

Psalm 8— 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 8

- Psalm 8, which concludes the Group of Seven Psalms (Psalms 2-8), is a showpiece of numerical composition fundamentally determined by the number of fullness (**7**) and the divine name- and *kabod* numbers. The author also used the envelope technique to embed the **58**-word core of the poem (vs. 2c-9) in the **14**-word framework (2a-b and 10).
- The text is arranged in such a way that the words **וּבֶן־אָדָם**, 'yes, a human being' (v. 5b), constitute the arithmetic middle of the poem, which is a precise reflection of humankind's central position in the universe. The larger meaningful centre, vs. 5-6, contains the quintessential idea of the psalm: although human beings are insignificant in the context of the universe, nevertheless God crowns them with dignity and power.
- The divine *name* numbers **17** and **26** and the *kabod* numbers **23** and **32** are not only used to give structure to the text, but also, more particularly, to weave the *name* and the *glory* of God into the fabric of the text as they are interwoven in the fabric of the universe. This disposition of the universe, in which the divine presence pervades, is reminiscent of Psalm 29, the concluding poem of the First Group of Eleven Psalms in Book I (Psalms 19-29). One wonders what the significance is that both concluding psalms deal with the presence of God in the universe, and what this means for our understanding of the arrangement of the psalms in Book I. See the Introduction to Book I.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 2a-b, 2c-3, 4-5 || 6-7, 8-9, 10 (2 cantos, 6 strophes, 10 verselines, 20 cola).
- Fokkelman and Labuschagne: similarly.
- For an overview of other divisions of the text, see Van der Lugt, CAS, Psalm 8, § 6.

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words in the main body; **d**: words in the framework.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	Heading לְמִנְצֵחַ עַל־הַנְּתִיב מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד :	5	5			
2a-b	יְהוָה אֲדַבֵּר 1	2	2			2
	מִה־אֲדִיר שְׁמִי ¹ בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ [^]	5	5			5
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 2a-b	7	= 7	+ 0	= 0	+ 7
2c	אֲשֶׁר תִּנְהַ הַיּוֹדֵד ² עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם :	5		5	5	
3	מִפִּי עוֹלָלִים וַיִּנְקִים יִסְדֵּת עֹז	5	5		5	
	לְמַעַן צוֹרְרֵי ³ ־עֹז	3	2	2	2	
	לְהַשְׁבִּית אוֹיֵב וּמִתְנַקֵּם :	3		3	3	
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 2c-3	15	= 7	+ 8	= 15	+ 0

