the clusters of seven divine speech formulas
occur right through Exodus and Leviticus till the end of Numbers,
totalling four series of seven clusters of seven formulas (see the
synopsis).

The second observation concerned the crucial part played by the
verb qārā in the over-all structure of the Tetrateuch. It occurs 23
times with YHWH as subject, two instances of which are in-
tegrated in a cluster of seven formulas (Gen. xxxv 10b and Numb.
xii 5), which means that they do not feature outside this cluster.
The remaining 21 occurrences are distributed throughout the
Tetrateuch as follows: one series of seven instances in the Primeval
story, followed by a series of three instances in Gen. xxi-xxii,
resulting in 7 + 3 instances in Genesis, continued in Exodus iii-xxiv
with four instances completing the second series of seven at xxiv 16;
the third series of seven begins in Ex. xxxi 2 and ends in Numb. xi

1 I differ from G. Lisowsky, Konkordanz zum Hebräischen Alien Testament (Stutt-
gart, 1958), p. 1270, who erroneously considers YHWH the subject of the verb in
Gen. xi 9 and Moses the subject in Ex. xxxiv 5 and Numb. xi 3. See the synopsis
under qārā.