

# Psalm 1— 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 features of Psalm 1

- The opening psalm of the Book of Psalms is a showpiece of biblical numerical composition. In a most ingenious way, the 7-word meaningful centre of the text (v. 3b) is positioned within a larger 15-word core around the pivotal word **בְּעֵתוֹ**, 'in season', in a perfectly concentric menorah pattern: **26 + 4+3+1+3+4 + 26**. The **14 (7 + 7)** words surrounding the pivot demonstrate the use of the number of fullness, while the **26** words on either side witness the use of the divine name number **26**.
- The first psalm also exhibits a striking numerical device shared by a considerable number of psalms and others texts: the use of the numerical value of a key-word to give structure to the text. Here, the number of words enveloping the meaningful centre, **52 (26 + 26)**, represent the numerical value of the first word, **אַשְׁרֵי**, 'happy' (1+21+20+10 = 52), which is a key-word of paramount importance. The psalm shares this feature particularly with Psalm 41 concluding Book I. This key-word clearly serves as a device for inclusion. For the use of the numerical value of a key-word to define the number of words in a given text, see "The numerical value of a key-word in the text" in the [General Introduction](#).
- The psalm also introduces the use of syntax as a device to structure the text in still another way to weave divine name numbers into the fabric of the text: in this case, the number **26** is divided in vs. 2-3 and 4-6 into its basic components, YH = **15** and WH = **11**.

## Strophic structure

- Van der Lugt: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6 (3 strophes, with 6 verselines and 14 cola).
- Fokkelman: 1-2, 3, 4-6 (3 strophes, 8 verselines, 16 cola, taking vs. 1a and 3b as bicola; with disregard for syntax, he divides v. 1a into 3 + 4 words, instead of 2 + 5).
- Labuschagne: 1-2, 3, 4-6 (3 strophes, with 6 verselines and 14 cola).
- For an overview of other divisions of the text, see Van der Lugt, CAS, Psalm 1, § 6.

## 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.
- The numbering of the verselines is in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	אַשְׁרֵי־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָלַךְ בְּעֵצַת רְשָׁעִים	1	7	2	2	5
	וּבְדֶרֶךְ תְּטָאִים לֹא עָמַד <sup>^</sup>		4	4		4
	(1+21+20+10) אַשְׁרֵי = 52		4			4
	וּבְמִוֶּשֶׁב לְצִיִּים לֹא יָשָׁב:		4	4		4
	For אַשְׁרֵי see Observation 3	Total, v. 1	15	= 11	+ 4	= 2 + 13
2	כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה חֲפָצוֹ	2	5	5	5	
	וּבְתוֹרַתוֹ יְהַגֵּה יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה:		4	4	4	
	Total, v. 2	9	= 9	+ 0	= 9	+ 0
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-2	24	= 20	+ 4	= 11	+ 13

3 Meaningful core: וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ עַל־פְּלִי מָוֶם 3  
 26+15+26 אֲשֶׁר פְּרִיו יִתֵּן בְּעֵתוֹ וְעַלְהוֹ לֹא־יִבּוֹלֵא  
 Middle word: 33 + 1 + 33 : וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלִיחַ:  
 Middle words: Middle Strophe 2 Total, v. 3  
 67 = 26 + 4 + 7 + 4 + 26 Total, v. 2-3

4 לֹא־כֵן הָרְשָׁעִים 4  
 כִּי אִם־כַּמּוֹץ אֲשֶׁר־תִּדְפְּנוּ רוּחַ:  
 Total, v. 4  
 Total, v. 3-4

5 עַל־כֵּן לֹא־יִקְמוּ רְשָׁעִים בְּמִשְׁפָּטֵא 5  
 וְחֲטָאִים בְּעֵדַת צְדִיקִים:  
 Total, v. 5

6 כִּי־יִזְרַע יִתְּנָה דְרֹךְ צְדִיקִים 6  
 וְדְרֹךְ רְשָׁעִים תֵּאֱבֹד :  
 Total, v. 6  
 Total, v. 5-6  
**Strophe 3 Total, v. 4-6**  
 Total, v. 2-6  
 Total, v. 1-6

6	6	6	
7	7		7
4	4		4
<hr/>			
17	= 13	+ 4	= 6 + 11
26	= 22	+ 4	= 15 + 11
<hr/>			
3	3		3
6	6		3
<hr/>			
9	= 3	+ 6	= 6 + 3
26	= 16	+ 10	= 12 + 14
<hr/>			
6	6		6
3	3		3
<hr/>			
9	= 6	+ 3	= 9 + 0
5	5		5
<hr/>			
3	3		3
<hr/>			
8	= 5	+ 3	= 0 + 8
17	= 11	+ 6	= 9 + 8
26	= 14	+ 12	= 15 + 11
52	= 36	+ 16	= 30 + 22
67	= 47	+ 20	= 32 + 35

## Observations

- The middle word is **בְּעֵתוֹ**, 'in season', in v. 3a (33 + 1 + 33), situated in the middle of the 7 words in v. 3a (30 + 7 + 30), which fall within the central strophe, v. 3:

אֲשֶׁר פְּרִיו יִתֵּן בְּעֵתוֹ וְעַלְהוֹ לֹא־יִבּוֹלֵא  
 that yields its fruit in season and whose foliage never withers.

