

Psalm 109— Logotechnical Analysis

Guidelines

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

Specific features of Psalm 109

- In his Commentary (The Anchor Bible, 1970), Mitchell Dahood wrote: "A perplexing Hebrew text makes it difficult to identify with certainty the dramatis personae and the sequence of action in this lament of an individual." In my opinion, the matter is quite plain. As in the immediately preceding psalm and many others, the change in the direction of address gives sufficient structure to the text to enable us to identify the dramatis personae and the sequence of action. See Observation 2.
- In the 2-word meaningful centre in v. 16b, **עָנִי וְאֶבְיֹֹן**, 'afflicted and poor', the speaker (identified as the afflicted and poor person), appeals to God to vindicate him and denounce his accuser and his family. The meaningful centre is significantly flanked by **111** words ($224 = 111 + 2 + 111$), the numerical value of the three words **אִישׁ-עָנִי וְאֶבְיֹֹן**, 'a person afflicted and poor' ($1+10+21 + 16+14+10 + 6+1+2+10+6+14 = 32 + 40 + 39$).
- As in the case of Psalms 104-108, the poet concludes his poem with a coda (vs. 30-31).

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

- Van der Lugt: 1-3, 4-5, 6-7 | 8-9, 10-11, 12-13 || 14-16, 17-19, 20 | 21-23, 24-25 || 26-27, 28-29, 30-31 (3 cantos with 14 strophes, 30 verselines and 66 cola).
- Fokkelman: 1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-10, 11-13, 14-16, 17, 18-19, 20, 21-22, 23-25, 26-27 28-29, 30-31 (14 strophes, 32 verselines, 69 cola, taking both vs. 17 and 28 as bicola).
- Labuschagne: 1-3, 4-5 | 6-7, 8-9, 10-11, 12-13 || 14-16, 17-19, 20 || 21-23, 24-25 | 26-27, 28-29 | 30-31 (3 cantos with 14 strophes, 30 verselines and 66 cola).

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
1a	לְמִנְצַח לְדוֹר מְזִמּוֹר Heading	3	3	0		
1b	אֱלֹהֵי תְהַלְתִּי אֶל-תַּחֲרֹשׁ:	1	4	4	4	
2a	Vs. 1b-3 constitute		5	5	5	
2b	two tricola: 1b-2b and 2c-3		2	2	2	
2c	דַּבְּרוּ אִתִּי לְשׁוֹן שִׁקָּר:	2	4	4	4	
3	וְדַבְּרִי שְׁנֵאָה סָבְבוּנִי וַיִּלְחַמוּנִי חַנּוּם:	3	3		3	
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-3	20	= 14	+ 6	= 20	+ 0
4	תַּחַת-אֶהְבֶּתִי יִשְׁטַנּוּנִי וְאֲנִי תַפְלָה:	3	3	3	3	
	Total, v. 4	5	= 5	+ 0	= 5	+ 0
5	וַיִּשְׂמוּ עָלַי רָעָה תַּחַת טוֹבָה וְשֵׁנֵאָה תַּחַת אֶהְבֶּתִי:	4	5	5	5	
	Total, v. 5	8	= 5	+ 3	= 8	+ 0
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 4-5	13	= 10	+ 3	= 13	+ 0
	Canticle I.1 Total, v. 1-5	33	= 24	+ 9	= 33	+ 0