4	<p>כִּי־אֲרָאָה שְׁמִי־ךָ⁴ מַעֲשֵׂי אֲצַבְעֹתֶיךָ⁵ ^</p> <p>יִרְחַ וְכֹכְבִים אֲשֶׁר כֹּונְנָתָה:</p> <p>Total, v. 4</p> <p>Total, v. 2c-4</p>	<p>5 5 5</p> <p>4 4 4</p> <hr/> <p>9 = 5 + 4 = 9 + 0</p> <p>24 = 12 + 12 = 24 + 0</p>
5	<p>מָה־אֲנוֹשׁ כִּי־תִזְכְּרֵנוּ⁵</p> <p>Middle words: יְבֹן־אָדָם כִּי תִפְקְדֵנוּ:</p> <p>72 = 35 + 2 + 35</p> <p>Total, v. 5</p> <p>Strophe 3 Total, v. 4-5</p> <p>Total, v. 2c-5</p> <p>Canto I Total, v. 2-5</p>	<p>4 4 4</p> <hr/> <p>4 4 4</p> <hr/> <p>8 = 4 + 4 = 8 + 0</p> <p>17 = 9 + 8 = 17 + 0</p> <p>32 = 16 + 16 = 32 + 0</p> <p>39 = 23 + 16 = 32 + 7</p>
6	<p>וְתִחַסְרָהוּ מַעַט מֵאֱלֹהִים⁶</p> <p>וְכָבוֹד וְהָדָר תִּשְׁפָּרְהוּ:</p> <p>Middle cola: 20 = 8 + 4 + 8</p> <p>Middle verselines: 10 = 4 + 2 + 4</p> <p>Total, v. 6</p> <p>Total, v. 5-6</p>	<p>3 3 3</p> <hr/> <p>3 3 3</p> <hr/> <p>6 = 3 + 3 = 6 + 0</p> <p>14 = 7 + 7 = 14 + 0</p>
7	<p>תִּמְשִׁלְהוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂי יָדֶיךָ⁶ ^</p> <p>כָּל־שִׁתָּה תַחַת־רַגְלָיו:</p> <p>Total, v. 7</p> <p>Strophe 4 Total, v. 6-7</p> <p>Total, v. 4-7</p> <p>Total, v. 2-7</p>	<p>3 3 3</p> <hr/> <p>4 4 4</p> <hr/> <p>7 = 3 + 4 = 7 + 0</p> <p>13 = 6 + 7 = 13 + 0</p> <p>30 = 15 + 15 = 30 + 0</p> <p>52 = 29 + 23 = 45 + 7</p>
8	<p>צְנֹה וְאֲלֹפִים כָּלָם⁸</p> <p>וְגַם בְּתִמּוֹת שְׂרָי:</p> <p>Total, v. 8</p> <p>Total, v. 2c-8</p>	<p>3 3 3</p> <hr/> <p>3 3 3</p> <hr/> <p>6 = 3 + 3 = 6 + 0</p> <p>51 = 25 + 26 = 51 + 0</p>
9	<p>צְפוֹר שְׁמַיִם וְדַגֵּי הַיָּם⁹</p> <p>עֲבַר אַרְחֹת יָמַי:</p> <p>Total, v. 9</p> <p>Numerical v. 6-7</p> <p>Strophe 5 Chiasmus v. 8-9</p> <p>Total, v. 6-9</p> <p>Total, v. 2c-9</p>	<p>4 4 4</p> <hr/> <p>3 3 3</p> <hr/> <p>7 = 4 + 3 = 7 + 0</p> <p>13 = 6 + 7 = 13 + 0</p> <p>13 = 7 + 6 = 13 + 0</p> <p>26 = 13 + 13 = 26 + 0</p> <p>58 = 29 + 29 = 58 + 0</p>
10	<p>יְהִיָּה אֱדִינִי¹⁰</p> <p>מָה־אֲדִיר שְׁמִי־ךָ בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ:</p> <p>Strophe 6 Conclusion Total, v. 10</p> <p>Canto II Total, v. 6-10</p> <p>Total, v. 2-10</p> <p>With the heading, v. 1-10</p>	<p>2 2 2</p> <hr/> <p>5 5 5</p> <hr/> <p>7 = 2 + 5 = 0 + 7</p> <p>33 = 15 + 18 = 26 + 7</p> <p>72 = 38 + 34 = 58 + 14</p> <p>77 = 43 + 34</p>

* In v. 2c M. Dahood, followed by Christensen and others, proposed to read אֲשֶׁר תִּבְנֶה as one word אֲשֶׁר־תִּבְנֶה, 'I worship', but on logotechnical grounds I retain the *lectio difficilior*, because the loss of one word would ruin the numerical structure.

Observations

1. In terms of the 72 words of the poem, the arithmetic centre is constituted by two words in v. 5b (72 = 35 + 2 + 35). These two words also constitute the arithmetic centre of the core, vs. 2c-9 (58 = 28 + 2 + 28), which means that the structure is 7 + 28 + 2 + 28 + 7:

וּבֶן־אָדָם 'yea, a human being'.

This centre is a particularly meaningful middle, since its positioning in the text is a precise reflection of the central position of humankind in the universe.

From both perspectives the arithmetic centre is surrounded by a multiple of 7 words: 35 + 35 = 70 and 28 + 28 = 56 respectively. In the same way, the 14-word framework surrounds the 58-word core, vs. 2c-9: 72 = 7 + 58 + 7. The consciously designed use of the number 7 is primarily to symbolize the idea of fullness.

2. It may be mere coincidence, but the two sets of 7 words both contain 26 letters!
3. The 2-word arithmetic centre in v. 5b falls within the 2 middle verselines (10 = 4 + 2 + 4), which coincide with the 4 middle cola (20 = 8 + 4 + 8), vs. 5-6, which may be regarded as the meaningful centre in terms of the poetical structure. It contains the gist of the poem:

מִזֶּה־אֲנוֹשׁ כִּי־תִזְכְּרֵנוּ ^ וּבֶן־אָדָם כִּי תִפְקְדֵנוּ: ⁵

וְתִחַסְרָהוּ מִעֵט מַאֲלָהִים ^ וְכָבוֹד וְהָדָר תַּעֲטֶרְהוּ: ⁶

What is a human being that you think of him // a child of Adam that you care for him?
You have made him little less than a god // and with glory and honour crowned him.

