

Psalm 31— 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 31

- Together with Psalm 30, this psalm forms a bridge between between the well-defined coherent sub-groups of eleven psalms: Psalms 19-29 and 32-41.
- A defining feature of the poem is the use of words spoken *about* God in the prayer to determine the strophic structure of the text in much the same way as in Psalm 30.
- Another feature it shares with Psalm 30 is the structuring role of the number of fullness, **7**, and the use of syntax to achieve a desired number of words in the subordinate clauses, in this case, **52** (2 x **26**) words (Column **d**).

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

- Van der Lugt: 2-3, 4-6, 7-9 || 10-11, 12-13, 14-15 || 16-17, 18-19 | 20-21, 22-23 || 24-25 (4 cantos with 11 strophes, 29 verselines and 63 cola).
- Fokkelman: 2-3, 4-5 | 6-7, 8-9 || 10-11, 12, 13-14 || 15-17, 18-19, 20-21 | 22-23 || 24-25 (3 stanzas with 12 strophes, 32 verselines and 68 cola, taking vs. 10 and 12c-e as bicola, v. 19 as a tricolon, and vs. 18, 20 and 21 as having two bicolic verselines each).
- Labuschagne: 2-3, 4-6 || 7-9 | 10-11, 12-13, 14-15 | 16-17, 18-19, 20-21 || 22-23 || 24-25 (4 cantos determined by the change in the direction of address, with 11 strophes, 29 verselines and 66 cola, taking vs. 18, 19, and 20 as tricola).
- For an overview of other divisions of the text, see Van der Lugt, CAS, Psalm 31, § 6.

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words in the main clauses; **d**: words in the subordinate clauses.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	לְמִנְצַח מְזִמּוֹר לְדָוִד : Heading, v. 1	3	3			
2	בְּךָ יְהוָה חֲסִיתִי 1	3	3		3	
	אֶל-אֲבוֹשָׁה לְעוֹלָם^	3	3		3	
	בְּצַדִּיקְתֶּךָ פִּלְטֵנִי :	2		2	2	
	Total, v. 2	8	= 6	+ 2	= 8	+ 0
3	חַטָּה אֵלַי אָזַנְךָ 2	3	3		3	
	מִתְהַרָה תִּצִּילֵנִי	2	2		2	
	הֲיֵה לִי לְצוּר-מְעוֹז 3	4	4		4	
	לְבֵית מְצוּדוֹת לְהוֹשִׁיעֵנִי :	3	3		3	
	Total, v. 3	12	= 12	+ 0	= 12	+ 0
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 2-3	20	= 18	+ 2	= 20	+ 0

