

# Psalm 86— Logotechnical Analysis

## Guidelines

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

## Specific features of Psalm 86

- This solitary Davidic Psalm in Book III is a high-grade numerical composition, characterized by its threefold use of the menorah pattern to give structure to the text: the 7 strophes of the entire psalm, the 7 verselines of vs. 1-7 (Canto I), and the 7 verselines of vs. 8-14 (Canto II). The menorah pattern is buttressed by the 7 instances of the divine appellative אֲדֹנָי, 'Lord'.
- Psalm 86 is the only psalm in Book III in which syntax has been used to weave the divine name numbers into the fabric of the text. It shares this feature with other psalms but particularly with [Psalm 71](#), with which it has more features in common, such as the idea of the incomparability of YHWH.
- As in Psalm 71, the meaningful centre is to be found in the middle strophe: Strophe 4, [vs. 8-10](#), dealing specifically with YHWH's incomparability. Its pivotal position is highlighted by the middle verseline at the heart of the strophe (v. 9), the two middle cola (vs. 9c-10a), and the 5 middle words (v. 10a).
- As in many other psalms, e.g., Psalms 84 and 85, the author of this Psalm made use of the numerical value of a keyword to give structure to (part of) his text: the number 54, representing עֲנֵנִי, 'answer me' (v. 1a), to define the number of words in vs. 1-7 and 9-14, and the number 72, representing נִפְלְאוֹת, 'wondrous things', to define the number of words flanking the middle word אַתָּה, 'you' (see the chart).

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

- Van der Lugt and Labuschagne: 1-2, 3-5, 6-7 || 8-10, 11, 12-14 || 15-17 (3 cantos with 7 strophes, 17 verselines and 40 cola).
- Fokkelman: 1-2, 3-5, 6-7 || 8-10, 11-13 || 14-15, 16-17 (3 stanzas with 7 strophes, 18 verselines and 41 cola, taking v. 17 – in my view, mistakenly - as 2 bicolic verselines).

## 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 (as [Psalm 71](#)).
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	תַּפְּלָה לְדָוִד	2	2			
	תַּטְהֵר יְהוָה אֶזְנֶךָ עֲנֵנִי <sup>1</sup>	4	4		4	
	כִּי־עָנִי וְאֶבְיֹן אָנִי:	4		4		4
	Total, v. 1	8	= 4	+ 4	= 4	+ 4
2	שָׁמְרָה נַפְשִׁי כִּי־תִסֵּד אָנִי	5	5		2	3
	הוֹשַׁע עַבְדְּךָ אֱתָה אֱלֹהֵי	4	4		4	
	תְּבוֹטֵת אֱלֹהֶיךָ:	2		2	2	
	Total, v. 2	11	= 9	+ 2	= 8	+ 3
	Strophe 1	19	= 13	+ 6	= 12	+ 7

3 **חַנְנִי אֱדַנְיָ** 3 2 2 2  
**כִּי אֱלֹהִים אֶקְרָא כָּל-הַיּוֹם:**  
 Total, v. 3  
 Total, v. 1-3

$$\begin{array}{r} 5 \quad 5 \quad 5 \\ \hline 7 = 2 + 5 = 2 + 5 \\ 26 = 15 + 11 = 14 + 12 \end{array}$$

4 Middle verseline of Canto I **שִׁמְחָה נֶפֶשׁ עַבְדְּךָ** 4  
**כִּי אֱלֹהִים אֶדַנְיָ** נֶפֶשׁ אִשָּׁא: (7 = 3 + 1 + 3)  
 Total, v. 4  
 Total, v. 2-4  
 Total, v. 1-4

$$\begin{array}{r} 5 \quad 5 \quad 5 \\ \hline 8 = 3 + 5 = 3 + 5 \\ 26 = 14 + 12 = 13 + 13 \\ 34 = 18 + 16 = 17 + 17 \end{array}$$

5 **כִּי-אֶתָּה אֱדַנְיָ** טוֹב וְסִלְחָה 5  
 וְרַב-חֶסֶד לְכָל-קְרָאֶיךָ:  
 Total, v. 5  
 Strophe 2 Total, v. 3-5  
 Total, v. 1-5

$$\begin{array}{r} 5 \quad 5 \quad 5 \\ \hline 4 \quad 4 \quad 4 \\ \hline 9 = 5 + 4 = 0 + 9 \\ 24 = 10 + 14 = 5 + 19 \\ 43 = 23 + 20 = 17 + 26 \end{array}$$