6	5	הַפֶּקֶד עָלָיו רְשָׁעִי וְשָׁטָן יַעֲמֹד עַל־יָמִינוּ: Total, v. 6	3	3	3			
			4		4	4		
			7	= 3	+ 4	= 7	+ 0	
7	6	בְּהִשָּׁפְטוֹ יֵצֵא רְשָׁעִי וְתִפְּלְתוֹ תִּהְיֶה לְחַטָּאתָה: Total, v. 7	3	3	3			
			3		3	3		
			6	= 3	+ 3	= 6	+ 0	
	Strophe 3	Total, v. 6-7	13	= 6	+ 7	= 13	+ 0	
		Total, v. 4-7	26	= 16	+ 10	= 26	+ 0	
8	7	יְהוּדֵי־יָמֵינוּ מַעֲטִים־ פֶּקֶדְתוֹ יִקַּח אַחֵר: Total, v. 8 Total, v. 4-8	3	3	3			
			3		3	3		
			6	= 3	+ 3	= 6	+ 0	
			32	= 19	+ 13	= 32	+ 0	
9	8	יְהוּדֵי־בָנָיו יְתוּמִים־ וְאִשְׁתּוֹ אֶלְמָנָה: Total, v. 9	3	3	3			
			2		2	2		
			5	= 3	+ 2	= 5	+ 0	
	Strophe 4	Total, v. 8-9	11	= 6	+ 5	= 11	+ 0	
		Total, v. 7-9	17	= 9	+ 8	= 17	+ 0	
10	9	וְנוֹעַ וְנוֹעָיו בָּנָיו וְשֹׁאֲלוֹ וְדָרְשׁוּ מִחֲרָבוֹתֵיהֶם: Total, v. 10 Total, v. 8-10	4	4	4			
			2		2	2		
			6	= 4	+ 2	= 6	+ 0	
			17	= 10	+ 7	= 17	+ 0	
11	10	יִנְקֹשׁ נֹשֶׁה לְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וְיִבְזֶזוּ זָרִים וְיִנְעוּ: Total, v. 11	5	5	5			
			3		3	3		
			8	= 5	+ 3	= 8	+ 0	
	Strophe 5	Total, v. 10-11	14	= 9	+ 5	= 14	+ 0	
		Total, v. 6-11	38	= 21	+ 17	= 38	+ 0	
12	11	אֶל־יְהוָה־לוֹ מִשְׁבֵּד חֶסֶד־ וְאֶל־יְהוָה חֹנֵן לִיתוּמָיו: Total, v. 12 Total, v. 11-12	5	5	5			
			4		4	4		
			9	= 5	+ 4	= 9	+ 0	
			17	= 10	+ 7	= 17	+ 0	
13	12	יְהוָה־אֲחֵרֵיתוֹ לְהַכְרִיתָהּ בְּדוֹר אַחֵר יִמַּח שְׁמֶם: Total, v. 13	3	3	3			
			4		4	4		
			7	= 3	+ 4	= 7	+ 0	
	Strophe 6	Total, v. 12-13	16	= 8	+ 8	= 16	+ 0	
		Total, v. 11-13	24	= 13	+ 11	= 24	+ 0	
		Total, v. 10-13	30	= 17	+ 13	= 30	+ 0	
	Canticle I.2	Total, v. 6-13	54	= 29	+ 25	= 54	+ 0	
	Canto II	Total, v. 1-13	87	= 53	+ 34	= 87	+ 0	

14	יִזְכֹּר עֵזְרָא אֶל־יְהוָה ¹ וְחַטָּאת אָמוּ אֶל־תִּמְחָה: Middle words of 14-16 29 = 13 + 3 + 13 Total, v. 14	13	5	5	5	4	4	4	9 = 5 + 4 = 0 + 9
15	coinciding with the middle colon: 7 = 3 + 1 + 3 Total, v. 15	יְהִי נִגְד־יְהוָה ² תְּמִידָה וַיִּכְרַת מֵאֶרֶץ זָכָרָם: Total, v. 15	14	4	4	4	3	3	7 = 4 + 3 = 0 + 7
16	Middle words: 224 = 111 + 2 + 111 Cf. vs. 22a and 31a! Total, v. 16 Strophe 7 Total, v. 14-16 Total, v. 1-16	יֵעַן אֲשֶׁר לֹא זָכַר עֲשׂוֹת חֶסֶד וַיִּרְדֹּף אִישׁ־עֵנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן וַנִּכְאֶה לִּבֵּב לְמוֹתָת: Total, v. 16	15	6	6	6	4	4	3 = 3
17	30 = 14 + 2 + 14 Total, v. 17 Total, v. 15-17	וַיֵּאָהֵב קָלְלָהּ וַתְּבוֹאֶהוּ וְלֹא־חָפֵץ בְּבִרְכָּהּ וַתִּרְחַק מִמֶּנּוּ: Total, v. 17	16	3	3	3	3	3	8 = 3 + 5 = 0 + 8
18	Total, v. 14-18	וַיִּלְבַּשׁ קָלְלָהּ כְּמִדּוֹ וַתְּבֹא כַּמִּים בְּקִרְבּוֹ וַכְשֶׁמֶן בַּעֲצֻמוֹתָיו: Total, v. 18	17	3	3	3	3	3	28 = 20 + 8 = 0 + 28
19	Total, v. 17-19 Strophe 8 Total, v. 17-19	תְּהִי־לוֹ כְּבֹד יַעֲטֶהּ וְלִמְנוַח תְּמִיד יִחַגְרֶה: Total, v. 19	18	4	4	4	3	3	8 = 6 + 2 = 0 + 8
20	Total, v. 17-20 Canto II Total, v. 14-20	זֹאת פְּעֻלַּת שְׁטָנֵי מֵאֵת יְהוָה ³ וַהֲדַבְּרִים רַע עַל־נַפְשִׁי: Strophe 9 Total, v. 20	19	5	5	5	4	4	45 = 31 + 14 = 0 + 45
21	Middle instance	וְאֵתֶּה יְהוָה ⁴ אֲדַנִּי עֲשֵׂה־אֵתִי לְמַעַן שְׂמֹדָה כִּי־טוֹב חֶסֶדְךָ הַצִּילָנִי: Total, v. 21	20	3	3	3	4	4	7 = 4 + 3 = 0 + 7
22	Total, v. 18-22	כִּי־עֵנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן אֲנֹכִי וְלִבִּי חָלַל בְּקִרְבִּי: Total, v. 22	21	4	4	4	3	3	32 = 18 + 14 = 0 + 32
23	Total, v. 21-23 Strophe 10 Total, v. 21-23	כְּצֶל־בְּנוֹטוֹתוֹ נִהְלַכְתִּי נִנְעַרְתִּי כְּאַרְבֶּה: Total, v. 23	22	3	3	3	2	2	61 = 40 + 21 = 0 + 61
									11 = 7 + 4 = 11 + 0
									42 = 26 + 16 = 18 + 24
									5 = 3 + 2 = 5 + 0
									23 = 14 + 9 = 23 + 0

