

Psalm 55— Logotechnical Analysis

Guidelines

- Please read the [General Introduction](#) as well as the Introduction to [Book I](#) and [Book II](#).
- For common features found in the numerical analysis charts, see the "[Key to the charts](#)".

Specific features of Psalm 55

- Apart from v. 14, which is the (meaningful) arithmetic centre on word level, the psalm has another one on strophic level, v. 16. Additionally, the 5 middle words of Canto III, in v. 20a-b, may be regarded as the meaningful centre of this section of the text.
- Another significant feature is the use of the double *kabod* pattern (55 = 23 + 32) to give structure to Canto I, vs. 2-9. A numerical chiasmus reinforces the literary unity of Canto I. This is additional support for dividing the text into 4 cantos: 1-9, 10-16, 17-22, and 23-24.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 2-4, 5-6, 7-9 || 10-12, 13-15, 16 || 17-18, 19-20, 21-22 || 23, 24 (4 cantos with 11 strophes, 28 verselines and 61 cola, taking vs. 2-4 as three verselines).
- Fokkelman: 2-4b, 4c-6, 7-9, 10-12, 13, 14-16, 17-18b, 18c-19, 20, 21-22, 23, 24 (12 strophes with 30 verselines and 64 cola, taking vs. 10-12 as well as vs. 16 and 23 as tricola, and vs. 17-19 as 4 bicola).
- Labuschagne: as Van der Lugt, but I find 29 verselines, taking vs. 2-4 as four verselines.

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words addressed to God; **d**: words spoken about God.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	לְמִנְצַחַת בְּנִינֹת מְשָׁפִיל לְדָרוֹד : Heading, v. 1	4	4			
2	הָאֲזִינָה אֱלֹהִים תְּפַלְתִּי וְאֶל־תִּתְּעַלֵּם מִתְּהַנְּתִי : Total, v. 2	3 3 6	3	3	3	0
3	הַקְּשִׁיבָה לִי וְעֲנֵנִי אָרִיד בְּשִׁיחֵי וְאֶהְיָמָה : Total, v. 3	3 3 6	3	3	3	0
4	מְקוֹל אוֹיֵב מִפְּנֵי עֶקֶת רָשָׁע כִּי־מִיטוּ עָלַי אֲוֹן וּבְאֶף יִשְׁטְמוּנִי : Total, v. 4	2 3 4 2 11	2	3	2	0
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 2-4	23	11	12	11	0
5	לְבִי יַחִיל בְּקִרְבִּי וְאֵימֹת מוֹת נָפְלוּ עָלַי : Total, v. 5	3 4 7	3	4	4	0
6	יִרְאָה וְרַעַד יִבֹּא בִּי וּתְכַסֵּנִי פְלָצוֹת : Total, v. 6	4 2 6	4	2	4	0

