

Psalm 17— 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 17

- Unlike Psalm 16, this psalm is from beginning to end a prayer addressed to God. The central core, Canto II (vs. 6-12), is a prayer for protection against the godless.
- Its consciously designed meaningful centre is constituted by v. 8, the middle Masoretic verse (15 = 7 + 1 + 7), and the middle poetic verseline (17 = 8 + 1 + 8).

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: || Canticle boundary: |

- Van der Lugt: 1, 2-3 | 4-5, 6-7 || 8-9, 10-12 | 13-14b, 14c-15 (2 cantos with 4 sub-cantos, 8 strophes with 17 verselines and 35 cola).
- Fokkelman: similarly, except that he finds 18 verselines and 40 cola, taking v. 6 as two bicolic verselines, v. 7 as a tricolon, and vs. 13-14 as having 8 cola instead of 6.
- Labuschagne: 1, 2-3, 4-5 || 6-7, 8-9, 10-12 || 13-14, 15 (3 cantos and 8 strophes, with 17 verselines and 35 cola).
- For an overview of other divisions of the text, see Van der Lugt, CAS, Psalm 17, § 6.

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: prayer for vindication and deliverance; **d**: prayer for protection from foes.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	תְּפִלָּה לַדָּוָד Heading	2	2			
	שָׁמְעָה יְהוָה צְדָקָה 1	3	3		3	
	הִקְשִׁיבָה רִנָּתִי	2	2		2	
	הֶאֱזִינָה תְּפִלָּתִי 2	2	2		2	
	בְּלֹא שִׁפְתֵי מִרְמָה:	3		3	3	
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 1	10	= 7	+ 3	= 10	+ 0
2	מִלִּפְנֵיךָ מִשְׁפָּטִי יִצְאֵנִי 1	3	3		3	
	תַּחֲזִינָה מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל: 2	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 2	6	= 3	+ 3	= 6	+ 0
3*	בְּחַנּוּת לִבִּי פָקַדְתָּ לֵילָה 4	4	4		4	
	צָרְפַתְנִי בְּלֹא תִמְצָאֵנִי	3	3		3	
	זַמְתִּי בְּלֹא יַעֲבֹרֵנִי:	4		4	4	
	Total, v. 3	11	= 7	+ 4	= 11	+ 0
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 2-3	17	= 10	+ 7	= 17	+ 0
	Total, v. 1-3	27	= 17	+ 10	= 27	+ 0

4	לִפְעֻלֹת אָדָם בְּדַבֵּר ³ שִׁפְתָיָהּ [^]	5	4	4	4	
	אֲנִי שָׁמַרְתִּי אֲרָחוֹת פְּרִיץ:		4	4	4	
	Total, v. 4		8	= 4 + 4	= 8 + 0	
5	תִּמְדָה אֲשֶׁרִי ⁴ בְּמַעְגְלוֹתָיָהּ [^]	6	3	3	3	
	בְּלִנְמוֹטוֹ פְּעָמָי:		3	3	3	
	Total, v. 5		6	= 3 + 3	= 6 + 0	
	Strophe 3	Total, v. 4-5	14	= 7 + 7	= 14 + 0	
		Total, v. 2-5	31	= 17 + 14	= 31 + 0	
	Canto I	Total, v. 1-5	41	= 24 + 17	= 41 + 0	
6	אֲנִי־קָרָאתִיךָ כִּי־תַעֲנֵנִי אֱלֹהִים	7	5	5	5	
	הַט־ ⁵ אֲזִנָּה לִי שְׁמַע אִמְרָתִי:		5	5	5	
	Total, v. 6		10	= 5 + 5	= 0 + 10	
7	הַפְּלֵה ⁶ תְּסַדִּיךָ מוֹשִׁיעַ חוֹסִים [^]	8	4	4	4	
	מִמִּתְקוֹמָמִים ⁷ בְּיַמֶּיךָ:		2	2	2	
	Total, v. 7		6	= 4 + 2	= 0 + 6	
	Strophe 4	Total, v. 6-7	16	= 9 + 7	= 0 + 16	
	Meaningful Centre 31 letters	Total, v. 2-7	47	= 26 + 21	= 31 + 16	
8	8 Middle colon (8a) שְׁמַרְנִי כְּאִישׁוֹן בְּתַעֲוִיךָ	9	4	4	4	
	8 Middle (verse)line (v. 8) : בְּצֵל ⁸ כְּנֹפֶיךָ תִּסְתִּירֵנִי:		3	3	3	
	Middle words: 122 = 58 + 6 + 58	Total, v. 8	7	= 4 + 3	= 0 + 7	
9	מִפְנֵי רָשָׁעִים זֶה שְׂדוּוֹנָי	10	4	4	4	
	אִיבֵי בְּנֹפֶשׁ יִקִּיפוּ עָלָי:		4	4	4	
	Total, v. 9		8	= 4 + 4	= 0 + 8	
	Strophe 5	Total, v. 8-9	15	= 8 + 7	= 0 + 15	
		Total, v. 6-9	31	= 17 + 14	= 0 + 31	
		Total, v. 2-9	62	= 34 + 28	= 31 + 31	
10	חֲלָבִימוֹ סָגְרוּ [^]	11	2	2	2	
	פִּימוֹ דִּבְרוּ בְּגֵאוֹת:		3	3	3	
	Total, v. 10		5	= 2 + 3	= 0 + 5	
	Total, v. 8-10		20	= 10 + 10	= 0 + 20	
	Numerical Total, v. 2-5		31	= 17 + 14	= 31 + 0	
	Chiasmus Total, v. 6-10		36	= 19 + 17	= 0 + 36	
	Total, v. 2-10		67	= 36 + 31	= 31 + 36	
	Total, v. 1-10		77	= 43 + 34	= 41 + 36	
11	אֲשֶׁרִינוּ עִתָּה סִבְבוּנוּ [^]	12	3	3	3	
	שִׁינִיהֶם יִשִּׁיתוּ לְנִטּוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ:		4	4	4	
	Total, v. 11		7	= 3 + 4	= 0 + 7	
12	דְּמִינוּ כְּאֶרְיָה יִכְסוּף לְטָרוּף [^]	13	4	4	4	
	וְכִכְפִּיר יֵשֵׁב בְּמִסְתָּרִים:		3	3	3	
	Total, v. 12		7	= 4 + 3	= 0 + 7	
	Total, v. 11-12		14	= 8 + 6	= 0 + 14	
	Strophe 6	Total, v. 10-12	19	= 9 + 10	= 0 + 19	
		Total, v. 8-12	34	= 17 + 17	= 0 + 34	
	Canto II	Total, v. 6-12	50	= 26 + 24	= 0 + 50	