4	כִּי־סִלְעֵי וּמְצוּדָתֵי אֶתְהָא־ וּלְמַעַן שִׂמְךָ תִּנְחַנְנִי וּתְנַהַלְנִי: Total, v. 4	4	4	4	4	4	4	8 = 4 + 4 = 0 + 8
5	תּוֹצִיאֵנִי מִרְשַׁת זֶה טָמְנוּ לִי־ כִּי־אַתָּה מְעוּזִי: Total, v. 5 69 = 33 + 3 + 33	5	5	5	5	3	3	8 = 5 + 3 = 5 + 3
6	בִּינְךָ אֶפְקִיד רוּחִי פְּדִיתָה אוֹתִי יְהוָה אֵל אֱמֶת: Total, v. 6 Strophe 2 Total, v. 4-6 Canto I Total, v. 2-6	6	3	3	3	5	5	8 = 8 + 0 = 8 + 0 24 = 17 + 7 = 13 + 11 44 = 35 + 9 = 33 + 11
7	שָׁנֵאתִי הַשְּׁמַרִים הַכְּלִי־שׂוֹאֵא־ וְאֲנִי אֵל־יְהוָה בְּטַחְתִּי: Words spoken about God Total, v. 7 Total, v. 2-7	7	4	4	4	4	4	8 = 4 + 4 = 8 + 0 52 = 39 + 13 = 41 + 11
8	אֲנִילָה וְאֶשְׁמַחָה בְּחֶסֶדְךָ אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתָ אֶת־עֲנִיִּי־ יָדַעְתָּ בְּצָרוֹת נַפְשִׁי: Total, v. 8	8	3	3	3	4	4	4 = 4 + 0 = 4 + 0 10 = 7 + 3 = 3 + 7
9	וְלֹא הִסְגַּרְתִּנִּי בִּיד־אֹיְבֵא־ הַעֲמִדְתָּ בְּמִרְחַב רִגְלִי: Total, v. 9 Total, v. 8-9 Canticle II.1 Strophe 3 Total, v. 7-9 Total, v. 2-9	9	4	4	4	3	3	7 = 4 + 3 = 7 + 0 17 = 11 + 6 = 10 + 7 25 = 15 + 10 = 18 + 7 69 = 50 + 19 = 51 + 18
10	חַנְּנִי יְהוָה כִּי צָר־לִי עֲשֵׂשָׁה בְכַעַס עֵינִי נַפְשִׁי וּבְטָנִי: Total, v. 10	10	5	5	2	3	3	10 = 10 + 0 = 2 + 8
11	כִּי כָלוּ בִּיגוֹן תִּנִּי וּשְׁנוֹתַי בְּאִנְחָה כָּשַׁל בְּעוֹנֵי כַחֲאִי־ וְעֲצָמֵי עֲשָׂשׁוּ: Total, v. 11 Strophe 4 Total, v. 10-11	11	4	4	4	2	2	11 = 9 + 2 = 11 + 0 21 = 19 + 2 = 13 + 8
12	מִכָּל־צָרָרֵי תִּיִתִי חֲרַפָּה וְלִשְׁכְּנֵי מָאֵד וּפְחַד לְמִידְעֵי רָאִי בַחֲוִצֵי־ נִדְרֹו מִמֶּנִּי: Total, v. 12 Total, v. 2-12	13	4	4	4	2	2	12 = 10 + 2 = 12 + 0 102 = 79 + 23 = 76 + 26
13	Middle verseline: וּשְׁכַחְתִּי כְּמַת מַלְבֵּא־ 29 = 14 + 1 + 14 Middle cola: 66 = 32 + 2 + 32 Strophe 5 Total, v. 12-13	15	3	3	3	3	3	6 = 3 + 3 = 6 + 0 18 = 13 + 5 = 18 + 0

14	Middle words:	כִּי שָׁמַעְתִּי דְבַת רַבִּים	16	4	4	4
	217 = 105 + 7 + 105	מְגוּר מִסְבִּיב		2	2	2
		בְּהוֹסְדָם יַחַד עָלַי	17	3	3	3
		לְקַחַת נַפְשִׁי זְמָמוֹ:		3	3	3
		Total, v. 14		12 = 9 + 3 = 0 + 12		
		Total, v. 10-14		51 = 41 + 10 = 31 + 20		
		Total, v. 8-14		68 = 52 + 16 = 41 + 27		
15		וְאָנִי עָלִיךָ בְּטַחְתִּי יְהוָה	18	4	4	4
		אֲמַרְתִּי אֱלֹהֵי אֶתָּה:		3	3	3
		Total, v. 15		7 = 4 + 3 = 7 + 0		
	Strophe 6	Total, v. 14-15		19 = 13 + 6 = 7 + 12		
	Canticle II.2	Total, v. 10-15		58 = 45 + 13 = 38 + 20		
16		בִּיךָ עִתְתִּי	19	2	2	2
		הַצִּילְנִי מִיַּד-אוֹיְבֵי וּמִרִדְפָּי:		4	4	4
		Total, v. 16		6 = 2 + 4 = 6 + 0		
17		הָאִירָה פְּנִיךָ עַל-עַבְדְּךָ	20	4	4	4
		הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי בְּחֶסֶדְךָ:		2	2	2
		Total, v. 17		6 = 4 + 2 = 6 + 0		
	Strophe 7	Total, v. 16-17		12 = 6 + 6 = 12 + 0		
		Total, v. 10-17		70 = 51 + 19 = 50 + 20		
18		יְהוָה אֵל-אֲבוֹשָׁה כִּי קָרַאתִיךָ	21	5	5	3
		יִבְשׁוּ רַשָּׁעִים		2	2	2
		יִדְמוּ לְשֹׂאֵל:		2	2	2
		Total, v. 18		9 = 5 + 4 = 7 + 2		
19		הַאֲלַמְנָה שִׁפְתֵי שֶׁקֶר	22	3	3	3
		הִדְבְּרוֹת עַל-צַדִּיק עָתֵק		4	4	4
		בְּנֶאֱוָה וְבוֹז:		2	2	2
		Total, v. 19		9 = 9 + 0 = 9 + 0		
	Strophe 8	Total, v. 18-19		18 = 14 + 4 = 16 + 2		
20		מָה רַב-טוֹבְךָ אֲשֶׁר-צָפַנְתָּ לִירְאִיךָ	23	6	6	3
		פְּעֻלַת לַחֲסִים בְּךָ		3	3	3
		נִגְדַר בְּנֵי אָדָם:		3	3	3
21		תִּסְתִּירֵם בְּסֶתֶר פְּנִיךָ מִרְכְּסֵי אִישׁ	24	5	5	5
		תִּצְפְּנֵם בְּסֶכֶה מְרִיב לְשָׁנוֹת:		4	4	4
	Strophe 9	Total, v. 20-21		21 = 18 + 3 = 15 + 6		
	Canticle II.3	Total, v. 16-21		51 = 38 + 13 = 43 + 8		
22		בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה	25	2	2	2
		כִּי הִפְלִיא חֶסְדּוֹ לִי בְּעִיר מְצוּר:		6	6	6
	Words spoken about God	Total, v. 22		8 = 2 + 6 = 2 + 6		
23		וְאָנִי אֲמַרְתִּי בְּחַפְזִי	26	3	3	3
		נִגְרַזְתִּי מִנִּגְדַּי עֵינֶיךָ		3	3	3
		אֲכֵן שָׁמַעְתָּ קוֹל תַּחֲנוּנָי	27	4	4	4
		בְּשׁוֹעֵי אֱלִיךָ:		2	2	2
		Total, v. 23		12 = 12 + 0 = 12 + 0		
	Canto III Strophe 10	Total, v. 22-23		20 = 14 + 6 = 14 + 6		
		Total, v. 16-23		71 = 52 + 19 = 57 + 14		

