Psalm 15— 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 15

- In its own way, Psalm 15 is an ingenious numerical composition. The text is structured in two ways: first, in the pattern of question - answer - conclusion, and second, by the perfect balance between the *positively* and *negatively* phrased requirements for the person qualified to stay in God's abode.
- The number of fullness, **7**, is used to define the number of words describing the *positive* requirements, while both divine name numbers are used to define the number of words describing the *negative* requirements.
- The author used the numerical value of the keyword לְשֹׁנוֹ, 'his tongue' (53), to define the total number of words in the poem.

Strophic structure

- Van der Lugt and Labuschagne: 1-2, 3-5 (2 strophes, 5 verselines and 13 cola).
- Fokkelman: similarly, except that he has 6 verselines, taking vs. 4a-b, 4c-5b and 5c as separate verselines.
- For an overview of other divisions of the text, see Van der Lugt, *CAS*, Psalm 15, § 6.

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words describing the *positively phrased* requirements (vs. 2-5b);
- Column **d**: words describing the *negatively phrased* requirements (vs. 2-5b).
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in brown.

			Total	a	b	c	d
1	מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד	Heading:	2	2			
	יְהֹוָה מִי־יָגוּר בְּאָהֳלֶךָ^	1	4	4			
	מִי־יִשְׁכֹּן בְּהַר קָדְשֶׁךָ׃		4		4		
	The question, v. 1:		8	= 4	+ 4		
2	הוֹלֵךְ¹ תָּמִים וּפֹעֵל² צֶדֶק^	2	4	4		4	
	וְדֹבֵר³ אֱמֶת בִּלְבָבוֹ׃		3		3	3	
	Total, v. 2:		7	= 4	+ 3	= **7**	+ 0
Strophe 1	Total, v. 1-2:		15	= 8	+ 7	= **7**	+ 0

			3	4	4			4
3	Vs. 3 middle verseline	לֹא־רָגַל¹ עַל־לְשֹׁנוֹ						
	לֹא־עָשָׂה² לְרֵעֵהוּ רָעָה^ **53** = לְשֹׁנוֹ			4	4			4
	3c middle colon: וְחֶרְפָּה לֹא־נָשָׂא³ עַל־קְרֹבוֹ			5		5		5

13 = 6 + **1** + 6   Total, v. 3:   13 = 8 + 5 = 0 + 13
Middle word: 53 = **26** + **1** + 26   Total, v. 2-3:   20 = 12 + 8 = **7** + 13

4		נִבְזֶה⁴ בְּעֵינָיו נִמְאָס	4	3	3		3	
		וְאֶת־יִרְאֵי יְהוָה⁵ יְכַבֵּד^		4	4		4	
		נִשְׁבַּע⁶ לְהָרַע וְלֹא⁴ יָמִר:		4		4		4

Total, v. 4:   11 = 7 + 4 = **7** + 4
Total, v. 3-4:   24 = **15** + 9 = **7** + 17
Total, v. 2-4:   31 = 19 + 12 = 14 + 17

5a		כַּסְפּוֹ לֹא־נָתַן⁵ בְּנֶשֶׁךְ	5	4	4			4
5b		וְשֹׁחַד עַל־נָקִי⁶ לֹא לָקָח		5	5			5

The answer, v. 2-5b: 40 = 28 + 12 = 14 + **26**

		עֹשֵׂה⁷־אֵלֶּה^ לֹא יִמּוֹט⁷ לְעוֹלָם: *		5	2	3		

5c   **The conclusion, v. 5c:**   5 = 2 + 3
     Total, v. 5:   14 = **11** + 3
Strophe 2   Total, v. 3-5:   38 = **26** + 12
            Total, v. 1-5:   53 = **34** + 19
With the heading, v. 1-5:   **55** = 36 + 19

* For the strange positioning of the *atnach* in v. 5c (within a colon!), see Observation 4 below,
   and compare the note at the bottom of the chart in my Analysis of Psalm 6.

