

Psalm 3— Logotechnical Analysis

Guidelines

- Please read the [General Introduction](#) as well as the Introduction to [Book I](#).
- For common features found in the numerical analysis charts, see the "[Key to the charts](#)".

Specific features of Psalm 3

- Psalm 3 is the first psalm explicitly labelled in the heading ‘for David’. It is clearly the follow-up to Psalm 2, which introduces the 37 Davidic psalms in Book I. In the heading, the poem is connected with an episode in David’s life, “when he fled from his son Absalom”, which is interpreted as reflecting David’s trust in God, as an example for all the kings of the earth and all people in dangerous situations.
- The most characteristic feature of the psalm is the use of the number **7** and its multiples to give structure to the text, more specifically the use of **7** words in each of the first five verses, **14** words in both Canto I and 2, and **28** (2 x 14) in Cantos 3-4.
- The author deliberately used the number **14**, which represents the numerical value of the name of David (4 + 6 + 4 = 14), to highlight the first Davidic psalm, symbolically stamping it with his ‘signature’ as belonging to David. See Observation 3 below.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 2-3, 4-5 || 6-7, 8-9 (2 cantos, 4 strophes, with 8 verselines and 18 cola, taking vs. 8-9 as two tricolonic verselines).
- Fokkelman: 2-3, 4-5 || 6-7, 8, 9 (2 stanzas, 5 strophes, with 9 verselines and 18 cola, taking v. 8 as two bicolic verselines and v. 9 as a separate bicolic verseline).
- Labuschagne: similarly as Fokkelman.
- For an overview of other divisions of the text, see Van der Lugt, CAS, Psalm 3, § 6.

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words addressed to God; Column **d**: words spoken about God.
- The numbering of the verselines is in **brown**.

| | | Total | a | b | c | d |
|---|--|-------|------|-----|------|-----|
| 1 | מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד בְּבָרְחוֹ מִפְּנֵי אֲבִשָׁלוֹם בְּנוֹ: | 6 | 2 | 4 | | |
| | דָּוִד = 14 | 6 | = 2 | + 4 | | |
| | Heading, v. 1 | | | | | |
| 2 | יְהוָה מִהֲרַבּוּ צָרִי 1 | 4 | 4 | | 4 | |
| | רַבִּים קָמוּ עָלַי: | 3 | | 3 | 3 | |
| | Total, v. 2 | 7 | = 4 | + 3 | = 7 | + 0 |
| 3 | רַבִּים אָמְרִים לְנַפְשִׁי 2 | 3 | 3 | | 3 | |
| | אֵין יְשׁוּעָתָה לּוֹ בְּאֱלֹהִים סָלָה: | 4 | 4 | | 4 | |
| | Total, v. 3 | 7 | = 7 | + 0 | = 7 | + 0 |
| | Strophe 1 Total, v. 2-3 | 14 | = 11 | + 3 | = 14 | + 0 |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|-----------|---|----|----------------|
| 4 | וְאַתָּה יְהוָה מִגֵּן בְּעַד־יָדָי 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | |
| | כְּבוֹדִי וּמְרִים רֵאשִׁי: | 3 | | 3 | 3 |
| | Total, v. 4 | <u>7</u> | = | 4 | + 3 = 7 + 0 |
| 5 | קוֹלִי אֶל־יְהוָה אֶקְרָא 4 | 4 | 4 | | 4 |
| | וַיַּעֲנֵנִי מִתּוֹר קְדָשׁוֹ סֵלָה: | 3 | | 3 | 3 |
| | Total, v. 5 | <u>7</u> | = | 4 | + 3 = 0 + 7 |
| | Strophe 2 Total, v. 4-5 | <u>14</u> | = | 8 | + 6 = 7 + 7 |
| | Canto I Total, v. 2-5 | <u>28</u> | = | 19 | + 9 = 21 + 7 |
| 6 | אֲנִי שָׁכַבְתִּי [אִישָׁנָה] 5 | 3 | 3 | | 3 |
| | Two middle cola: הִקְצוֹתַי כִּי יְהוָה יִסְמְכֵנִי: | 4 | | 4 | 1 3 |
| | Meaningful centre (18 = 8 + 2 + 8) Total, v. 6 | <u>7</u> | = | 4 | + 3 = 0 + 7 |
| 7 | לֹא־אִירָא מְרַבְבוֹת עָם 6 | 4 | 4 | | 4 |
| | אֲשֶׁר סָבִיב שְׁתוֹ עָלַי: | 4 | | 4 | 4 |
| | Total, v. 7 | <u>8</u> | = | 4 | + 4 = 0 + 8 |
| | Strophe 3 Total, v. 6-7 | <u>15</u> | = | 8 | + 7 = 0 + 15 |
| | Total, v. 2-7 | <u>43</u> | = | 27 | + 16 = 21 + 22 |
| 8 | קוֹמָה יְהוָה 7 | 2 | 2 | | 2 |
| | הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי אֱלֹהֵי | 2 | 2 | | 2 |
| | כִּי־הִכִּיתָ אֶת־כָּל־אֹיְבֵי לְחַיִּי 8 | 6 | 6 | | 6 |
| | שְׁנֵי רִשְׁעִים שִׁבְרָתָ: | 3 | | 3 | 3 |
| | Strophe 4 Total, v. 8 | <u>13</u> | = | 10 | + 3 = 13 + 0 |
| | Total, v. 7-8 | <u>21</u> | = | 14 | + 7 = 13 + 8 |
| | Total, v. 6-8 | <u>28</u> | = | 18 | + 10 = 13 + 15 |
| | Total, v. 2-8 | <u>56</u> | = | 37 | + 19 = 34 + 22 |
| 9 | לִיהוָה הִישׁוּעָה 9 | 2 | 2 | | 2 |
| | עַל־עַמּוּד בְּרִכְתּוֹ סֵלָה: | 3 | | 3 | 3 |
| | Strophe 5 Total, v. 9 | <u>5</u> | = | 2 | + 3 = 3 + 2 |
| | Total, v. 7-9 | <u>26</u> | = | 16 | + 10 = 16 + 10 |
| | Canto II Total, v. 6-9 | <u>33</u> | = | 20 | + 13 = 16 + 17 |
| | Total, v. 2-9 | <u>61</u> | = | 39 | + 22 = 37 + 24 |
| | With the heading, v. 1-9 | <u>67</u> | = | 41 | + 26 |
| | With סֵלָה (3x), v. 1-9 | <u>70</u> | = | 42 | + 28 |