24		בְּרַכִּי כְּשֶׁלוֹ מִצּוֹם־ וּבְשָׂרִי כְּחֹשׁ מִשָּׁמֶן: Total, v. 24 Total, v. 17-24	23	3	3	3	3	
				3		3	3	
				6	=	3	+	3
				61	=	35	+	26
					=	29	+	32
25		וְאַנִּי הִיִּיתִי חֲרָפָה לְהֵם־ יִרְאוּנִי וַיִּנְעוּן רֵאשִׁים: Total, v. 25 Strophe 11 Total, v. 24-25 Canticle III.1 Total, v. 21-25 Total, v. 20-25	24	4	4	4	4	
				3		3	3	
				7	=	4	+	3
				13	=	7	+	6
				36	=	21	+	15
				45	=	26	+	19
					=	36	+	9
26		עֲזַרְנִי יְהוָה ⁵ אֱלֹהֵי־ הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי כַחֲסֻדָּךְ: Total, v. 26 Strophe 12 Total, v. 26-27 Total, v. 23-27	25	3	3	3	3	
				2		2	2	
				5	=	3	+	2
				12	=	7	+	5
				30	=	17	+	13
					=	30	+	0
27		וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי־יָדָךְ זֹאת־ אַתָּה יְהוָה ⁶ עֹשֵׂתָה: Total, v. 27 Strophe 12 Total, v. 26-27 Total, v. 23-27	26	4	4	4	4	
				3		3	3	
				7	=	4	+	3
				12	=	7	+	5
				30	=	17	+	13
					=	30	+	0
28		יִקְלְלוּ־הַמָּוֶה וְאַתָּה תִּבְרַךְ־ קָמוּ וַיִּבְשׂוּ וְעָבְדָךְ יִשְׁמַח: Total, v. 28 Total, v. 18-28	27	4	4	4	4	
				4		4	4	
				8	=	8	+	0
				80	=	51	+	29
					=	56	+	24
29		יִלְבָּשׁוּ שׂוֹטְנֵי כְּלִמָּד־ וַיַּעֲטוּ כַמְעִיל בְּשָׂתָם: Total, v. 29 Strophe 13 Total, v. 28-29 Canticle III.2 Total, v. 26-29 Total, v. 21-29 Total, v. 14-29	28	3	3	3	3	
				3		3	3	
				6	=	3	+	3
				14	=	11	+	3
				26	=	18	+	8
				62	=	39	+	23
				123	=	119	+	65
					=	62	+	61
30	Coda: vs. 30-31	אוֹדָה יְהוָה ⁷ מְאֹד בְּפִי־ וּבִתְוֹךְ רַבִּים אֶת־לִלְמוֹ: Total, v. 30 Total, v. 25-30	29	4	4	4	4	
				3		3	3	
				7	=	4	+	3
				40	=	26	+	14
					=	33	+	7
31		כִּי־יַעֲמֵד לִימִין אַבְיֹן ⁸ לְהוֹשִׁיעַ מִשִּׁפְטֵי נַפְשׁוֹ: Total, v. 31 Canticle III.3 Strophe 14 v. 30-31 Total, v. 26-31 Canto III Total, v. 21-31 Total, v. 1-31 Total with the heading v. 1-31	30	4	4	4	4	
				3		3	3	
				7	=	4	+	3
				14	=	8	+	6
				40	=	26	+	14
				76	=	47	+	29
				224	=	140	+	84
				227	=	143	+	84

Observations

1. In terms of the 224 words of the psalm, the arithmetic middle falls between the two words עֲנִי וְאַבְיֹן, 'afflicted and poor', in v. 16b (224 = 112 + 112). These words may be regarded as the deliberately designed meaningful centre (224 = 111 + 2 + 111) for good reasons. First, the evil perpetrated by the wicked accuser is that he "did not show kindness, but persecuted a poor, afflicted person", and this is precisely the gist of the psalm, in which

the the speaker (identified as this wretched person) appeals to God to save and vindicate him and denounce the accuser and his family.