Observations

1. The preposition עַל in v. 3c is the middle word: 53 = **26** + **1** + **26**, but the poem does not have a meaningful centre on word level. However, in terms of the 13 cola, the middle colon, v. 3c, is a good candidate for meaningful centre (13 = 6 + **1** + 6):

   וְחֶרְפָּה לֹא־נָשָׂא עַל־קְרֹבוֹ   'And (he) tells no tales against his neighbour'.

   If we include the 2-word heading in the word count, the middle colon coincides precisely with the arithmetic centre on word level: 55 = 25 + **5** + 25. In my opinion, a 2-word heading was intentionally chosen for this purpose. For this specific function of the heading, see my Analysis of Psalm 67, Observations 6 and 7, as well as the summary of the results of the logotechnical analysis of Psalm 67 and the conclusions.

   The 'telling of tales' by a gossiping tongue was obviously regarded as the most damaging thing anyone can do to a neighbour. That is why the reference to this reprehensible behaviour is positioned in the very centre of the poem.

   The particular attention paid to the tongue is strongly underscored by the use of exactly 53 words in the poem, the numerical value of לְשֹׁנוֹ, 'his tongue', in v. 3a (12+21+14+6). This reminds us not only of Psalm 52, but also more specifically, of what is said about the tongue in the Epistle of James (3:1-12)!

   For the use of the numerical value of an important word in the text to define its number of words, see the General Introduction, "The numerical value of a keyword in the text."

2. The poem is clearly structured in the pattern: question – answer – conclusion:

    v. 1   the question: who can stay in God's abode?   8 w

    vs. 2-5b   the answer: positive and negative requirements   **14** + **26** = 40 w

    vs. 5c   the conclusion: the person who qualifies shall live secure   5 w.

3. Significantly enough, the divine name numbers feature especially in the number of words describing the *negatively* phrased requirements (Column d): **17** words in vs. 3-4b and **9** in v. 5a, altogether **26**. The use of the divine name numbers specifically in this case is obviously to emphasize what is forbidden: you shall not do that!

   The emphasis on the *negative* acts is ingeniously highlighted by the use of altogether precisely **7** verbal forms with לֹא, 'not' (in box). Note that all 4 words in v. 4c describe a *negative* aspect: (when) he swears to his own hurt, *he does not change*.

   The number of fullness features also in the **7** verbal forms words (in box) describing the *positive acts* (Column c, with **7** words in v. 2 and **7** in v. 4). Note that the phrase נִבְזֶה בְּעֵינָיו, 'despised in his eyes', denotes a positive act, despite the passive form.

4. The divine name numbers feature in the following way:

       vs. 3-4   **17** words in total in Column d

       vs. 2-5b   **26** words in total in Column d

       vs. 3-5   **26** words before atnach: **15** (YH) in vs. 3-4, and **11** (WH) in v. 5*

       vs. 1-5   **34** (2 x **17**) words before atnach*

       vs. 1-5   **26** words before, and **26** words after the pivotal word.

       * in both cases achieved by the unusual position of *atnach,* within the colon in v. 5c!

5. The 53 words of the psalm consists of exactly **182** (**7** x **26**) letters. If consciously designed, this explains the defective spelling (without *mater lectionis*) of לְשֹׁנוֹ in vs. 3a and יָמִר in vs. 4c, which was deliberately used to achieve the desired number of letters. See the note at the bottom of the chart in my Analysis of Psalm 16, where I counted **364** (14 x **26**) letters. Compare also Observation 2 in my Analysis of Psalm 67, where I counted **208** (8 x **26**) letters. Such significant numbers of letters suggest that letter-count goes right back to the authorial – or at least editorial - phase of the text (or some texts), and that it was devised to weave additional divine name numbers into the text.

6. The name יהוה occurs twice (vs. 1a, as the very first word, and 4b).