Observations

1. Psalm 3 is the first psalm in the Psalter provided with a heading and the technical term *selah*, which appears no less than 3 times. This confronts us with the question as to the status of these elements: are they integral to the psalms and should they automatically be included in the word-count, or should we disregard them when analyzing the psalms? The current view among scholars is that they were secondarily added in the course of the formation of the Psalter.

Duane Christensen, however, regards these elements as integral to the psalms, arguing that this is the way they are presented in MT. I do not concur with the traditional view, but I disagree with Christensen. Having logotechnically analysed all 150 psalms, I am more than ever convinced that such elements stand outside the poetical bodies of the psalms. The evidence for this seems to me to be overwhelming. Even if some authors have

provided their poems with headings - which certainly cannot be excluded – they did not regard them as integral to the poems. The poets designed their psalms as numerical compositions in their own right, each with its own structure and distinctive numerical features, quite apart from the headings and other non-poetic material. I am convinced that the inclusion of these elements in the word-count does not contribute to a deeper insight into the numerical structure of the psalms proper. It would, in my opinion, only blur their basic features, to the detriment of our understanding of these unique works of art. Therefore, in order not to distract the reader's attention from the real issue, the quantitative structural analysis of the psalms proper, I shall leave these elements out of consideration. However, the word-counts of the headings and *selahs* will meticulously be registered and presented in the charts and the Tables as indispensable evidence for our study of the numerical aspects of the entire text as it stands in MT.

See also the Introduction to [Book I](#), Table III, Observation 4.

2. Let us now examine the numerical aspects of this psalm to assess its basic compositional structure and numerical characteristics and then see what the effect is of including the heading and the three *selahs* in the word-count.

In terms of the 61 words of the psalm, the word **וַאֲשָׁנָה**, 'and I sleep', in v. 6, constitutes the arithmetic middle (30 + 1 + 30). Since this single word is not very meaningful, we have to look for the consciously designed meaningful centre on the level of verselines and cola. It appears to be the middle verseline coinciding with the two middle cola:

אֲנִי שָׁכַבְתִּי וַאֲשָׁנָה הִקְיִצְוֹתַי כִּי יִתְּנֶה יְיָ יְסָמְכֵנִי
 I lie down and I sleep // I awake, for YHWH sustains me.