Note also that vs. 5-6 are made up of 14 words, with 7 before and 7 after atnach.

4. The number 7 also figures in the 7 instances of the 2nd person singular suffix –ךָ.
- The explicit reference to God's name, שְׁמֶךָ, 'your name', and the name YHWH itself, appear both in the framework at the beginning and at the end of the poem, signifying the idea that the name of YHWH envelops the entire universe.

The remarkable term שְׁמֵיךָ, 'your heavens', clearly alliterating שְׁמֶךָ, is situated at the centre of the 7 occurrences of the suffix –ךָ:

1. שְׁמֶךָ, 'your name' (2a)
2. הוֹדְךָ, 'your majesty' (2b)
3. צוֹרְרֵיךָ, 'your adversaries' (3a)
4. שְׁמֵיךָ, 'your heavens' (4a)
5. אֶצְבְּעוֹתֶיךָ, 'your fingers' (4a)
6. יְדֵיךָ, 'your hands' (7a)
7. שְׁמֶךָ, 'your name' (10b).

For a comparable series of 7 suffixes, see Observation 4 in my Analysis of [Psalm 144](#). The keyword שְׁמֶךָ, which has already been precluded in Ps. 7:18 – see Observation 6 in the Analysis of [Psalm 7](#) – reverberates twice further on in Psalm 9 (vs. 3 and 11) as a unifying thread. The same applies to אֲנוֹשׁ, which echoes in Ps. 9:3 – see Observation 5 in my Analysis of [Psalm 9](#).

5. The 43 words of vs. 4-9 clearly divide into 17 words used to depict the privileged position (vs. 4-5) and 26 words to describe God's ordination of humankind (vs. 6-9). Both numbers represent the numerical value of the word כְּבוֹד, 'glory', spelled defectively: the *positional* value of כְּבוֹד is 17 (11 + 2 + 4) while their *decimal* value is 26 (20 + 2 + 4).

See the General Introduction under "The name YHWH woven into the fabric of the text".

6. The **58** words of the core of the psalm, vs. 2c-9, divide precisely into **32** (in vs. 2c-5) and **26** (in vs. 6-9) constituting the *kebod*-YHWH formula: **58 = 32 + 26**, which expresses the *glory* of God. Note that the word כבוד in v. 6b is consciously spelled in *scriptio plena*.

vs. 2c-5 **32** words (כבוד = 20 + 2 + 6 + 4)

vs. 6-9 **26** words (יהוה = 10 + 5 + 6 + 5).

In addition, the 30 words of vs. 4-7 divide into **17** words in vs. 4-5, and **13** in vs. 6-7, constituting the minor YHWH-*echad* formula: **17 + 13 = 30**, symbolically expressing YHWH's uniqueness and incomparability. The uniqueness of YHWH contrasts strongly with the trivial status of mortal human beings, who are created a little less than 'gods', i.e., divine beings. How much less than God Himself!

The numerical structure of the poem can be outlined as follows:

Vs. 2a-b	Universal glorification of God's name	7		
Vs. 2c-3	<u>God's importance in the Universe</u>		15	} 32
Vs. 4-5	<u>Man's trivial status in the Universe</u>		17	
Vs. 6-7	<u>Man's important status on earth</u>		13	} 26
Vs. 8-9	<u>Man's importance on earth</u>		13	
Vs. 10	Universal glorification of God's name	7		} 58

In this way the numerical structure of the hymn underscores its central message, that the name and the glory of God are omnipresent in the entire Universe, where human beings have a *trivial* status, but also on the earth, where they have an *important* status.

7. If we include the 5-word heading in the word-count, the text has **77** (11 x 7) words in total. I consider it likely that a 5-word heading was deliberately chosen by the editor of the Psalter to upgrade the 72 words of the poem in order to achieve still another multiple of 7.
8. The name יהוה occurs only twice: in the first and last verselines, as in Psalms 23, 101 and 131, as observed by Van der Lugt. The word אלהים occurs only in vs. 6a, where it does not refer to God but denotes a divine being.

© 2008

Dr. C.J. Labuschagne Senior Lecturer in Semitic Languages (retired),
 Brinkhorst 44 University of Pretoria, South Africa
 9751 AT Haren (Gron) and
 The Netherlands Professor of Old Testament (retired),
labuschagne.cj@planet.nl University of Groningen, The Netherlands