

Psalm 38— 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 feature of Psalm 38

- Contrary to Psalm 37, which is from beginning to end a contemplation in which the speaker never addresses God, Psalm 38 is a prayer. Its only significant feature is the way in which three meaningful centres of different passages represent and highlight important aspects of the crisis in which the supplicant finds himself:
 - the *unbearable burden of his sins* (v. 5b, the meaningful centre of Canto I),
 - his *utter desolation* (v. 12b, the centre meaningful of the entire poem),
 - his *deaf-muteness* (v. 14, the meaningful centre of Canto II).

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: || Sub-canto boundary: |

- Van der Lugt and Labuschagne: 2-3, 4-5 | 6-7, 8-9 || 10-11, 12-13, 14-15 | 16-17, 18-19 || 20-21, 22-23 (3 cantos, with 11 strophes, 23 verselines, and 47 cola).
- Fokkelman: 2-3, 4-5 | 6-7, 8-9 || 10-11, 12-13, 14-15 || 16-17, 18-19 | 20-21, 22-23 (3 stanzas with 11 strophes, 22 verselines and 45 cola, taking v. 4 as a bicolic verseline).
- For an overview of other divisions of the text, see Van der Lugt, CAS, Psalm 38, § 6.

Logotechnical analysis

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

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד לְתוֹכֵיר: Heading, v. 1	3	3			
2	יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי בְקִצְפָּךְ תּוֹכִיחֵנִי	1 4	4		4	
	וּבְחַמְתֶּךָ תִּסְרֹנֵנִי:	2		2	2	
	Total, v. 2	6	= 4	+ 2	= 6	+ 0
3	כִּי־חֲצִיךָ נִחַתוּ בִּי	2 4	4			4
	וַתִּנְחַת עָלַי יְדָךְ:	3		3		3
	Total, v. 3	7	= 4	+ 3	= 0	+ 7
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 2-3	13	= 8	+ 5	= 6	+ 7
4	אֵין־מָתַם בְּבִשְׂרֵי	3 3	3		3	
	מִפְּנֵי זַעֲמֻדָּה	2 2	2		2	
	אֵין־שְׁלוֹם בְּעַצְמוֹ	4 3	3	3	3	
	מִפְּנֵי חַטָּאתַי:	2		2	2	
	Total, v. 4	10	= 5	+ 5	= 10	+ 0
	Total, v. 3-4	17	= 9	+ 8	= 10	+ 7
5	כִּי עֲוֹנֹתַי עָבְרוּ רֵאשִׁי	5 4	4			4
	כְּמִשְׂא כְבֹד יִכְבְּדוּ מִמֶּנִּי: Middle of Canto I	4		4		4
	58 = 27 + 4 + 27 Total, v. 5	8	= 4	+ 4	= 0	+ 8
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 4-5	18	= 9	+ 9	= 10	+ 8
	Sub-canto I.1 Total, v. 2-5	31	= 17	+ 14	= 16	+ 15