6 **הַאֲזִינָה יְהוָה תִּפְלְתִי** 6  
 וְהִקְשִׁיבָה בְּקוֹל תְּחִנּוֹתַי:  
 Total, v. 6

$$\begin{array}{r} 3 \quad 3 \quad 3 \\ \hline 3 \quad 3 \quad 3 \\ \hline 6 = 3 + 3 = 6 + 0 \end{array}$$

7 **בְּיוֹם צָרְתִי אֶקְרָאֶךָ** 7  
**כִּי תַעֲנֵנִי:**  
 Total, v. 7  
 Strophe 3 Total, v. 6-7  
 Canto I Total, v. 1-7

$$\begin{array}{r} 2 \quad 2 \quad 2 \\ \hline 5 = 5 + 0 = 3 + 2 \\ 11 = 8 + 3 = 9 + 2 \\ 54 = 31 + 23 = 26 + 28 \end{array}$$

8 **אֵין-כְּמוֹד בְּאֱלֹהִים אֱדַנְיָ** 8  
 Vs. 8-10 middle strophe: **וְאֵין כְּמַעֲשֶׂיךָ:**  
 meaningful core Total, v. 8

$$\begin{array}{r} 4 \quad 4 \quad 4 \\ \hline 2 \quad 2 \quad 2 \\ \hline 6 = 6 + 0 = 6 + 0 \end{array}$$

9 Middle verseline **כָּל-גּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ** 9  
 יִבּוֹאוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְפָנֶיךָ **אֱדַנְיָ**  
 וַיִּכְבְּדוּ לְשִׁמְךָ:  
 Total, v. 9  
 נִפְלְאוֹת = 72

$$\begin{array}{r} 4 \quad 4 \quad 4 \\ \hline 2 \quad 2 \quad 2 \\ \hline 10 = 8 + 2 = 8 + 2 \end{array}$$

10 Middle word **כִּי-יִגְדֹל אֶתָּה וְעָשִׂה נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ** 10  
 אֶתָּה אֱלֹהִים לְבָרְךָ: 145 = 72 + 1 + 72  
 Five middle words: 70 + 5 + 70 Total, v. 10  
 Middle Strophe: Strophe 4 Total, v. 8-10

$$\begin{array}{r} 5 \quad 5 \quad 5 \\ \hline 3 \quad 3 \quad 3 \\ \hline 8 = 5 + 3 = 0 + 8 \\ 24 = 19 + 5 = 14 + 10 \end{array}$$

11 Middle verseline of Canto II **הוֹרֵנִי יְהוָה דְּרָכֶךָ** 11  
 אַחֲלֶיךָ בְּאַמְתָּךְ **אֱדַנְיָ**  
 יַחַד לְבָבִי לְיִרְאַת שִׁמְךָ:  
 Strophe 5 Total, v. 11

$$\begin{array}{r} 3 \quad 3 \quad 3 \\ \hline 2 \quad 2 \quad 2 \\ \hline 4 \quad 4 \quad 4 \\ \hline 9 = 5 + 4 = 9 + 0 \end{array}$$

12	אֹרְךָ <b>אֲדָנִי</b> אֱלֹהֵי בְּכָל־לִבְבִי <sup>6</sup> וְאֶכְבְּדָה שְׁמֹךָ לְעוֹלָם: Total, v. 12	12	5	5	5		
			3		3	3	
			8	=	5	+	3 = 8 + 0
13	כִּי־חֲסִדְךָ גָּדוֹל עָלַי <sup>7</sup> וְהִצַּלְתָּ נַפְשִׁי מִשְׂאוֹל תַּחְתָּיָה: Total, v. 13	13	4	4			4
			4		4		4
			8	=	4	+	4 = 0 + 8
14	אֱלֹהִים יָדִים קָמוּ־עָלַי <sup>8</sup> וַעֲדַת עֲרִיצִים בִּקְשׁוּ נַפְשִׁי <sup>9</sup> וְלֹא שָׁמוּךָ לִנְגָדָם: Total, v. 14	14	4	4			4
			4		4		4
			3		3	3	
			11	=	8	+	3 = 11 + 0
	Strophe 6 Total, v. 12-14		27	=	17	+	10 = 19 + 8
	Total, v. 9-14		54	=	35	+	19 = 36 + 18
	<b>Canto II Total, v. 8-14</b>		60	=	41	+	19 = 42 + 18
	<b>Canto I-II Total, v. 1-14</b>		114	=	73	+	42 = 68 + 46
15	וְאַתָּה <b>אֲדָנִי</b> אֱלֹהֵי־רַחוּם וְחַנוּן <sup>7</sup> אֲרַךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְאַמֶּת: Total, v. 15	15	5	5			5
			5		5	5	
			10	=	5	+	5 = 10 + 0
16	פָּנָה אֵלַי וְחַנּוּנִי <sup>8</sup> תִּנְהַ־עֲוֹה לְעַבְדְּךָ <sup>9</sup> וְהוֹשִׁיעָה לִבְן־אִמְתֶּךָ: Total, v. 16	16	3	3			3
			3		3		3
			3		3	3	
			9	=	6	+	3 = 9 + 0
17	עֲשֵׂה־עִמִּי אוֹת לְטוֹבָה <sup>8</sup> וַיִּרְאוּ שְׂנְאֵי יוֹבְשׁוּ <sup>9</sup> כִּי־אַתָּה יְהוָה עֲזַרְתָּנִי וְנַחַמְתָּנִי: Total, v. 17	17	4	4			4
			3		3		3
			5		5		5
			12	=	7	+	5 = 7 + 5
	<b>Canto III Strophe 7 Total, v. 15-17</b>		31	=	18	+	13 = 26 + 5
	Total, v. 14-17		42	=	26	+	16 = 37 + 5
	Total, v. 8-17		91	=	59	+	32 = 68 + 23
	Total, v. 1-17		145	=	90	+	55 = 94 + 51
	With the heading, v. 1-17		147	=	92	+	55