		Total, v. 6	$6 = 4 + 2 = 6 + 0$
	Strophe 2	Total, v. 5-6	$13 = 7 + 6 = 13 + 0$
7		וְאָמַר מִי־יִתֶּן־לִי אֶבֶר כִּי־וָנָה אֶעֱוֹפָה וְאֶשְׁכְּנָה: Total, v. 7	7 6 6 6 <u>2 2 2</u> 8 = 8 + 0 = 8 + 0
8		הִנֵּה אֶרְחִיק נְדָרָֹּה אֶלֶיךָ בַּמִּדְבָּר סֵלָה: Total, v. 8	8 3 3 3 <u>2 2 2</u> 5 = 3 + 2 = 5 + 0
9		אֶחֱשָׂה מִפְּלֹט לִי מִרוּחַ סֶעָה מִסָּעֵר: Total, v. 9	9 3 3 3 <u>3 3 3</u> 6 = 3 + 3 = 6 + 0
	Strophe 3	Total, v. 7-9	$19 = 14 + 5 = 19 + 0$
		Double v. 2-4	$23 = 11 + 12 = 23 + 0$
		kabod pattern, v. 5-9	$32 = 21 + 11 = 32 + 0$
	Canto I	Numerical chiasmus, v. 2-9	$55 = 32 + 23 = 55 + 0$
10		בְּלֶע אֲדֹנָי פִּלְג לְשׁוֹנָם כִּי־רֵאִיתִי חֶמְס וְרִיב בְּעִיר: Total, v. 10	10 4 4 4 <u>5 5 5</u> 9 = 4 + 5 = 9 + 0
11		יּוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה יִסּוּבְכֶּה עַל־חֹמְתֶיהָ וְאָנֹן וְעַמֹּל בְּקִרְבָּה: Total, v. 11	11 5 5 5 <u>3 3 3</u> 8 = 5 + 3 = 8 + 0
12		הַזֹּאת בְּקִרְבָּה וְלֹא־יִמִּישׁ מִרְחֶבָה תֵּדַךְ וּמִרְמָה: Total, v. 12	12 2 2 2 3 3 3 <u>2 2 2</u> 7 = 2 + 5 = 7 + 0
	Strophe 4	Total, v. 10-12	$24 = 11 + 13 = 24 + 0$
13		כִּי לֹא־אוֹיֵב יִחַרְפְּנִי וְאִשָּׂא לֹא־מִשְׁנָאִי עָלַי הַגְּדִילָה וְאִסְתַּר מִמֶּנּוּ: Total, v. 13	13 5 5 5 4 4 4 <u>2 2 2</u> 11 = 9 + 2 = 11 + 0
14	Meaningful centre on word level:	וְאַתָּה אָנוּשׁ כְּעֶרְכִּי אֲלוֹפֵי וּמִיָּדַעִי: Total, v. 14	14 3 3 3 <u>2 2 2</u> 5 = 3 + 2 = 5 + 0
15		אֲשֶׁר יִחַדּוּ נִמְתִּיק סוּדָה בְּבֵית אֱלֹהִים נִחְלָךְ בְּרִגְשׁ: Total, v. 15	15 4 4 4 <u>4 4 4</u> 8 = 4 + 4 = 8 + 0
	Strophe 5	Total, v. 13-15	$24 = 16 + 8 = 24 + 0$
16	* See Observation 1	יִשִּׁי מְוֵת עֲלִימוֹ יִרְדּוּ שְׂאוּל חַיִּים	16 3 3 3 3 3 3
17		כִּי־רַעוּת בְּמִגְוָרָם בְּקִרְבָּם:	17 3 3 3 <u>1 1 1</u>
	Meaningful centre on strophic level:		