Second, the meaningful centre is most effectively underscored in terms of logotechnique. The significant balance structure, **111 + 2 + 111**, is based on the numerical value of the full phrase, אִישׁ־עָנִי וְאֶבְיֹן, 'a person afflicted and poor', which is **111** (1+10+21 + 16+14+10 + 6+1+2+10+6+14 = 32 + 40 + 39 = 111).

The third reason is that the two pivotal words reappear as keywords in v. 22a, where the speaker describes himself as עָנִי וְאֶבְיֹן, 'afflicted and poor'. Moreover, אֶבְיֹן, 'poor', clearly reverberates as a keyword in the final verse, where it is said that God "stands at the right hand of *the poor*" (v. 31a). It is exactly here that the poem reaches its climax.

2. As in Psalm 108, the direction of address gives structure to the text, showing that the main caesurae of the text are between vs. 13||14, 20||21 and 29||30:

vs. 1-13	words directly addressed to God
vs. 14-20	words spoken about God in his presence
vs. 21-29	words directly addressed to God
vs. 30-31	words spoken about God in his presence.

This implies that vs. 6-13 cannot be interpreted as the *ipsissima verba* of the false accuser (so e.g. Van der Lugt). Moreover it is highly improbable that the poet would quote him so extensively, and even without any introduction at all. In my opinion, vs. 6-13 are part of the words directly addressed to God (vs. 1-13). It is God who is called upon to appoint a wicked man against the accuser to bring him to trial and to let him come forth guilty.

These four well-defined passages based on the direction of speech, set the major parameters for the canto structure:

Canticle I.1	vs. 1-5	O God, do not to be silent: the wicked accuse me
Canticle I.2	vs. 6-13	Appoint some rogue to denounce him: may he perish
Canto II	vs. 14-20	He persecuted a poor downtrodden: may he be cursed
Canticle III.1	vs. 21-25	Deliver me, for I am downtrodden and in dire straits
Canticle III.2	vs. 26-29	Vindicate me by your love and denounce my accusers
Canticle III.3	vs. 30-31	I shall praise YHWH, for he stands beside the poor.

3. In much the same way as in Psalms 104-108, the poet ends his poem with a brief coda (vs. 30-31), in which he expresses his belief in the help he is sure YHWH will send. This is very reminiscent of the coda in Ps. 108:14. For the coda, see the [General Introduction](#) "The use of a coda as a device for conclusion".
4. As in Psalm 108, the *kabod* numbers **23** and **32** feature prominently, occurring more frequently than can be expected from coincidence. Therefore, I have noted them here as well. See Observations 3 and 4 in my Analysis of [Psalm 108](#). Together with the divine name numbers, they appear in the following way (some may be due to coincidence):

vs. 4-7	26 words in total
vs. 4-8	32 words in total
vs. 7-9	17 words in total
vs. 8-10	17 words in total
vs. 6-11	17 words after atnach
vs. 11-12	17 words in total
vs. 10-13	17 words before atnach
vs. 1-13	34 (2 x 17) words after atnach
vs. 10-14	17 words after atnach
vs. 17-19	23 words in total
vs. 17-20	32 words in total
vs. 18-22	26 words before atnach
vs. 21-23	23 words in total

vs. 17-24	26 words after atnach
vs. 20-25	26 words before atnach
vs. 23-27	17 words before atnach
vs. 18-28	51 (3 x 17) words before atnach
vs. 26-29	26 words in total
vs. 21-29	23 words after atnach
vs. 14-29	119 (7 x 17) words before atnach
vs. 26-31	26 words before atnach.

A brief remark on the fact that in Codex L three verses (4, 16 and 28) have no *atnach*: Christensen, who regularly consults other editions of the text, has restored an *atnach* in v. 16 on the strength of evidence from the Letteris and Ginsburg editions, leaving vs. 4 and 28, however, as they stand in MT. In my opinion, it is better to be consistent and leave the atnachs as they stand in Codex L. See the [General Introduction](#), "Criteria for logotechnical analysis".

The designation Elohim appears only in vs. 1 and 26a. The name יהוה, on the other hand, occurs exactly **7** times, only in Cantos II-III (vs. 14a, 15a, 20a, **21a**, 26a, 27b, 30a), showing the deliberate use of the number of fullness. Compare the poem's **14** (2 x **7**) strophes and **224** (**32** x **7**) words.

Note that the middle occurrence in 21a is accompanied by the designation אֲדֹנָי, 'my Lord', which highlights its pivotal position. In addition, it directs special attention to the beginning of Canto III, the final plea of the speaker to God "to deal with me as befits your *name*". The single mention of God's *name* is evidently to contrast his *everlasting Name* with the *name* of the accuser's posterity (referred to at the end of Canto I, in v. 13b), which was doomed to be *blotted out*.

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