6	הבֵּאִישׁוּ נִמְקוּ חֲבוּרָתִי מִפְּנֵי אֲנֹלְתִי: Total, v. 6	6	3	3	3			
			<u>2</u>		<u>2</u>		<u>2</u>	
			5	= 3	+ 2	= 5	+ 0	
7	נִעֲוִיתִי שַׁחְתִּי עַד־מְאֹד כָּל־הַיּוֹם קָדַר הַלְּבָבִי: Total, v. 7	7	4	4	4			
			<u>4</u>		<u>4</u>		<u>4</u>	
			8	= 4	+ 4	= 8	+ 0	
	Strophe 3	Total, v. 6-7	13	= 7	+ 6	= 13	+ 0	
8	כִּי־כִסְּלִי מְלֹאוֹ נִקְלָהָ וְאִין מִתָּם בִּבְשָׂרִי: Total, v. 8	8	4	4	4			4
			<u>3</u>		<u>3</u>		<u>3</u>	
			7	= 4	+ 3	= 0	+ 7	
9	נִפְוֹנֹתִי וְנִדְכִיתִי עַד־מְאֹד שְׁאֵנֹתִי מִנְהַמַּת לִבִּי: Total, v. 9	9	4	4	4			
			<u>3</u>		<u>3</u>		<u>3</u>	
			7	= 4	+ 3	= 7	+ 0	
	Strophe 4	Total, v. 8-9	14	= 8	+ 6	= 7	+ 7	
	Sub-canto I.2	Total, v. 6-9	<u>27</u>	= 15	+ 12	= 20	+ 7	
		Total, v. 3-9	52	= 28	+ 24	= 30	+ 22	
	Canto I	Total, v. 2-9	58	= 32	+ 26	= 36	+ 22	
10	אֲדֹנָי נִגְדָה כָּל־תְּאוֹתָי וְאִנְחַתִּי מִמֶּדֶד לֹא־נִסְתַּרְתָּה: Total, v. 10	10	4	4	4			
			<u>4</u>		<u>4</u>		<u>4</u>	
			8	= 4	+ 4	= 8	+ 0	
11	לִבִּי סָחַרְתָּר עֲזַבְנִי כַחַי וְאוֹר־עֵינָי גַּם־הֵם אֵין אֵתִי: Total, v. 11	11	4	4	4			
			<u>6</u>		<u>6</u>		<u>6</u>	
			10	= 4	+ 6	= 10	+ 0	
	Strophe 5	Total, v. 10-11	18	= 8	+ 10	= 18	+ 0	
12	Middle verseline אֶהְבִּי וְרַעִי מִנְגִיד נִגְעִי יַעֲמֹדוּ Middle words of the psalm: וַיִּקְרָבוּ מִרְחַק עֲמָדוֹ: 165 = 81 + 3 + 81 Middle colon: 47 = 23 + 1 + 23 Total, v. 12	12	5	5	5			
			<u>3</u>		<u>3</u>		<u>3</u>	
			8	= 5	+ 3	= 8	+ 0	
			26	= 13	+ 13	= 26	+ 0	
13	וַיִּנְקְשׁוּ מִבְּקִשֵּׁי נַפְשִׁי וְדַרְשֵׁי רַעְתִּי הִבְרוּ תוֹוֹתַי וּמִרְמוֹת כָּל־הַיּוֹם יִהְנוּ: Total, v. 13	13	3	3	3			
			<u>4</u>		<u>4</u>		<u>4</u>	
			11	= 7	+ 4	= 11	+ 0	
	Strophe 6	Total, v. 12-13	19	= 12	+ 7	= 19	+ 0	
		Total, v. 10-13	37	= 20	+ 17	= 37	+ 0	
		Total, v. 2-13	95	= 52	+ 43	= 73	+ 22	
14	Middle of Canto II וְאִנִּי כַחַרְשׁ לֹא אֶשְׁמַע וּכְאֵלֶם לֹא יִפְתַּח־פִּי: 82 = 37 + 8 + 37 Total, v. 14	14	4	4	4			
			<u>4</u>		<u>4</u>		<u>4</u>	
			8	= 4	+ 4	= 8	+ 0	
15	וְאֵדֵי כְּאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־שָׁמַע וְאִין בְּפִי תוֹכַחוֹת: Total, v. 15	15	5	5	2	3		
			<u>3</u>		<u>3</u>		<u>3</u>	
			8	= 5	+ 3	= 2	+ 6	
	Strophe 7	Total, v. 14-15	16	= 9	+ 7	= 10	+ 6	
	Sub-canto II.1	Total, v. 10-15	53	= 29	+ 24	= 47	+ 6	

16	כִּי־לָךְ יִתְּנָה הוֹסְלָתֶיָּהּ אַתָּה תַעֲנֶנָּה אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵי: See Observation 3	16	4	4	4			
	Total, v. 16		4		4	4		
17	כִּי־אָמַרְתִּי פֶן־יִשְׁמַח־לִי בְּמוֹט רִגְלִי עָלַי הַגְדִּילֹו: Total, v. 17	17	2	2	3	2		
	Strophe 8 Total, v. 16-17		4		4	4		
18	כִּי־אָנִי לְצַלַּע נִכּוֹן וּמִכְאוּבֵי נִגְדֵי תָמִיד: Total, v. 18	18	4	4	4			
	Strophe 9 Total, v. 18-19		3		3	3		
19	כִּי־עֹנֵי אֲנִידָּה אֲדַאֵג מִחֻטְאֵתִי: Total, v. 19	19	3	3		3		
	Sub-canto II.2 Total, v. 16-19		2		2	2		
	Canto II Total, v. 10-19		5		3	2	0	5
	Canto I-II Total, v. 2-19		12		7	5	7	5
20*	וְאִבֵּי חַיִּים עֲצֻמוֹ וְרַבּוֹ שֵׁנָאִי שֶׁקֶר: Total, v. 20	20	3	3		3		
	Total, v. 14-20		3		3	3		
21	וּמִשְׁלָמֵי רָעָה תַחַת טוֹבָהָהּ יִשְׁטַנּוּנֵי תַחַת רֶדְפֵי־טוֹב: Total, v. 21	21	4	4		4		
	Strophe 10 Total, v. 20-21		4		4	4		
	Total, v. 18-21		8		4	4	8	0
	Total, v. 10-21		14		7	7	14	0
22	אֶל־תַעֲזֹבֵנִי יִתְּנָה Coda (22-23) אֱלֹהֵי אֶל־תִּרְחַק מִמְּנִי: Total, v. 22	22	3	3		3		
23	חוֹשָׁה לְעֹזְרֵתִי אֲדֹנָי תִּשׁוּעָתִי: Total, v. 23	23	2	2		2		
	Strophe 11 Total, v. 22-23		4		4	4		
	Canto III Total, v. 20-23		7		3	4	7	0
	Total, v. 16-23		2		2	2	4	0
	Total, v. 2-23		4		2	2	4	0
	With the heading, v. 1-23		11		5	6	11	0
			25		12	13	25	0
			54		28	26	47	7
			165		89	76	130	35
			168		92	76	133	35

* Read חַיִּים, 'without cause', as in 4Qps^a and in Ps. 35:19, and 69:5 - see BHS.