This 7-word statement is a most appropriate meaningful centre for a psalm of which the essential idea is confidence in YHWH's help and protection in a dangerous situation. Those who trust in him, go to bed without fear, knowing that he shall sustain them and that they will awake safe and sound in the morning. The idea clearly recurs in Ps. 4:9, indicating the close connection between the two psalms.

Significantly, the (7-letter) word **הִקְיִצְוֹתַי**, 'I awake', is positioned precisely at the centre of the 7 words – compare the 7-word centre of Psalm 1!

3. From beginning to end, the number 7, primarily the number of fullness, determines the framework of the psalm. Given its stringent structure, there are only two instances of a divine name number: in the **34** (2 x 17) words addressed to God in vs. 2-8, and in the **17** words spoken about God in vs. 6-9. The number 7 features in the following instances:

- vs. 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 (the first five verses) are all made up of 7 words
- vs. 2-5 (Canto I) have **21** (3 x 7) words addressed to God and 7 spoken about him
- vs. 6-7 have 7 words after *atnach*
- vs. 7-8 have **21** (3 x 7) words, with 14 before and 7 after *atnach*
- vs. 2-8 have altogether **56** (8 x 7) words.

What meets the eye immediately is the use of the number 14, the numerical value of the name David: **דָּוִד** (4 + 6 + 4 = 14). The 56 (4 x 14) words divide into:

| | | | |
|--------------|---------|---------------------------|---|
| Strophe 1 | vs. 2-3 | 14 words | Strophe 1 is demarcated by <i>selah</i> |
| Strophe 2 | vs. 4-5 | 14 words | Strophe 2 is demarcated by <i>selah</i> |
| Strophes 3-4 | vs. 6-8 | 28 (2 x 14) words. | |

Since Psalm 3 is the first *Davidic* Psalm in the Psalter, the author has obviously chosen this number to structure the psalm and to imbue it with David's 'signature'. See pp. 2-3 in my Analysis of [1 Samuel](#). Note, however, that this does not imply that every 14 occurring in the book of Psalms refers to David!

Throughout the Psalter the name of David is spelled דָּוִד, except in Psalm 122 (v. 5b), where it is deliberately written in *scriptio plena* as דָּוִדָּד (4 + 6 + 10 + 4 = **24**). For the reason behind this particular spelling, see Observation 2 in my analysis of [Psalm 122](#).

The use of the numerical value of the name David recalls the genealogy in Matthew 1, where it is used to structure the **42** (3 x **14**) generations in the ancestry of Jesus.

4. Given the clear-cut numerical structure of the psalm proper, defined by the numbers **7** and **14**, one needs little imagination to realize that a clever editor could easily compute what the logotechnical effect would be of a heading consisting of a specific number of words. It is therefore not surprising that a 6-word heading was devised and that 3 *selahs* were employed to add 3 extra words. This enhances the numerical aspects as follows:
 - **28** (2 x **14**) words in vs. 1-4
 - **70** (5 x **14**) words in the entire text, including the *selahs*
 - the **70** words divide into **42** (3 x **14**) before and **28** (2 x **14**) after *atnach*
 - vs. 1-6 and 4-8 have both **26** words before and **17** after *atnach*.

However, when we regard these elements as integral to the poem, the extended text – which is in fact a different text - would inevitably lack several features mentioned above in Observation 3. A more disastrous effect would be that the stamp of the name of David on Strophe 1 and 2 would be completely obliterated.

Last but not least, the 7-word meaningful centre of the psalm, v. 6, would be eclipsed and substituted by a meaningless conglomerate of 6 words (4 in v. 5b and 2 in 6a).

In my judgement, the negative effects of the inclusion of 9 extra, non-poetic words greatly outweigh the advantages. Therefore, I conclude that there is no adequate basis for the supposition that the author/editor regarded the heading and the *selahs* as part of the text. The inclusion of these elements in the word-count does not contribute to a better understanding of the compositional structure of the psalms; quite the contrary.

5. The name יהוה occurs no less than 6 times (vs. 2a, 4a, 5a, 6b, 8a and 9a), while the word אֱלֹהִים is found twice.

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