

Psalm 23— 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 23

- Psalm 23 is the follow-up to Psalm 22 apparently to contrast the idea of being *forsaken by God* in Psalm 22 with the idea of *God's presence* under all circumstances. The most outstanding compositional feature of the poem is the use of the double *kabod* pattern, **55 = 32 + 23**, to give structure to the text, exactly as in the **55**-word section in Ps. 22:13-19. The *kabod* numbers symbolically represent the presence of God.
- The meaningful centre of the poem, "for you are with me", which is significantly flanked by **26** words on either side ($55 = 26 + 3 + 26$), once again precisely as in Ps. 22:13-19, is highlighted by the sudden change in the direction of address from 3rd to 2nd person form.
- The menorah pattern is used to enumerate the **7** beneficial acts of God.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 1-3, 4 || 5, 6 (2 cantos with 4 strophes, 9 verselines and 20 cola, following the layout in *BHS*, taking vs. 1-2a, 2b-3a, and 3b-c as three bicolic verselines and v. 4a-c and 4d-f as two tricolonic verselines).
- Fokkelman: similarly, except that he finds 19 cola, taking v. 4a-b as one colon).
- Labuschagne: similarly as Van der Lugt.
- For an overview of other divisions of the text, see Van der Lugt, *CAS*, Psalm 23, § 6.

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words spoken about God; **d**: words directly addressed to God.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	מְזִמּוֹר לְדָוִד [^] Heading	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>			
1a	יְהוָה רֵעִי לֹא אֶחְסָר :	1 4	4		4	
2a	בְּנֵאוֹת דָּשָׁא יִרְבִּיצֵנִי [^]	3	3		3	0
2b	עַל-מִי מְנַחֹת יִנְהַלֵּנִי :	2 4		4	4	0
3a	נִפְשִׁי יִשׁוּבֶכָה [^]	2	2		2	
3b	יִנְחֵנִי בְּמַעְגְלֵי-צֶדֶק 3	3		3	3	
3c	לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ :	<u>2</u>		2	2	
Three bicolic verselines Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-3		18	= 9	+ 9	= 18	+ 0

4a	גַּם כִּי־אֶלֶךְ	4	3	3	3
4b	בְּגִיַּא צְלֻמּוֹת		2	2	2
4c	לֹא־אֵירָא רַע		3	3	3
	Total, v. 4a-c		8	= 8	+ 0 = 8 + 0
	Total, v. 1-4c		26	= 17	+ 9 = 26 + 0
4d	Middle words: 55=26+3+26 כִּי־אַתָּה עִמָּדִי	5	3	3	3
4e	Meaningful word-centre שְׁבִטָּךְ וּמִשְׁעֲנִתְךָ		2		2
4f	Middle verseline (4d-f): 4+1+4: הַמָּה יִנְחֲמֵנִי		2		2
	Meaningful poetic-centre Total, v. 4d-f		7	= 3	+ 4 = 0 + 7
	Two tricollic verselines Strophe 2 Total, v. 4		15	= 11	+ 4 = 8 + 7
	Canto I Total, v. 1-4		33	= 20	+ 13 = 26 + 7
5	תַּעֲרֹךְ לְפָנַי שְׁלֹחַן	6	3	3	3
	נֶגֶד צַרְרֵי		2	2	2
	דַּשְׁנֵת בַּשָּׁמֶן רֵאשִׁי	7	3		3
	כּוֹסֵי רְנוּיָה:		2		2
	Two bicolic verselines Strophe 3 Total, v. 5		10	= 5	+ 5 = 0 + 10
	Total, v. 4-5		25	= 16	+ 9 = 8 + 17
6	אֵךְ טוֹב וְחֶסֶד יִרְדְּפוּנִי	8	4	4	4
	כָּל־יְמֵי חַיֵּי		3	3	3
	וְשָׁבְתִי בְּבֵית־יְהוָה	9	3		3
	לְאֶרֶץ יְמִים:		2		2
	Two bicolic verselines Strophe 4 Total, v. 6		12	= 7	+ 5 = 12 + 0
	Canto II Total, v. 5-6		22	= 12	+ 10 = 12 + 10
	Total, v. 4d-6		29	= 15	+ 14 = 12 + 17
	Total, v. 4e-6		26	= 12	+ 14 = 12 + 14
	Total, v. 2-6		51	= 28	+ 23 = 34 + 17
	Total, v. 1-6		55	= 32	+ 23 = 38 + 17
	With the heading, v. 1-6		57	= 30	+ 27

Observations

- In terms of its 55 words, the arithmetic centre of the poem is constituted by the three words in v. 4d, which is its meaningful centre on word level (55 = 26 + 3 + 26):

כִּי־אַתָּה עִמָּדִי For you are with me.

This statement expresses in a most appropriate way the quintessential idea of the psalm: the speaker's belief in the guidance and presence of God in his life under all circumstances. At the same time, the statement contrasts the notion of *being guarded* by God to the idea of *being forsaken* by God expressed in the preceding psalm.

