

Psalm 6— 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 6

- A special feature is its particularly regular numerical and strophic structure: its **78** (3 x **26**) words divide into two equal halves in terms of the words addressed to God and the words spoken about him. Both sections have identical compositional formulae:
vs. 2-6 (2nd person) with 5 verselines and **39** words: **22** before, and **17** after atnach
vs. 7-11 (3rd person) with 5 verselines and **39** words: **22** before, and **17** after atnach.
- The use of syntax, in addition to the use of the *atnach*, to weave the divine name numbers into the fabric of the text is a feature this psalm shares with Psalm 5.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt, Fokkelman and Labuschagne: 2-4, 5-6 || 7-8, 9-11 (2 cantos with 4 strophes, 10 verselines and 21 cola).
- For an overview of other divisions of the text, see Van der Lugt, CAS, Psalm 6, § 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	לְמַנְצַח בְּנִינּוֹת עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִת מְזִמּוֹר לְדָוִד :	6	6			
2	יְהוָה אֶל־בְּאֶפְדָּ תוֹכִיחֵנִי [^] 1	4	4		4	
	וְאֶל־בְּחִמָּתְךָ תִּנְסָרְנִי :	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 2	7	= 4 +	3 =	7 +	0
3 *	חַנּוּנֵי יְהוָה כִּי אֶמְלֵל אֲנִי 2	5	5		2	3
	רַפְּאֵנִי יְהוָה [^] כִּי נִבְהָלוּ עַצְמוֹ :	5		5	2	3
	Total, v. 3	10	= 7 +	3 =	4 +	6
	Total, v. 2-3	17	= 11 +	6 =	11 +	6
4	וְנַפְשִׁי נִבְהָלָה מְאֹד [^] 3	3		3		
	וְאַתָּה יְהוָה עַד־מָתִי :	2		2	2	
	Total, v. 4	7	= 3 +	4 =	7 +	0
	Total, v. 3-4	17	= 10 +	7 =	11 +	6
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 2-4	24	= 14 +	10 =	18 +	6
5	שׁוֹבָה יְהוָה חֲלֹצָה נַפְשִׁי [^] 4	4		4		
	הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי לְמַעַן חֲסִדְךָ :	3		3	1	2
	Total, v. 5	7	= 4 +	3 =	5 +	2
6	כִּי אֵין בְּמִנּוֹת זְכָרְךָ [^] 5	4	4			4
	בְּשֹׂאֵל מִי יוֹדֶה־לָּךְ :	4		4	4	
	Total, v. 6	8	= 4 +	4 =	4 +	4
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 5-6	15	= 8 +	7 =	9 +	6
	Canto I Total, v. 2-6	39	= 22 +	17 =	27 +	12

Arithmetic middle in terms of verselines (5 + 5) and words (39=22+17 + 39=22+17)

7	Middle colon: 21=10+1+10	יָנַעְתִּי בְּאַנְחָתִי	6	2	2	2
	Meaningful centre	אֲשַׁחֲהָ בְּכָל-לַיְלָה מִטְּתִי		4	4	4
		בְּדַמְעָתִי עָרְשֵׁי אֲמֹסָה:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 7			9	= 6 + 3	= 9 + 0
8		עֲשֻׁשָׁה מִכַּעַס עֵינָי	7	3	3	3
		עֲתָקָה בְּכָל-צוּרְרָי:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 8			6	= 3 + 3	= 6 + 0
	Strophe 3 Total, v. 7-8			15	= 9 + 6	= 15 + 0
	Vs. 5-8, 30 middle words: Total, v. 5-8			30	= 17 + 13	= 24 + 6
	78 = 24 + 30 + 24	Total, v. 2-8		54	= 31 + 23	= 42 + 12
9		סוּרוֹ מִמֶּנִּי כָּל-פַּעְלֵי אֲוִן	8	5	5	5
		כִּי-שָׁמַע יְהוָה קוֹל בְּכִי:		5	5	5
	Total, v. 9			10	= 5 + 5	= 5 + 5
10		שָׁמַע יְהוָה תְּחִנּוֹתַי	9	3	3	3
		יְהוָה תִּבְלָתִי יִקַּח:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 10			6	= 3 + 3	= 6 + 0
11		יָבֹשׁוּ וַיִּבְהַלּוּ מְאֹד כָּל-אֲיָבָי	10	5	5	5
		יָשׁוּבוּ יָבֹשׁוּ רְגַע:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 11			8	= 5 + 3	= 8 + 0
	Strophe 4 Total, v. 9-11			24	= 13 + 11	= 19 + 5
	Canto II Total, v. 7-11			39	= 22 + 17	= 34 + 5
	Total, v. 3-11			71	= 40 + 31	= 54 + 17
	Total, v. 2-11			78	= 44 + 34	= 61 + 17
	With the heading, v. 1-11			84	= 50 + 34	

* The unusual placement of the *atrach* right in the middle of a colon, v. 3b, has to do with the author's desire, for some reason, to achieve two identical compositional formulae in the two halves of the text. See Observation 3 below.