11 = 5 + 1 + 5	Strophe 6	Total, v. 16	$10 = 6 + 4 = 10 + 0$
		Total, v. 13-16	$34 = 22 + 12 = 34 + 0$
	Canto II	Total, v. 10-16	$58 = 33 + 25 = 58 + 0$
17		אֲנִי אֶל־אֱלֹהִים אֶקְרָא [^] 18	4 4 4
		יְהוָה יוֹשִׁיעֵנִי:	<u>2 2 2</u>
		Total, v. 17	$6 = 4 + 2 = 0 + 6$
18		עָרַב וּבִקֵּר וְצָהַרְתִּים 19	3 3 3
		אֲשִׁיחָה וְאֶהְמָה [^]	2 2 2
		וַיִּשְׁמַע קוֹלִי:	<u>2 2 2</u>
		Total, v. 18	$7 = 5 + 2 = 0 + 7$
	Strophe 7	Total, v. 17-18	$13 = 9 + 4 = 0 + 13$
19		פָּדָה בְּשָׁלוֹם נַפְשִׁי מִקְרֵב־לִי [^] 20	5 5 5
		כִּי־בָרְבִים הָיוּ עֲמָדַי:	<u>4 4 4</u>
		Total, v. 19	$9 = 5 + 4 = 0 + 9$
20	Middle words of Canto III	וַיִּשְׁמַע אֵל וַיַּעֲנֶם 21	3 3 3
		49 = 22 + 5 + 22	2 2 2
		* See below	2 2 2
		וַיֵּשֶׁב קֶדֶם סֶלָה * 21	2 2 2
		אֲשֶׁר אֵין חֲלִיפוֹת לְמוֹ [^] 22	4 4 4
		וְלֹא יֵרָאוּ אֱלֹהִים:	<u>3 3 3</u>
		Total, v. 20	$12 = 9 + 3 = 0 + 12$
	Strophe 8	Total, v. 19-20	$21 = 14 + 7 = 0 + 21$
		Total, v. 17-20	$34 = 23 + 11 = 0 + 34$
21		שָׁלַח יָדָיו בְּשַׁלְמוֹ 23	3 3 3
		חֲלַל בְּרִיתוֹ:	<u>2 2 2</u>
		Total, v. 21	$5 = 5 + 0 = 0 + 5$
22		חָלְקוּ מַחְמַאת פִּיו 24	3 3 3
		וּקְרַב־לְבֹ 2	2 2 2
		רַכּוּ דְבָרָיו מִשְׁמֵן 25	3 3 3
		וְהִמָּה פְתַחוֹת:	<u>2 2 2</u>
		Total, v. 22	$10 = 10 + 0 = 0 + 10$
	Strophe 9	Total, v. 21-22	$15 = 15 + 0 = 0 + 15$
	Canto III	Total, v. 17-22	$49 = 38 + 11 = 0 + 49$

23		הַשְּׁלֵף עַל־יְהוָה יְהַבֶּךָ	26	4	4	4
		וְהוּא יִכְלֶכְלֶךָ		2	2	2
		לֹא־יִתֵּן לְעוֹלָם	27	3	3	3
		מוֹט לְצַדִּיק:		2	2	2
	Strophe 10	Total, v. 23		11	= 11	+ 0 = 0 + 11
		Total, v. 21-23		26	= 26	+ 0 = 0 + 26
24	Coda	וְאַתָּה אֱלֹהִים תּוֹרְדֵם	28	3	3	3
		לְבֹאֵר שַׁחַת		2	2	2
		אֲנָשֵׁי דָמִים וּמְרֻמָּה	29	3	3	3
		לֹא־יִחַצְצוּ יְמֵיהֶם ^		3	3	3
		וְאֲנִי אֶבְטַח־בְּךָ:		3	3	3
	Strophe 11	Total, v. 24		14	= 11	+ 3 = 14 + 0
	Canto IV	Total, v. 23-24		25	= 22	+ 3 = 14 + 11
		Total, v. 19-24		61	= 51	+ 10 = 14 + 47
		Total, v. 10-24		132	= 93	+ 39 = 72 + 60
		Total, v. 2-24		187	= 125	+ 62 = 127 + 60
		With the heading and סְלָה (2x), v. 1-24		193	= 130	+ 63

* In Codex L the *selah* in v. 20 is not situated at its normal place at the end of the verse, but right within the body of the text (as in Ps. 57:4). For an explanation of this phenomenon, see Observation 4 below. Whatever the function of the *selah* may be in this case, the suggestion by the editor in *BHS* to read *kulloh*, instead of *selah*, resulting in an extra word in the psalm, is totally unacceptable on numerical grounds:

1. it would disturb the **34** (2 x 17) words in vs. 17-20,
2. it would disturb the total number of **187** (11 x 17) words,
3. it would disrupt the carefully designed numerical structure of the **60** words phrased in 3rd person (Column d): **34** in vs. 17-20, and **26** in vs. 21-23.