The presence of God is symbolically illustrated and compositionally underlined by the fact that the divine name number 26 flanks the meaningful centre on either side. For this symbolism and the way it is reflected in the structure of the text, see Observation 2 in my Analysis of [Psalm 1](#).

This enveloping of the meaningful centre by means of the divine name number 26 is significantly underscored by the use of the name YHWH as a device for *inclusion* in the first and last verselines of the poem. This underscores the idea that God keeps close watch before and behind the speaker (compare Ps. 139:5).

2. As in the two preceding psalms and the next two, the meaningful centre is situated precisely at the point where the direction of address changes. In this case it is the sudden switch from words spoken *about* God (the **26** words in vs. 1-4c, Column **c**) to words directly addressed to God in 2nd person form (**17** words in vs. 4d-5, Column **d**). In the concluding strophe, v. 6, the direction of address changes back to words spoken about God (**12** words).

For the use of this rhetorical device to mark the meaningful centre, see the General Introduction, "Special devices to highlight the meaningful centre".

3. There is no agreement among scholars about the strophic structure of the text, especially when it comes to dividing the verselines into cola. What is relatively certain is that the poem is made up of 9 verselines, of which **v. 4d-f** is the 5th – and central - verseline (9 = 4 + 1 + 4). A considerable number of psalms have a larger meaningful centre in terms of their poetic structure - sometimes instead of, and occasionally in addition to the one on word level (compare Psalm 24!). Therefore, it is not surprising to find that Psalm 23 has a larger centre as well, the middle verseline, **v. 4d-f**:

כִּי־אַתָּה עִמָּדִי ^ שִׁבְטֶךָ וּמִשְׁעֲנֵתֶךָ הִמָּה יִנְחֵמֵנִי:

For you are with me // your rod and your crook // they give me comfort.

The primary meaningful centre on word level, **v. 4d**, falls within this middle verseline and buttresses its meaningfulness.

In terms of the poetical structure, **v. 4** as a whole stands out as having 2 tricollic verselines, surrounded by 7 bicolic verselines:

vs. 1-3	3 bicolic verselines
v. 4	2 tricollic verselines
vs. 5-6	4 bicolic verselines.

4. The bipartite structure of the poem, as shown in the division into Canto I and Canto II, is reminiscent of the bipartite structure of the two preceding psalms. Here it is based on both formal and thematic considerations: the linear correspondences between vs. 1-4 and 5-6 and the two metaphors: YHWH as *Shepherd* and YHWH as *Host*, complemented by the two scenes: *outside* in a rural environment and *inside* in the private habitation – see Van der Lugt, CAS, p. 254. Differentiating between YHWH as *Shepherd* and YHWH as *Host* does not mean that the metaphors are disparate or even mutually exclusive. They are in fact inseparable. The image of YHWH as Shepherd is the dominant metaphor throughout the psalm, which implies that it is the Shepherd who acts as Host.
5. There is every reason to believe that the explicit reference to the House of YHWH at the end of the poem contains a subtle reference to the Abode of YHWH featuring so prominently in Psalm 24. For the relationship between the two psalms, see my Analysis of [Psalm 24](#).
6. The poem is additionally structured by the division of words before and after *atnach* (Columns a and b respectively) to form the double *kabod* formula, **55 = 32 + 23**,* exactly as in Ps. 22:13-19 – see Observation 2 in my Analysis of Psalm 22. The reason for the use of this pattern is to express the presence of God in this particular way in addition to the divine name numbers **17** and **26**. See my *Numerical Secrets of the Bible*, pp. 121-125, and the General Introduction, p. 11.

* Instead of Schedl's term 'minor tetraktys', which I used in my book, I now prefer the more appropriate term 'double *kabod* pattern or 'double *kabod* formula'.

Unlike Ps. 22:13-19, where the text divides into **32** and **23** words (vs. 13-16 and 17-19 respectively), Psalm 23 has **33** words in Canto I and **22** in Canto II, which may have been deliberately devised in order to symbolize the idea of fulfilment. For the number **11**, consult my *Numerical Secrets of the Bible*, pp. 70-73.

7. The divine name numbers are woven into the fabric of the text in the following way:
- vs. 1-4c **26** words in total, with **17** before atnach
 - vs. 4d-5 **17** words in total addressed to God
 - vs. 4e-6 **26** words in total
 - vs. 2-6 **51** words, **34** (2 x **17**) spoken about and **17** addressed to God.
8. A count of the beneficial acts of YHWH in vs. 2-5 reveals that the number of fullness and abundance, **7**, has been used to enumerate them in a menorah pattern:
1. He makes me lie down
 2. He leads me beside still waters
 3. He restores my soul
 - 4. He guides me in the right paths for his name's sake**
 5. You are with me
 6. You prepare a table before me
 7. You anoint my head with oil.
- Note that God's guiding the speaker in the right paths occupies central position; thereby it gets special emphasis, which is reinforced by the reference to God's name.
9. The name יהוה appears only twice: in the first and last verseline, where it functions as a device for inclusion.

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