

# Psalm 12— 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 12

- The psalm has a regular strophic structure: 2 cantos of equal length, each consisting of 2 strophes, 4 verselines and 37 words. The number **37** represents the numerical value of the keyword **תְּסִיד**, 'loyal, faithful' (v. 2a).
- In terms of the words addressed *to* God, the words spoken *about* him and the words spoken *by* him, the psalm exhibits a symmetrical concentric pattern, with the divine speech (the meaningful centre!) in central position. This is very reminiscent of Psalm 2.

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

- Van der Lugt: 2-3, 4-5 || 6-7, 8-9 (2 cantos, 4 strophes, 8 verselines and 18 cola, taking vs. 3 and 5 as bicola by disregarding the *atnach*).
- Fokkelman: similarly, except that he finds 19 cola, taking only v. 5 as a tricolon.
- Labuschagne: similarly, but I find 20 cola, taking vs. 3 and 5 as tricola in terms of *atnach*.
- For an overview of other divisions of the text, see Van der Lugt, *CAS*, Psalm 12, § 6.

## Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the *atnach*.
- Column **c**: words spoken by the first person speaker; **d**: words attributed to God.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	לְמַנְצַחַּ עַל־הַשְּׁמִינִית מְזִמֹּר לְדָוִד:	5	5			
	Heading, v. 1	5 = 5 + 0				
2	הוֹשִׁיעָה יְהוָה כִּי־גָמַר תְּסִיד <sup>^</sup> 1	5	5		5	
	כִּי־פָסוּ אֱמוּנִים מִבְּנֵי אָדָם: תְּסִיד = 37	5		5	5	
	(8+15+10+4 = 37) vs. 4-5 Total, v. 2	10 = 5 + 5 = 10				0
3	שׁוּא יִדְבְּרוּ אִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ 2	5	5		5	
	שִׁפְתַּי חִלְקוֹתַי <sup>^</sup>	2	2		2	
	בְּלִב וּלְבַב יִדְבְּרוּ:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 3	10 = 7 + 3 = 10				0
	Words addressed to God Strophe 1, v. 2-3	20 = 12 + 8 = 20				0

4	יְכַרְתַּי יְהוָה כָּל־שִׁפְתָי חִלְקוֹתֶי לְשׁוֹן מְדַבֶּרֶת גְּדֵלוֹת: Total, v. 4	3	5	5	5	
			3	3	3	
			8 =	5 +	3 =	8 + 0
5	אֲשֶׁר אָמְרוּ לְלִשְׁנֵנוּ נִגְבִּיר שִׁפְתֵינוּ אֲתֵנוּ מִי אֲרוֹן לָנוּ: Total, v. 5	4	4	4	4	
			2	2	2	
			9 =	6 +	3 =	9 + 0
Words spoken about God Strophe 2 v. 4-5			<b>17</b> = 11 + 6 = 17 + 0			
<b>Canto I Total, v. 2-5</b>			<b>37</b> = 23 + 14 = 37 + 0			
Arithmetic middle in terms of verselines (4 + 4) and words (37 + 37)						
6	מִשֵּׁר עֲנִיִּים מֵאֲנַקַּת אֲבִיּוֹנִים עָתָה אֲקוּם יְהוָה אֱמַר יְהוָה אִשִּׁית בְּיִשַׁע יַפִּיחַ לִּי: Meaningful centre: <b>Divine speech</b> , v. 6	5	4	4	4	
			4	4	4	
			12 =	8 +	4 =	0 + 12
7	אֲמָרוֹת יְהוָה אֲמָרוֹת טְהוֹרוֹת כֶּסֶף צְרוּף בְּעֵלִיל לְאֶרֶץ מִזְקַק שִׁבְעָתַיִם: Words spoken about God, v. 7	6	4	4	4	
			4	4	4	
			10 =	8 +	2 =	10 + 0
Strophe 3 Total, v. 6-7			<b>22</b> = 16 + 6 = 10 + 12			
Total, v. 4-7			<b>39</b> = 27 + 12 = 27 + 12			
8	אֲתָה־יְהוָה תִּשְׁמְרֵם תִּצְרְנוּ מִן־הַדּוֹר זֶה לְעוֹלָם: Total, v. 8	7	3	3	3	
			5	5	5	
			8 =	3 +	5 =	8 + 0
9	סִבִּיב רְשָׁעִים יִתְהַלְכוּן כָּרָם זְלוֹת לְבָנֵי אָדָם: Total, v. 9	8	3	3	3	
			4	4	4	
			7 =	3 +	4 =	7 + 0
Words addressed to God Strophe 4 v. 8-9			<b>15</b> = 6 + 9 = 15 + 0			
<b>Canto II Total, v. 6-9</b>			<b>37</b> = 22 + 15 = 25 + 12			
Total, v. 4-9			<b>54</b> = 33 + 21 = 42 + 12			
Words addressed to God, v. 2-3 + 8-9			<b>35</b> = 18 + 17 = 35 + 0			
<b>Canto I-II Total, v. 2-9</b>			<b>74</b> = 45 + 29 = 62 + 12			
With the heading, v.1-9			79 = 50 + 29			

