

Psalm 52— 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 52

- The use of the numerical value of an important word in the text to define the total number of words in the poem: **תַּתְהַלֵּל**, 'you boast' (v. 3), **73** (22 + 22 + 5 + 12 + 12).
- The use of similar compositional devices as in the preceding psalm, more particularly the placement of a keyword at the arithmetic centre of part of the text: the word **שָׁקַר**, 'the act of lying' (within vs. 3-7) and **כְּפִיֵּת רֹעֵנָן**, 'like a flourishing olive tree' (within vs. 8-11).
- The menorah pattern is used twice to express the idea of 'fullness' and to highlight, by its focusing function, the quintessence of evilness and divine judgement.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 3-4, 5-7 || 8-9, 10-11 (2 cantos with 4 strophes, 11 verselines and 24 cola).
- Fokkelman: 3-4, 5-7 || 8-9, 10, 11 (2 stanzas with 5 strophes, 11 verselines and 24 cola).
- Labuschagne: 3-4, 5-7 || 8-9, 10, 11 (2 cantos with 5 strophes - the last of which is a coda – 11 verselines and 24 cola).

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: the lying boaster is warned about God's inevitable judgement.
- Column **d**: words describing how the devout will rejoice at God's judgement.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	לְמַנְצַח מִשְׁכִּיל לְדָוִד:	3	3			
2	כְּבוֹא דוֹאֵג הָאֲדָמִי וַיִּגְדַּל לְשֹׂאוֹל וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא־	7	7			
	בָּא דָוִד אֶל־בֵּית אַחִימֵלֵךְ:	5		5		
	Heading, v. 1-2	15	= 10	+ 5		
3	מִה־תַּתְהַלֵּל בְּרָעָה הַגְּבוּרָה תַּתְהַלֵּל = 73	1	4	4		4
	חֶסֶד אֵל כָּל־הַיּוֹם: (22 + 22 + 5 + 12 + 12 = 73)	4		4	4	
	Total, v. 3	8	= 4	+ 4	= 8	+ 0
4	הַזֹּהֵת תַּחֲשֹׁב לְשׁוֹנֵדָה	2	3			3
	כְּתַעַר מִלְּטָשׁ עֲשֵׂה רַמְיָה:	4		4	4	
	Total, v. 4	7	= 3	+ 4	= 7	+ 0
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 3-4	15	= 7	+ 8	= 15	+ 0

5	אֶהְבֶּתָּ רַע מִטוֹב־אֶ	3	3	3	3
Middle word of vs. 3-7	שָׁרָה מִדְּבַר צְדָק סָלָה :		3	3	3
37 = 18 + 1 + 18	Total, v. 5		6	= 3 + 3	= 6 + 0
6	אֶהְבֶּתָּ כָּל־דְּבָרֵי־בָלֵעַ	4	4	4	4
	לְשׁוֹן מִרְמָה :		2	2	2
	Total, v. 6		6	= 6 + 0	= 6 + 0
	Total, v. 5-6		12	= 9 + 3	= 12 + 0
	Total, v. 3-6		27	= 16 + 11	= 27 + 0
7	גַּם־אֵל יִתְצַדֵּק לְנֹצֶחַ	5	4	4	4
	יִחַתֵּד וְיִסְתַּחֵד מֵאֵהֱלֵא		3	3	3
Middle word of poem	וְיִשְׁרָשֵׁד מֵאֲרִץ תַּיִם סָלָה :		3	3	3
73 = 36 + 1 + 36	Total, v. 7		10	= 7 + 3	= 10 + 0
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 5-7		22	= 16 + 6	= 22 + 0
	Canto I Total, v. 3-7		37	= 23 + 14	= 37 + 0
8	וַיֵּרְאוּ צְדִיקִים וַיֵּרְאוּ	6	3	3	3
Middle verseline: 11 = 5 + 1 + 5	וְעָלְיוּ יִשְׁחַקוּ :		2	2	2
Meaningful centre of the poem	Total, v. 8		5	= 5 + 0	= 0 + 5
9	הִנֵּה הַגִּבּוֹר לֹא יִשִּׁים	7	4	4	4
	אֱלֹהִים מְעוֹזוֹ		2	2	2
	וַיִּבְטַח בְּרַב עֲשָׂרוֹ	8	3	3	3
	יַעַז בְּהִוְתָּו :		2	2	2
	Total, v. 9		11	= 9 + 2	= 0 + 11
	Strophe 3 Total, v. 8-9		16	= 14 + 2	= 0 + 16
	Total, v. 7-9		26	= 21 + 5	= 12 + 14
	Total, v. 3-9		53	= 37 + 16	= 37 + 16
10 Middle words of vs. 8-11	וַאֲנִי כְּנִיתָ רַעֲנָן	9	3	3	3
36 = 17 + 2 + 17	בְּבֵית אֱלֹהִים		2	2	2
	בְּשַׁחַתִּי בְּחֶסֶד־אֱלֹהִים	10	3	3	3
	עוֹלָם וָעֶד :		2	2	2
	Strophe 4 Total, v. 10		10	= 5 + 5	= 0 + 10
	Total, v. 8-10		26	= 19 + 7	= 0 + 26
11 Coda	אֹדְדֶךָ לְעוֹלָם כִּי עָשִׂיתָ	11	4	4	4
	וַאֲמַנְתָּ שְׁמֶךָ כִּי־טוֹב		4	4	4
	נִגְדַת תְּסִיִּדֶיךָ : – words in Canto I		2	2	2
(8+15+10+4 = 37)	Strophe 5 Total, v. 11		10	= 4 + 6	= 0 + 10
	Canto II Total, v. 8-11		36	= 23 + 13	= 0 + 36
	Total, v. 3-11		73	= 46 + 27	= 37 + 36
With the heading and סָלָה (2x), v. 1-11			90	= 56 + 34	

Observations

1. Whether it is a matter of coincidence or not, it is worth noting that the total number of words, **73**, represents the numerical value of the second word of the psalm (v. 3), **תַּתְהַלַּל**, 'you boast'. It is an important word, since it is particularly because of the **boasting** of the mischief done against the godly that the dishonest liar is subjected to God's judgement.