Observations

1. The word-count is based upon the correction of the text in v. 16, where I follow the Masoretic Qere reading מְוֹת יְשִׁי, instead of יְשִׁימְוֹת (one word) – see *BHS*.
2. In terms of its **187** (11 x 17) words the (meaningful) arithmetic centre of the poem is constituted by the 3 words in v. 14 (**187** = 92 + 3 + 92):

בְּעַרְכִּי אֱלוֹפִי וּמִדָּעִי

a man of my own sort, my comrade, my familiar friend.

By their central position these words express the reason behind the speaker's prayer for the ruin of his enemies: the hostility of fellow citizens, of which the epitome is the betrayal by a close friend and comrade.

However, in terms of the 11 strophes, v. 16 may be regarded as the consciously designed meaningful centre: the elimination of the speaker's enemies:

יְשִׁי מְוֹת עָלֵינוּ יִרְדּוּ שְׂאוֹל חַיִּים ^ כִּי־רְעוֹת בְּמִנוּרָם בְּקַרְבָּם:

May death come upon them, may they go down alive into Sheol!

For utter wickedness resides in their storage room, in their midst.

In Canto II, vs. 10-16, the pivotal strophe is the high point of the supplicant's prayer for the ruin of his enemies.

3. The first part of the poem, vs. 2-9 (Canto I), is an individual lament in which the speaker describes the betrayal by a close friend. This particular passage stands out because it is structured in the double *kabod* pattern, **55** = 23 + **32**. This is significantly done in two ways: first, by the number of words in the two subsections, vs. 2-4 (**23** words) and vs. 5-9 (**32** words), and second, by the division of the words by *atnach*: **32** before, and **23** after *atnach*, resulting in a numerical chiasmus:

vs. 2-4 **23** = **11** + 12

vs. 5-9 **32** = 21 + **11**

vs. 2-9 **55** = **32** + **23**

The double *kabod* pattern has in part been achieved by the absence of the *atnach* in v. 7, which explains the lack of an *atnach* here. There is no explanation, however, for its absence in the three consecutive verses 21 – 23, for there is numerically nothing significant here, except that vs. 21-23 are made up of **26** words.

4. In CAS I, p. 561, Van der Lugt has suggested that the *selah* in v. 20 seems to have the function of directing attention to the **5** preceding words. For a comparable function of *selah*, see [Psalm 67](#), where a *selah* is situated at the end of v. 5, the only tricolon verseline, at the centre of the menorah.

The importance of the speaker's trust in God is emphasized by the fact that these words constitute the meaningful centre of Canto III, vs. 17-22 (49 = 22 + **5** + 22):

יִשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים וַיִּשְׁבַּח קְדוֹם

God will hear and humble them, he who is enthroned from of old.

Psalm 55 shares the feature of having a meaningful centre in part of the text with Psalms 56, 57, and 69.

5. The divine name numbers feature in the following instances:

vs. 10-11	17 words in total
vs. 2-13	52 (2 x 26) words before <i>atnach</i>
vs. 13-16	34 (2 x 17) words in total
vs. 17-20	34 (2 x 17) words spoken about God
vs. 21-23	26 words in total (15 in vs. 21-22 + 11 in v. 23)
vs. 19-24	51 (3 x 17) words before <i>atnach</i>
vs. 21-24	26 words spoken about God
vs. 2-24	187 (11 x 17) words in total.

6. The concluding canto, vs. 23-24, is very reminiscent of the concluding strophe of Psalm 54 - see Observation 5 in my Analysis of [Psalm 54](#). Contrary to v. 23, which is still phrased as words spoken *about* God (as in vs. 17-22), v. 24, the last verseline, is suddenly directly *addressed* to God. Therefore, in terms of form and content, v. 24 clearly stands out and should be regarded as a coda – compare Ps. 54:9.

7. There are altogether **7** references to God: the name YHWH occurs 2x (vs. 17 and 23), אֱלֹהִים, 'God', 5x (vs. 2a, 15b, 17a, 20d, and 24a), אֲדֹנָי, 'my Lord', 1x (v. 10a), and אֱל, 'God', 1x (v. 20a).

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