## Observations

1. In terms of the 145 words of the psalm, the middle word is the pronoun אַתָּה, 'you', in v. 10a, flanked by 72 words on either side (145 = 72 + 1 + 72). The number 72 represents the numerical value of נִפְלְאוֹת, 'wondrous things', occurring in v. 10a. See the [General Introduction](#), "The numerical value of a keyword in the text".

The pivotal position of אַתָּה, 'you', is very reminiscent of the arithmetic centre of Psalm 23, כִּי־אַתָּה עִמָּדִי, 'for You are with me', and also of Psalm 76, אַתָּה נוֹרָא אַתָּה, 'You, awesome You!' – see Observation 1 in my analysis of [Psalm 23](#), and Observation 1 and 2 in my analysis of [Psalm 76](#).

The middle word is skillfully positioned at the centre of the 5 pivotal words in v. 10a (70 + 2+1+2 + 70), within the two middle cola, vs. 9c-10a. The arithmetic centre is

situated after the middle verseline, v. 9, within the middle strophe, vs. 8-10, constituting the absolute centre in terms of strophes, verselines, cola and words.

The 5 middle words of v. 10a may be regarded as the meaningful centre (70+5+70):

כִּי־גָדוֹל אַתָּה וְעָשָׂה נִפְלְאוֹת For you are great and do wondrous things.

However, since the arithmetic centres on word-, colon-, and verseline level all fall within the middle strophe, vs. 8-10, there is every reason to believe that the central strophe has consciously been designed as the meaningful centre (7 = 3 + 1 + 3):

אֵין־כְּמוֹךָ בְּאֱלֹהִים אֲדֹנָי וְאֵין כְּמַעֲשֶׂיךָ<sup>8</sup>  
 כָּל־גּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ יָבוֹאוּ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְפָנֶיךָ אֲדֹנָי וְיִכְבְּדוּ לְשִׁמְךָ<sup>9</sup>  
 כִּי־גָדוֹל אַתָּה וְעָשָׂה נִפְלְאוֹת אַתָּה אֱלֹהִים לְבַדְּךָ<sup>10</sup>

There is none like you among the gods, Lord // nor are there any works like yours.  
 All the nations you have made // will come to bow before you, Lord // and honour your name,  
 for you are great and do wondrous things // you alone are God!

This impressive, thematically coherent passage, dealing with YHWH's incomparable greatness among all gods and peoples, is a most eloquent expression of the highest praise due to the God of Israel. The function of the three arithmetic centres on the lower levels is clearly to highlight the real meaningful centre. This also holds true for the middle instance of the 7 occurrences of the word אֲדֹנָי, 'my Lord'.

Incidentally, the 24 words of this larger meaningful centre consist of **102** (6 x 17) letters. Coincidence or deliberate design?

2. A closer examination of the framework of the psalm confirms the division into three cantos, 7 strophes, 17 verselines and 40 cola, structured as follows:

Canto I (vs. 1-7)	3 strophes	7 verselines	15 cola	54 words
Canto II (vs. 8-14)	3 strophes	7 verselines	17 cola	60 words
Canto III (vs. 15-17)	1 strophe	3 verselines	8 cola	31 words.