Another keyword, of which the numerical value may have determined the number of words in part of the text, vs. 3-7, Canto I, is **תְּסִיד** (8 + 15 + 10 + 4 = **37**) compare the last word, **תְּסִידֶיךָ**, 'your faithful', in v. 11c and the noun **תְּסִיד**, 'faithfulness', in vs. 3b and 10c. It may be deliberate design that v. 11 is made up of 37 letters! I owe this observation to Pieter Van der Lugt.

2. In his description of the evilness of this arrogant boaster (vs. 4-6), the author mentions **7** characteristics, symbolizing the idea of 'fullness':
 1. he plans destruction (4a)
 2. he has a razor sharp tongue (4b, first part)
 3. he is a worker of treachery (4b, second part)
 4. **he loves evil more than good (5a)**
 5. he loves lying more than speaking the truth (5b)
 6. he loves all malicious talk (6a)
 7. he loves a deceitful tongue (6b)

The phrase expressing the quintessence of his evilness is situated at the centre of the menorah pattern, thus getting maximal emphasis: he loves evil more than good!

Likewise, describing God's judgement and its effect on the righteous (vs. 7-9) the author once again uses the menorah pattern:

- a. God will break him down (7a)
- b. God will snatch him (7b, first part)
- c. God will tear him from his tent (7b, second part)
- d. **God will uproot him from the land of the living (7c)**
- e. the righteous will look on (8a, first part)
- f. the righteous will be awestruck (8a, second part)
- g. the righteous will laugh at him (8b).

In this case the quintessence of God's judgement, the death of the arrogant evildoer, occupies centre position (v. 7c): God will uproot him from the land of the living!

3. The middle word of the poem is **חַיִּים**, 'the living', but the meaningful centre is constituted by the middle verseline, **v. 8** (11 = 5 + 1 + 5), coinciding with the two middle cola (24 = 11 + 2 + 11), describing the effect God's judgement has on the righteous:

וַיִּרְאוּ צְדִיקִים וַיִּרְאוּ וְעָלְיוּ יִשְׁחָקוּ:

The righteous will look on, will be awestruck // and will laugh at him.

4. In the address to the dishonest liar, vs. 3-7, the keyword **שָׁקֵר**, 'lying', is situated at the arithmetic centre of the 37-word passage: 37 = 18 + 1 + 18. This is reminiscent of the central position of the keyword **חָטָאתִי**, 'I have sinned', in Ps. 51:3-8 (in v. 6) – see Observation 2 in my Analysis of [Psalm 51](#).

5. Incidentally, in the description of the effect of God's judgement on the righteous, vs. 8-11 (Column d), expressed by the metaphor of the olive tree: **פְּנוּת רֵעֵן**, 'like a flourishing olive tree', is situated at the arithmetic centre of the 36-word passage. The two words are flanked by **17** words on either side: $36 = 17 + 2 + 17$. The metaphor portrays the speaker who trusts in God's faithful love (v. 10b – cf. vs., 3b!). This is reminiscent of the metaphor of the flourishing tree at the arithmetic centre of [Psalm 1](#).
6. In terms of the direction of address, the text divides as follows:
- | | | |
|---------|--------------|--|
| vs. 3-7 | Strophes 1-2 | words spoken to the dishonest liar |
| vs. 8-9 | Strophe 3 | description of the effect of God's judgement |
| v. 10 | Strophe 4 | self-reflection by the speaker |
| v. 11 | Strophe 5 | words specifically addressed to God. |

In terms of form and content, Strophe 5 clearly functions as a coda – see the General Introduction, "The use of a coda as a device for conclusion."

7. There are only two instances of the divine name number **26** in the poem: the **26** words in vs. 7-9 and in vs. 8-10. Including the heading, five additional instances are generated, which suggests that a 15-word heading was devised to achieve this:
- | | |
|----------|--|
| vs. 1-7 | 52 (2 x 26) words in total |
| vs. 1-9 | 68 (4 x 17) words in total |
| vs. 1-10 | 78 (3 x 26) words in total |
| vs. 1-10 | 52 (2 x 26) words before atnach |
| vs. 1-10 | 26 words after atnach. |

8. The name YHWH itself does not occur in the psalm, but there is an explicit reference to the name in v. 11, 'I shall await *your name*, for it is good'. In the parallel phrase in Ps. 54:8, however, the name YHWH does feature: 'I shall praise your name, O YHWH, for it is good'.

The word **אֵל** features in the address to the evildoer (vs. 3 and 7), while **אֱלֹהִים** is used in the description of the effect of God's judgement on the godly (9, 10a, 10b).

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