## Observations

- The 74 words of the poem divide into two equal parts of 4 verselines and 37 words each:

Canto I (vs. 2-5), about the utter *untrustworthiness* of human beings,

Canto II (vs. 6-9), about the complete *trustworthiness* of God.

The purpose of this arrangement of the text is obviously to contrast God's reliability and his truthful words with the unreliability of human beings and their untruthful, boastful talk. The psalmist places them, as it were, on a pair of scales to show that God's trustworthiness by far outweighs the utter untrustworthiness of human beings.

The feature of being composed of two arithmetically equal halves is shared by no less than eight other psalms – see Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 6](#).

- The number **37** (the number of words in Canto I and Canto II) represents the numerical value of **חָסִיד**, 'loyal' (8 + 15 + 10 + 4 = 37), occurring in the very first colon, v. 2a. It is undoubtedly a keyword of great significance, because it signifies God's loyalty. See the General Introduction, under "The numerical value of a keyword in the text".
- Being composed of two equal halves, the poem has no meaningful centre on word level. However, v. 6, which is significantly phrased as God's own words, appears to be the consciously designed meaningful centre: YHWH's resolve to arise and place the poor and needy in the safety for which they long:

מִשָּׁד עֲנִיִּים מֵאַנְקַת אֲבִיּוֹנִים עֲתָה אָקוּם יְהוָה אֲשִׁית בְּיָשַׁע יְפִיחַ לוֹ:

"Because of the plundering of the poor and the groaning of the needy // shall I now arise," says YHWH, // "I shall place him in the safety for which he longs."

The divine speech itself, which begins as an embedded speech – obviously for the sake of its rhetorical force, once again very reminiscent of Psalm 2 – is made up of **10** words. The 2 introductory words **יְהוָה יֹאמֵר**, 'says Yhwh' (in box), which in their turn are embedded in the speech, are an integral part of the speech – for a similar case, see Observation 2 in my Analysis of Psalm 16.

The **35** words directly addressed to God (vs. 2-3 and 8-9) envelop the two *3<sup>rd</sup> person* passages (vs. 4-5 and 7), with the divine speech (v. 6) at their centre, in a beautiful symmetrical concentric pattern:

Vs. 2-3	words addressed to God	20	
Vs. 4-5	words spoken about God	17	
<b>V. 6</b>	<b>divine speech</b>		<b>12</b>
Vs. 7	words spoken about God	10	
Vs. 8-9	words addressed to God	15	

As Pieter van der Lugt has pointed out, the poem as a whole is skilfully framed by the words **בְּנֵי אָדָם**, 'children of Adam' (2b and 9b), and the contrasting terms **חָסִיד**, 'faithful', and **רְשָׁעִים**, 'godless' (2a and 9a). This also applies to the name **יְהוָה** at the beginning of the two sections addressed to God (2a and 8a).

- The name **יְהוָה** occurs 5 times, as in Psalm 11 (vs. 2a, 4a, 6b, 7a, and 8a), with the middle (*3<sup>rd</sup>*) instance falling within the meaningful centre, more precisely, in the introductory formula (compare Psalm 2!).

For the use of this device to highlight the meaningful centre, see Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 11](#).

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