These 7 words constitute a most appropriate and therefore meaningful centre, because they focus especially on the *seasonal fruit and the evergreen foliage* of the tree, which symbolize its *fruitfulness and durability*. The pivotal position of the 7-word centre is highlighted by the fact that it coincides with the 7<sup>th</sup> of the 14 (2 x 7) cola.

- In their turn, the 7 pivotal words constitute the arithmetic centre of the 15 words describing *all four qualities* of the fruitful tree:

planted beside water channels,  
 that yields its fruit in season and whose foliage never withers,  
 and whatever it produces is good.

Therefore, this larger centre may be regarded as the meaningful core of the psalm. The 26 words on either side buttress its meaningfulness: 26 + 7 + 1 + 7 + 26. The divine name number 26 – representing YHWH's presence - surrounds the 15-word centre in much the same way as in [Psalm 23](#). For more examples, compare (among many others) Psalms 41, 82, and 92.

From this perspective, the middle word is flanked by two sets of 7 words, witnessing once again the deliberate use of the number of fullness and abundance to symbolize the fruitfulness and enduring goodness of the righteous in the simile.

3. Since the 15-word inner core falls within the *middle strophe* (v. 3), it cannot be excluded that the author intended the entire v. 3 to be the meaningful centre. The fact that v. 3 is made up of exactly 17 words underscores this supposition.

It is not simply a matter of coincidence that the 15-word core is *surrounded* by 52 words (26 + 15 + 26). The author used this pattern deliberately, because 52 represents the numerical value of the key-word אֲשֶׁרִי, 'happy', the very first word of the psalm (1 + 21 + 20 + 10 = 52). That we have to do with a key-word of paramount importance is shown by the fact that it occurs exactly 26 times in the Psalter as a unifying thread throughout the whole corpus.

It is worth noting that it occurs 13 times in Psalms 1-89, Books I-III:

1:1; 2:12; 32:1, 2; 33:12; 34:9; 40:5; 41:2; 65:5; 84:5, 6, 13; 89:16

and 13 times in Psalms 90-150, Books IV-V:

94:12; 106:3; 112:1; 119:1, 2; 127:5; 128:1, 2; 137:8, 9; 144:15a, 15b, 146:5.

See The [Compositional Structure](#) of the Psalter, pp. 13f.

For a comparable case, the 26 occurrences of the word צִוֵּר, 'rock', in the Psalter, see Observation 3 in my analysis of Psalm 18.

It is important to note that אֲשֶׁרִי is also the first word in Psalm 41 at the end of Book I. In addition, the meaningful centre of Psalm 41 is significantly surrounded by exactly 104 (4 x 26) words, with 52 before and 52 after the centre. See Observation 2 in my Analysis of [Psalm 41](#). Since this can hardly be a matter of chance, we may conclude that אֲשֶׁרִי also functions as a *device for inclusion* to delimit the 41 psalms of Book I.

In Psalm 1, we find another intriguing scribal device: the use of the *first word* with initial *Aleph* and the *last word* with initial *Taw* to delimit a text. In this case אֲשֶׁרִי in v.1a and תִּאכֹּר in v. 6b. I suggest to call this the 'Aleph-Taw device for inclusion'. My attention was directed to this phenomenon (to be found in Psalm 82:6-7, and elsewhere in the Book of Psalms), by Pieter van der Lugt. See his *Cantos and Strophes* (OTS 53), Leiden – Boston, 2006, p. 97, note 8) and see Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 82](#).

Having checked all 150 psalms, I found, in addition to Ps. 82:6-7, altogether 6 instances of the use of this device: Psalms 1, 5, 70, 79, 112 (an alphabetic acrostic!), noticed by Van der Lugt, and 138.\*

In Psalm 134 the *Aleph* and *Taw* of the accusative particle אֵת symbolically express the idea of all-inclusiveness. See Observation 1 in my analysis of [Psalm 134](#).

4. In addition to the use of the number 26 described above, both divine name numbers 17 and 26 are woven into the text in succession as follows particularly in order to give prominence to certain sections of the text:

v. 2	distinctive qualities of the righteous	9 words
v. 3	specification of these qualities	17 words
vs. 2-3	words devoted to the righteous	26 words
v. 4	about the wicked	9 words
vs. 3-4	about the righteous and the wicked	26 words

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\* The following psalms (35 in total, excluding the alphabetic acrostics) have a first word with initial *aleph*: 1, 5, 9, 14, 18, 22, 28, 30, 39, 41, 44, 46, 50, 53, 54, 60, 62, 63, 67, 70, 72, 73, 79, 82 (note the *taw*-alliteration in the last colon), 83, 90, 94, 109, 116, 120, 121, 123, 127, 128, and 138. Among the alphabetic acrostics (9-10, 25, 34, 37, 11, 112, 119, and 145), it is only Psalm 112 that begins with a word with initial *aleph* and ends with a word with initial *taw*.

vs. 4-6	about the wicked and the righteous	<b>26</b> words
vs. 5-6	conclusion	<b>17</b> words.

Note the concatenation of divine name numbers in vs. 2-3 ( $9 + 17 = 26$ ), a numerical figurative device used in a number of instances in the psalms to weave the divine name into the fabric of the text. See "Special patterns" in the [General Introduction](#).

5. In terms of main clauses and subordinate clauses in vs. 2-3 and 4-6, the compositional formula is significant: **26** = **15c** + **11d**. In both instances the divine name number is divided into its basic components: **15** (= YH) and **11** (= WH).
6. The name יהוה occurs 2x (vs. 2a and 6a).

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