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Won W. Lee, *Punishment and Forgiveness in Israel's Migratory Campaign*

Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2003

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Won Lee's doctoral dissertation, which reflects the research interests of Rolf Knierim, focuses on a synchronic reading of Numbers 10:11–36:13 as a unified literary composition. The study begins with a comparative review of “major proposals” by George B. Gray, Martin Noth, Philip Budd, Dennis Olson, Jacob Milgrom and Timothy Ashley. Lee then sets forth his own “systematic discussion of the structure of Numbers 10:11–36:13, which accounts for generative inexplicit conceptualities underneath the text” (p. 46). Lee attempts to demonstrate that Num. 10:11–36:13 is a distinct literary unit on the basis of certain structural indicators (pp. 73–121). He then turns his attention to a detailed analysis of 36 literary subunits using Knierim's method of “conceptual analysis” (pp. 121–209). The concluding section explores “macrostructure” where Lee shows how these 36 units are arranged in larger groupings within two major sections (10:11–14:45 and 15:1–36:13). The “working definition for an individual unit is that it consists of its own subject, verb, and verb complement; . . . it displays an identifiable genre; and it conveys an intention or a theme” (p. 120). Since these subunits vary from a single verse (36:13) to one that includes three chapters (22:1–24:25), it is difficult to see how this definition applies in any consistent manner.

Lee's study, which is well-argued and thorough, shows remarkable control of the secondary literature. The main problem is not a reflection on the author's competence, but rather the inevitable result of faulty presuppositions on which the study is based.

At first I puzzled over Lee's quick dismissal of evidence suggesting a “chiastic pattern” or concentric structure of any sort, whether advanced by Philip Budd, Jacob Milgrom, Kathy Sakenfeld, Gordon Wenham or Mary Douglas. Such structures are dismissed as having nothing more than “an artistic function for the material to which it refers” (p. 38) or simply as “a stylistic convention.” Lee insists that conclusions on “the structure of Numbers by virtue of the substantive and compositional qualities of its correspondence in the chiastic pattern” are invalid. And thus, “the question of the structural unity of Numbers still remains unanswered” (p. 39). Unfortunately that was my own response to Lee's categorical conclusion of his lengthy analysis: “The following is the macrostructure of Numbers 10:11–36:13” (p. 280). The detailed outline that follows on the next two and half pages may be suggestive and useful; but it does not present *the macrostructure* of the text in question. It is nothing more than one more detailed outline, among others, of a significant portion of the book of Numbers.

If there is substance to the claim on the part of a growing number of scholars that the biblical text is concentric in its essential structure, much like the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid* and other ancient literary works of epic proportion—and most musical compositions—then we must question the validity of Lee's work from the outset. He has established one certain boundary on which to base his work, namely that of Num. 36:13. But if he insists on working with this boundary, his starting point must be Num.

1:1 and not 10:11. The entire book of Numbers is the literary unit on which a study of this nature must be based.

When the musician Andrezej Panufnik composed his *Sinfonia Votiva* for the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1981, he dedicated it to the Black Madonna of Czestochowa. The symphony happens to be his eighth and it takes little effort to find the number eight in that Byzantine icon painted on a piece of cypress wood. The larger nimbus of the Madonna is intersected by the smaller one around the head of the infant. But of primary importance, from a structural point of view, is the left arm of the babe, which together with the flow of the garment of the Madonna forms another circle of equal size and tangent to the larger nimbus to form a figure eight. Panufnik took the number eight as his structuring principle and created a perfectly balanced concentric musical structure. At the same time, I would challenge any critic to find that structure, if he did not already know in advance that it was there. And if one chooses to analyze the latter three-fourths of Panufnik's work of art as a distinct compositional unit, one will find structure without ever seeing the dominant motif that governs the composition of that work. And so it is with the literary work of art we call the Torah and any one of its five basic parts.

I explore the structure of Numbers within the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) as a whole in my book, *The Unity of the Bible* (Paulist Press, 2003), pp. 11–13. On the next two pages I examine the structure of Numbers within what David Noel Freedman calls “the Primary History” (Torah and Former Prophets). Elsewhere I outline the structure of Numbers within the Torah as the primary literary unit. In each case we find a different center in the concentric compositional design and a somewhat different outline of the book of Numbers as well.

It is possible to outline the macrostructure of Numbers in a three-level nested menorah pattern.

A	Israel prepares to enter the Promised Land	1:1–10:36
B	Journey from Mount Sinai to Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran	11:1–35
C	Political rebellion on the part of Miriam and Aaron	12:1–16
X	<b>Forty years on the edge of the Promised Land</b>	13:1–20:21
C'	Death of Aaron at Mount Hor (Miriam died at Kadesh [20:1])	20:22–29
B'	Journey from Kadesh to the Plains of Moab	21:1–25:18
A'	Israel prepares to enter the Promised Land	26:1–36:13

The center of this structure (13:1–20:21) may be outlined in similar fashion. Within this structure, the center is found in Num. 16:34–17:13, as Mary Douglas argues on other grounds. And the center within the center is found in 16:46, where Moses commands Aaron to make atonement for the people. Lee's outline of *the macrostructure of Numbers 10:11–36:13* (pp. 280–82) does not show the central importance of Numbers 16–17 and its focus on the confirmation of Aaron as priestly leader.

When I first saw the title of Lee's book, I had no idea that it was a detailed literary analysis of Numbers. Though I now see why the particular title was selected, I find it to be inadequate and misleading. The primary theme of Numbers is not punishment and forgiveness. The primary theme has to do with the wars of YHWH in which the book of Numbers plays a staging role as the conflict moves from the Exodus from Egypt to the

Eisodus (Entry) into the Promised Land, which begins in the latter part of Numbers and concludes in the book of Joshua.

Though Lee makes frequent use of the concept of the “ongoing sanctuary campaign” of ancient Israel, I do not know what he means by this terminology. It is better to use words and imagery of the biblical account itself than to borrow abstract concepts from others with little or no attempt to explain what those words mean. Israel understood her epic story as the “wars of YHWH.” The so-called “sanctuary campaign” is better described in terms of what Frank Cross calls the tradition of “ritual conquest” (see *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* [1973], pp. 99–104). We are dealing here with a specific “march of conquest” in which the Divine Warrior is marching in the vanguard of his hosts from Kadesh to the battle camp at Gilgal and the second phase of YHWH’s “Holy War” (cf. Deut. 33:2; Hab. 3:3; and elsewhere). This is symbolic warfare, which stands at the center of Israel’s self-identity. Though Knierim sees “the military campaign of ancient Israel as dominant and superordinate to the migratory and sacral-cultic aspects” (p. 215), the title Lee has chosen for his book suggests the opposite.

After years of research and reflection on the structure of Deuteronomy, I was surprised to learn that the eleven *Parashoth* (prescribed weekly portions in the Jewish lectionary cycle of Torah readings) reflect the original literary structure of that book. My guess is that we will find something similar for Numbers as well. The ten *Parashoth* in Numbers (#34–43) may be divided into three groups. The center of these three structures highlight respectively: 1) offerings from tribal leaders and the consecration of the Levites (Numbers 7–8); 2) Aaron’s budding rod—showing the special status of his priesthood (Numbers 17); and 3) “holy war” against Midian and the cleansing of the contamination at Peth Peor (Numbers 31). The boundary Lee has chosen in 10:11, which falls within *Parashah* 36 (Num. 8:1–12:16), is not the major structural break that he claims. And since all he has written here proceeds from this assumption, we have an impressive structure built on a foundation of sand. And when the winds blow and beat against that house, it will surely fall (cf. Matt. 7:27).

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