24 vs. 24-25 Coda	אָהָבוּ אֶת־יְהוָה כָּל־חַסִּידָיו	28	5	5	5
Call to the faithful to trust God	אֱמוּנִים נִצֵּר יְהוָה		3	3	3
	וּמִשְׁלָם עַל־יִתְרַ עֲשֵׂה נִאֲוָה:		5	5	5
	Total, v. 24		13	= 8 + 5	= 13 + 0
25	חֲזָקוּ וַיֵּאמֹר לְבַבְכֶם	29	3	3	3
	כָּל־הַמְּיֻחָלִים לַיהוָה:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 25		6	= 3 + 3	= 6 + 0
	Canto IV Strophe 11 Total, v. 24-25		19	= 11 + 8	= 19 + 0
	Total, v. 20-25		60	= 43 + 17	= 48 + 12
	Words spoken about God, v. 7, 22, 24-25		35	= 21 + 14	= 29 + 6
	Words addressed to God, v. 2-6, 8-21, 23		182	= 137 + 45	= 136 + 46
	Total, v. 2-25		217	= 158 + 59	= 165 + 52
	With the heading, v. 1-25		220	= 161 + 59	

Observations

- In terms of the 217 words of the poem, its arithmetic centre is constituted by the 7 words in vs. 13b-14a, significantly made up of 26 letters (105 + 7 + 105):

הָיִיתִי כְּכֵלִי אֶבֶד כִּי שָׁמַעְתִּי דְבַת רַבִּים

I have become like a broken vessel // for I hear the whispering of many.

At first sight, these words may be regarded as the deliberately designed meaningful centre, but in terms of the 29 verselines of the poem, there is a more likely candidate: the middle verseline, v. 13 (29 = 14 + 1 + 14), which coincides with the two middle cola (66 = 32 + 2 + 32):

נִשְׁכַּחְתִּי כְּמֵת מֵלֵב הָיִיתִי כְּכֵלִי אֶבֶד:

I have passed out of mind like one who is dead // I have become like a broken vessel.

Judged from their material content, neither of the two presumed meaningful centres express what may be called the gist of the poem. Both deal one-sidedly with the pitiful condition of the supplicant, but perhaps this was what the author intended.