13	קוֹמָה יְהוָה קִדְמָה פָּנָיו תִּכְרִיעַהוּ ⁸	14	5	5	5
	פִּלְטָה נִפְשֵׁי מִרְשָׁע ⁹ תִּרְבֶּהָ:		4	4	4
	Total, v. 13		9	= 5 + 4	= 9 + 0
14	מִמֹּתִים מִמֹּתִים יְהוָה מִחֶלֶד ¹⁰	15	5	5	5
	חֶלְקָם בְּחַיִּים		2	2	2
	וַיִּצְפּוּנָה ¹¹ תִּמְלֵא בְטָנָם יִשְׁבְּעוּ בָנִים ¹¹	16	5	5	5
	וְהִנִּיחוּ יִתְרָם לְעוֹלָלֵיהֶם:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 14		15	= 12 + 3	= 15 + 0
	Strophe 7 Total, v. 13-14		24	= 17 + 7	= 24 + 0
	Total, v. 11-14		38	= 25 + 13	= 24 + 14
	Total, v. 6-9		31	= 17 + 14	= 0 + 31
	Total, v. 10-14		43	= 26 + 17	= 24 + 19
	Numerical chiasmus, v. 6-14		74	= 43 + 31	= 24 + 50
15	Coda אֲנִי בְצַדֵּק אֶחְזֶה ¹² פָּנֶיךָ ¹²	17	4	4	4
	אֲשַׁבְּעָה בְּחֶקְיִן ¹³ תִּמְוִנָתְךָ:		3	3	3
	Strophe 8 Total, v. 15		7	= 4 + 3	= 7 + 0
	Canto III Total, v. 13-15		31	= 21 + 10	= 31 + 0
	Total, v. 10-15		50	= 30 + 20	= 31 + 0
	Total, v. 6-15		81	= 47 + 34	= 31 + 50
	Total, v. 1-15		122	= 71 + 51	= 72 + 50
	With heading, v. 1-15		124	= 73 + 51	

* Verse 3: MT makes good sense: 'If you test me, you would find nothing; whatever I plan, my mouth would not transgress'. Emending the text in vs. 3bc (see *BHS*) would ruin the numerical structure and cause the loss of no less than 5 divine name numbers. The emendation involves moving the word וְזַמְרִי, 'whatever I plan', from the beginning of the third colon to the end of the second colon and reading וְזַמְרִי, 'my malice', as the object of the preceding verb: 'you will find no malice in me', which means that the *atnach* must be moved to the end of the second colon, after וְזַמְרִי. This makes the emendation unacceptable.