Observations

- In terms of the 21 cola, the middle colon may be identified as the consciously designed meaningful centre, v. 7a, the first colon of the only tricolonic verseline (21 = 10 + 1 + 10):

יָנַעְתִּי בְּאַנְחָתִי I am wearied with my moaning.

This is a most fitting description of the disposition of the speaker in this individual lament.

Given the stringent bipartite structure of the psalm, one would not expect it to have a clear meaningful centre *on word level*, but the 30 words of vs. 5-8, situated astride the arithmetic middle, may certainly be regarded as the meaningful core (78 = 24 + 30 + 24):

vs. 2-4	The speaker calls on God to be gracious	24 words
vs. 5-8	He prays to God for deliverance	30 words
vs. 9-11	He addresses his enemies: God will hear me	24 words.

- Psalm 6 is a clear instance showing the use of a special technique for highlighting the centre of the text: the change from words addressed to God to words spoken about him (or vice versa). The meaningful centre is always situated at the boundary between the two directions of address. Here, it is the first colon of the second section. See Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 5](#).

3. The **78** (3 x **26**) words of the poem divide significantly into two exactly equal parts:

Canto I (vs. 2-6) 2 strophes, 5 verselines and **39** words *addressed to God*,
Canto II (vs. 7-11) **2 strophes**, 5 verselines and **39** words *spoken about God*.

Moreover, the two cantos have identical compositional formulae: **39 = 22a + 17b**.
 I found no less than nine psalms consisting of two arithmetically equal halves (Psalms 6, 12, 20, 35, 79, 90, 91, 121, and 139 – compare also 9-10, 92, and 119!). Four of them have identical compositional formulae in the two halves in terms of the division by *atnach* (Psalms 6, 20, 79 and 121):

Psalm 20	vs. 2-6, Canto I, addressed to the king	33 = 18a + 15b
	vs. 7-10, Canto II, spoken about the king	33 = 18a + 15b
Psalm 79	vs. 1-7, Canto I, national lament	65 = 43a + 22b
	vs. 8-13, Canto II, prayer for forgiveness	65 = 43a + 22b
Psalm 121	vs. 1-4, Canto I, 4 verselines, 8 cola	27 = 16a + 11b
	vs. 5-8, Canto II, 4 verselines, 8 cola	27 = 16a + 11b.

A closer examination reveals that Psalm 6 has a perfectly symmetric strophic structure:

Strophe I (vs. 2-4)	3 verselines with 24 words
Strophe II (vs. 5-6)	2 verselines with 15 words
Strophes I-II	5 verselines with 39 words (2nd person)
Strophe III (vs. 7-8)	2 verselines with 15 words
Strophe IV (vs. 9-11)	3 verselines with 24 words
Strophes III-IV	5 verselines with 39 words (3rd person).

4. In addition to the two occurrence of the divine name number **17** in the two compositional formulae, **39 = 22 + 17**, it also features in the following instances:

vs. 2-3	17 words in total
vs. 3-4	17 words in total
vs. 5-8	17 words before <i>atnach</i>
vs. 7-11	34 (2 x 17) words in the main clauses (Column c)
vs. 2-11	17 words in total in the subordinate clauses (Column d)
vs. 2-11	78 (3 x 26) words in total, with 34 (2 x 17) after <i>atnach</i> .

The **17** words in the subordinate clauses (Column d) remind us of the **26** words of Psalm 5 in the subordinate clauses, illustrating the use of the syntax in both psalms to weave the divine name numbers into the text.

5. It is interesting to note, as pointed out by Van der Lugt, that the headings of the three succeeding Psalms 4, 5, and 6 are made up of **4**, **5**, and **6** words respectively. It is difficult to tell whether this is a matter of deliberate design or simply a coincidence?
6. The name יהוה occurs no less than 8 times in this relatively short psalm, probably in order to achieve a desired number of occurrences: **17** in Psalm 6-8 and **26** in Psalms 6-9. See Observation 7 in my Analysis of [Psalm 7](#); compare the [General Introduction](#), "The name YHWH woven into the fabric of the text", and Table I in the Introduction to [Book I](#).

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