Observations

1. The arithmetic centre of the 165 words of the psalm is **v. 12b** ($165 = 81 + 3 + 81$):

וּקְרוּבֵי מִרְחֹק עָמְדוּ

The 3-word phrase qualifies as the meaningful centre, because it expresses the utter desolation of the supplicant, which is most fitting in a prayer for deliverance from sickness and enemies. It is strongly highlighted by the fact that it coincides with the central colon ($47 = 23 + 1 + 23$), falling within the middle verseline, **v. 12** ($23 = 11 + 1 + 11$), and within the middle strophe, **vs. 12-13** ($11 = 5 + 1 + 5$).

2. The psalm divides into 3 cantos: **Canto I** (vs. 2-9), **II** (vs. 10-19) and **III** (vs. 20-23).

The unity of **Canto I** (vs. 2-9) is underscored by its strong compositional formula: the **58** words divide into **32** before and **26** after atnach, constituting the *kebod*-YHWH formula.

The arithmetic centre of Canto I is **v. 5b** ($58 = 27 + 4 + 27$):

כְּמִשָּׂא כִבֵּד יִכְבְּדוּ מִמֶּנִּי

They weigh like a burden too heavy for me.

This statement may be the consciously designed meaningful centre of Canto I, because it focuses on the unbearable burden of the supplicant's sin. In fact, he attributes his being in a serious crisis to his iniquities.

Canto II (vs. 10-19) has its own meaningful centre, the 8 words of **v. 14** ($82 = 37+8+37$), focusing on the utter silence of the desolate supplicant, who refuses to speak:

וְאֲנִי כִחֲרֹשׁ לֹא אֲשָׁמַע וּכְאֵלִם לֹא יִפְתַּח-פִּי:

I am like a deaf man, hearing nothing // like a dumb man, who cannot open his mouth.

3. Also **v. 16** stands out as significant, because of the striking occurrence of the three divine designations: יהוה, אֲדֹנָי, and אֱלֹהֵי, in a cluster, probably intended to emphasize the content: the hope fixed on YHWH (compare Psalm 37:34):

כִּי-לֹדָה יִתְּנָה הוֹקֵלְתִּי ^ אַתָּה תַעֲנֶנּה אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵי:

Yes, on you, YHWH, I fix my hope // you will answer, my Lord, my God!

The words 'on you, YHWH, I fix my hope' prelude and reverberate in the meaningful centre of Psalm 39, in the middle verseline (39:8): תוֹחֲלֵתִי לְךָ הִיא, 'My hope is in you'. See Observation 2 in my Analysis of [Psalm 39](#).

4. From a numerical point of view, the compositional formula of Cantos I-II (vs. 2-19), which is dominated by the number **7**, emphasizes the unity of this section: **140** (20×7) words, dividing into **77** (11×7) before and **63** (9×7) after atnach, with **105** (15×7) in the main clauses (Column **c**), and **35** (5×7) in the subordinate clauses (Column **d**). The use of exactly **130** (5×26) words in total in the main clauses (Column **c**) may also have been consciously designed.
5. Van der Lugt (CAS, p. 385) rightly refers to the apparent use of the number of fulfilment, **11**, in the preceding psalm to consider it likely that it has also here been used to define the poem's **11** strophes, **165** (15×11) words and the **11** verselines on either side of the central verseline. Moreover, the **11th** strophe (vs. 22-23) has **11** words, which stands out as having all the characteristics of a coda. Is it a coincidence that the coda of Psalm 39 (vs. 13-14) is made up of **22** (2×11) words? For the coda, see the General Introduction, "The use of a coda as a device for conclusion."

6. The divine name number **17** features in the following instances:

- vs. 3-4 **17** words in total
- vs. 2-5 **17** words before atnach
- vs. 10-13 **17** words after atnach
- vs. 16-17 **17** words in total
- vs. 14-20 **51** (3 x **17**) words in total.

The divine name number **26** features in even more instances:

- vs. 3-9 **52** (2 x **26**) words in total
- vs. 2-9 in the *kebod*-YHWH formula: **58** = **32** + **26**
- vs. 10-12 **26** words in total
- vs. 2-13 **52** (2 x **26**) words before atnach
- vs. 18-21 **26** words in total
- vs. 10-21 **52** (2 x **26**) words before atnach
- vs. 16-23 **26** words after atnach
- vs. 2-23 **130** (5 x **26**) words in the main clauses.

7. The name יהוה occurs only 3 times (vs. 2a, 16a, and 22a), with the middle occurrence in v. 16a. The same goes for the designation אֱלֹהֵי (vs. 10a, 16b, and 23b), with its middle occurrence likewise in v. 16a. The word אֱלֹהִים occurs twice (vs. 16b and 22b).

Note the clustering of the divine designations in vs. 16 and 22-23. See Psalm 36:6-7, and Observations 2 and 5 in my Analysis of [Psalm 36](#).

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