This is compensated by what may be considered the meaningful centre of vs. 2-9, Van der Lugt's Canto I, as observed by him, the 3 words in v. 5b (69 = 33 + 3 + 33):

כִּי־אַתָּה מְעוּזִי For you are my refuge.

This statement is very reminiscent of the meaningful centre of Psalm 23 (v. 4d):

כִּי־אַתָּה עִמָּדִי For you are with me.

- In terms of the change in the direction of address, the text divides as follows:

vs. 2-6	Strophes 1-2	words addressed to God
v. 7	Strophe 3a	words spoken about God
vs. 8-21	Strophes 3b-9	words addressed to God
v. 22	Strophe 10a	words spoken about God
v. 23	Strophe 10b	words addressed to God
vs. 24-25	Strophes 11-12	words spoken about God.

This shows that the author has used the words spoken about God as an attention-drawing device to highlight the beginning of Strophes 3-9 and Strophe 10, and to mark the end of the poem, Strophes 11-12 (Canto IV). Canto IV is clearly a coda. See the General Introduction, "The use of a coda as a device for conclusion."

But there is more to it, if the author intended the sudden switch in his prayer to **words spoken about God** as a device to mark his canto structure. In that case, we get the following canto division:

vs. 2-6	Canto I	Prayer for deliverance and expression of trust
vs. 7-21	Canto II	Affirmation of trust in YHWH as the only protector
vs. 22-23	Canto III	Blessed be YHWH who heard my prayer
vs. 24-25	Canto IV	Call to all the faithful to trust in YHWH.

Seeing the structuring function of the change in the direction of address in many psalms, the canto structure presented here deserves serious consideration.

3. The divine name numbers are woven into the fabric of the text in a very skilful way. The number **26** features in the following instances:

vs. 2-7	52 (2 x 26) words in total
vs. 2-12	26 words in the subordinate clauses (Column d)
vs. 13-25	26 words in the subordinate clauses (Column d)
vs. 8-14	52 (2 x 26) words before atnach
vs. 16-23	52 (2 x 26) words before atnach
vs. 2-6, 8-21, 23	182 (7 x 26) words addressed to God.

The number **17** shows up in even more instances:

vs. 4-6	17 words before atnach
vs. 8-9	17 words in total
vs. 2-9	51 (3 x 17) words in the main clauses
vs. 2-12	102 (6 x 17) words in total
vs. 10-14	51 (3 x 17) words in total
vs. 8-14	68 (4 x 17) words in total
vs. 10-17	51 (3 x 17) words before atnach
vs. 16-21	51 (3 x 17) words in total
vs. 20-25	17 words after atnach
v. 2-6, 8-21, 23	136 (8 x 17) words in the main clauses, addressed to God.

4. The number **7**, symbolizing fullness and abundance, features very prominently:

217 (31 x **7**) words in total in the psalm
7 words in the arithmetic centre, flanked by **105** (15 x **7**) words on either side
14 (2 x **7**) verselines flanking the central verseline (v. 13) on either side.
35 (5 x **7**) words in total spoken about God
182 (**26** x **7**) words in total addressed to God.

This seems to suggest that the use of **7**, the number of fullness and abundance, as structuring device was prompted by the words **עַל־יְהוָה**, 'abundantly', 'excessively', 'exceedingly', which appear in v. 24c, the call on all saints to love and trust God:

Love YHWH, all you saints!

YHWH preserves the faithful // but **abundantly** requites the arrogant.

Be strong and let your heart take courage // all you who wait for YHWH.

5. It is hard to say whether the number **31**, on its part, has any special significance. It features in the **217** (**31** x **7**) words in total, and in the **31** words on either side of the central colon (**31** + **1** + **31**). However, this being the **31st** Psalm seems to suggest that it does have significance, particularly in light of what we have observed in Psalms 5, 13, and 17. See Observation 2 in my Analysis of [Psalm 5](#)!

6. There are altogether 10 occurrences of the name יהוה (vs. 2a, 6b, 7b, 10a, 15a, 18a, 22a, 24a, 24b, and 25b). They are part of a series of **78** (3 x **26**) in Psalms 29-35. See the General Introduction “The name YHWH woven into the fabric of the text”, and the Introduction to Book I, Table I. The designation אֱלֹהִים, ‘God’, occurs once (v. 6b); so does אֱלֹהֵי, ‘my God’ (v. 15b).

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