The central 60-word Canto II, with its 17 cola, is significantly surrounded by 54 + 31 = **85** (5 x 17) words. For Canto I-II, see below, Observation 3.

The menorah pattern is used on two levels, in terms of strophes, and in terms of verselines: in addition to the 7 strophes of the entire poem, there are two sets of 7 verselines each (Canto I and II), which have their own distinct centre (vs. 4 and 11):

<sup>4</sup>**Gladden** the soul of your servant // for to you, Lord, do I lift up my soul.  
<sup>11</sup>**Teach** me your way, YHWH // that I may walk in your truth //  
 with an undivided heart to fear your name.

The two centres were probably consciously positioned in the middle of the two menorahs and intended to contain a central idea in their immediate context: the supplicant's prayer to God to **gladden** his heart, and to **teach** him his ways.

3. Canto I (vs. 1-7) is clearly demarcated by the verb עָנָה (pi.), 'to answer', functioning as an *inclusion* in the first and last colon (vs. 1a, עָנִי, and 7b, תַּעֲנֵנִי). It is a keyword of paramount importance in the 54-word Canto I, the more so, since Canto I is composed of exactly 54 words, the numerical value of עָנִי, 'answer me'.

Most significantly, Canto I-II (vs. 1-14) divide into a perfect balance pattern, with v. 8 at the centre (114 = 54 + 6 + 54), the statement about YHWH's incomparability:

There is none like you among the gods, Lord no deeds compare with yours.

4. A special feature of Psalm 86 – which it shares with Psalm 71 - is the apparent use of syntax (main and subordinate clauses) to structure the text numerically and to generate additional divine name numbers. Studying the psalm, I was struck at the outset by the exceedingly frequent occurrence of the conjunction **כִּי**, ‘for’, which features in this relatively short poem no less than 9 times. It is also worth noting that the 9 **כִּי**-clauses, together with the **אֲשֶׁר**-clause (v. 9a), are made up of **51** (3 x 17) words in total (Column **d**). But there is more to it:

vs. 1-4	<b>34</b> words: <b>17</b> in the main, and <b>17</b> in the subordinate clauses
vs. 1-5	<b>43</b> words: <b>17</b> in the main, and <b>26</b> in the subordinate clauses
vs. 1-5	<b>26</b> words, with <b>17</b> in vs. 1-3 and <b>9</b> in v. 5 (concatenation)
vs. 1-7	<b>26</b> words in the main clauses
vs. 12-14	<b>17</b> words before atnach
vs. 1-14	<b>68</b> (4 x 17) words in the main clauses
vs. 15-17	<b>26</b> words in the main clauses
vs. 8-17	<b>68</b> (4 x 17) words in the main clauses
vs. 1-17	<b>51</b> (3 x 17) words in the subordinate clauses.

In light of the author’s successful endeavor to weave the divine name numbers into the fabric of the text by means of syntax, it should not surprise us to find that the division of the text before and after the atnach does not play a role of any significance. For the use of syntax as a structuring device, see the [General Introduction](#), under “Criteria for logotechnical analysis”.

The idiosyncrasies of the psalm may be explained as a result of the stringent use of both the menorah pattern and the division of the text in terms of syntax.

5. In addition to the apparent concatenation in the **17 + 9 = 26** words in vs. 1-5 (Col. **d**), the **34** words in vs. 1-4 are structured as **26** (vs. 1-3) + **8** (v. 4).
6. The name **יהוה** occurs 4 times (vs. 1, 6, 11, and 17), and so does **אֱלֹהִים** (vs. 2, 10, 12, and 14). Most significant is that **אֲדֹנָי**, ‘Lord’, features no less than **7** times, with the middle instance in v. **8a** (vs. 3, 4, 5, **8**, 9, 12, and 15), highlighting the beginning of the meaningful central strophe. The high frequency of **אֲדֹנָי** here is exceptional in the Psalter, which has merely 47 occurrences in total. Psalm 86 is matched only by the much longer Psalm 68 which boasts 6 occurrences. The high frequency of 320 occurrences in the prophetic books out of 449 in total (of which Ezekiel has 217!) may suggest a prophetic provenance of our psalm.

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Dr. C.J. Labuschagne	Senior Lecturer in Semitic Languages (retired),
Brinkhorst 44	University of Pretoria, South Africa
9751 AT Haren (Gron)	and
The Netherlands	Professor of Old Testament (retired),
<a href="mailto:labuschagne.cj@planet.nl">labuschagne.cj@planet.nl</a>	University of Groningen, The Netherlands