Observations

1. The meaningful centre is to be found in the middle Masoretic verse (15 = 7 + 1 + 7), which coincides precisely with the middle poetic verseline (17 = 8 + 1 + 8). There cannot be any doubt that the 7-word v. 8 has deliberately been designed as the meaningful centre. It constitutes the central peak of the psalm and certainly contains the gist of the prayer for protection against the godless:

שְׁמֵרֵנִי כְּאֵשׁוֹן בְּתַעֲיִן אֲ בְּצֶל כְּנֹפֵיךָ תִּסְתִּירֵנִי

Guard me like the apple of your eye // in the shadow of your wings hide me.

2. Note that this psalm is the 17th psalm in the numbering of the Masoretes (who counted Psalm 9-10 as two psalms). The use of 17 verselines and 17 cola on either side of the middle colon (v. 8a), 17 words in Strophe 2 (vs. 2-3), 34 (2 x 17) in vs. 8-12, and 51 (3 x 17) after *atnach* in the poem as a whole, can hardly be a matter of chance. For the same phenomenon compare Psalm 5, which is governed by the number 5; see Observation 2 in my Analyses of [Psalm 5](#).
3. In search of the structure of the psalm, it is important to note that no less than three passages in the psalm are made up of 31 words (vs. 2-5, 6-9 and 13-15). Moreover, the first two, vs. 2-5 and 6-9, have identical compositional formulas: 31 = 17a + 14b, which

does not seem to be a matter of chance either. The same goes for the fact that the meaningful centre (v. 8) is made up of **31** words. As far as I can see, there is nothing special about the number **31** - no word in the text has this numerical value. However, this does not distract anything from the obvious conclusion that the division of the text into these three equal sections was consciously designed.

In terms of this numerical structure of the psalm and its content, it divides as follows:

vs. 1	Introduction to the plea for vindication	10 words
vs. 2-5	Examine my heart, God, and test me	31 words
vs. 6-9	Answer me, guard me like the apple of your eye	31 words
vs. 10-12	See what our arrogant deadly foes are like	19 words
vs. 13-15	Arise, God, make them perish, and vindicate me	31 words.

This division of the text appears to be in tension with Van der Lugt's and Fokkelman's canto division. They discern a strong caesura between vs. 7 and 8, while I find a strong caesura between vs. 1-5 and vs. 6-12. The question arises whether this is simply a matter of different structures overlapping each other, or whether we have to make a choice. For the time being, settling for the first option, I divide the text in three cantos:

Canto I	vs. 1-5	First part of prayer for vindication	10 + 31 = 41 words
Canto II	vs. 6-12	Prayer for protection from foes	31 + 19 = 50 words
Canto III	vs. 13-15	Second part of prayer for vindication	31 words.

In terms of content, the concluding verseline, v. 15, stands out within the last canto and may be considered a coda. For this literary device, see the General Introduction, "The use of a coda as a device for conclusion."

Apart from the **17** verselines of the poem and the **17** cola flanking the central colon, the divine name numbers **17** and **26** appear in the following instances:

vs. 1-3	17 words before atnach	vs. 8-12	17 before and 17 after atnach
vs. 1-5	17 words after atnach	vs. 6-12	26 words before atnach
vs. 2-5	17 words before atnach	vs. 13-14	17 words before atnach
vs. 2-7	26 words before atnach	vs. 10-14	26 before 17 after atnach
vs. 6-9	17 words before atnach	vs. 1-15	51 (3 x 17) after atnach.
vs. 6-10	17 words after atnach		

Psalms 16 and 17 have **26** verses altogether: **11** and **15** respectively. For the close relationship between the two psalms, see Van der Lugt, *CAS*, p. 202.

A significant feature of the psalm is the series of **13 nouns** with the suffix of the 2nd person singular, with **בְּיַמִּינֶךָ** in v. 7b at the centre: 13 = 6 + **1** + 6. Its central positioning brings **God's right hand** strongly into focus as his powerful instrument for protection. Recently Paul G. Mosca has drawn attention to the function of this word to reinforce one of the psalm's central motifs. See "A Note on Psalm 17:7", *VT* 61 (2011), pp. 388-392.

The name **יהוה** occurs only 3 times (1a, 13a, and 14a). In Psalms 16 and 17 there are altogether **7** occurrences, which brings the total number in Psalms 1-17 up to **78** (3 x **26**)! See the General Introduction, "The name YHWH woven into the fabric of the text", and the Introduction to Book I, Table I.

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