

# Psalm 32— 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 32

- Psalm 32 opens the last distinct sub-group of psalms in Book I, Psalms 32-41. It shares significant traits with Psalm 41 at the end of the book and with Psalm 1 at the beginning. All three psalms have אֲשֶׁרִי, 'happy', as their initial word.
- The arithmetic centre of Psalm 32 on word level is significantly, flanked by 52 (2 x 26) words, which is the gematric value of the keyword אֲשֶׁרִי, 'happy' (105 = 52 + 1 + 52). This is very reminiscent of Psalms 1 and 41. In addition, Psalm 1 and Psalm 32 have virtually similar pivotal words: לְעֵת, 'at a time of', in Ps. 32:6b, and בְּעֵתוֹ, 'in its time', in Ps. 1:3b.
- The canto structure of the poem is determined by the direction of address, with the words directly addressed to God in vs. 5-7 at the centre, flanked by words spoken about God.

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

- Van der Lugt: 1-2, 3-4, 5 || 6-7, 8-9, 10-11 (2 cantos with 6 strophes, 14 verselines and 29 cola, disregarding the *atnachs* in vs. 4 and 10).
- Fokkelman: similarly, but he finds 34 cola, disregarding the *atnachs* in vs. 4 and 7, and taking vs. 3, 7, 8, 10 and 11 as tricola.
- Labuschagne: 1-2, 3-4 || 5, 6, 7 || 8-9, 10-11 (3 cantos based on the change in the direction of address, with 7 strophes outlined in a menorah pattern, 14 verselines and 32 cola, taking v. 8 as a tricolon, and vs. 4 and 10 as tricola on account of the *atnach*).
- For an overview of other divisions of the text, see Van der Lugt, CAS, Psalm 32, § 6.

## Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the *atnach*.
- Column **c**: words addressed to God; **d**: words spoken about God.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	לְדוֹר מְשֻׁבֵּל Heading	2 = 2				
	אֲשֶׁרִי נִשְׁוֵי־פֶשַׁע 1	3	3			3
	אֲשֶׁרִי = 52 כְּסוּי חַטָּאָה:	2	2			2
2	(1+21+20+10 = 52) אֲשֶׁרִי אָדָם לֹא יִחַשֵׁב 2	4	4			4
	יְהוָה לֹו עֹנֵן	3	3			3
	וְאִין בְּרוּחֹו רְמִיָּה:	3		3		3
	<b>Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-2</b>	15	= 12	+ 3	= 0	+ 15
3	כִּי־חִתְּרִשְׁתִּי בְּלוֹ עֲצָמָי 3	4	4		4	
	בְּשִׂאֲנֹתַי כָּל־הַיּוֹם:	3		3	3	
4*	כִּי יִזְמַם וְלִילָה תִּכְבַּד עָלַי יִדָּךְ 4	6	6		6	
	וְהִפַּךְ לְשִׂדְי/לְשִׁנָּי	2	2		2	
	בְּחִרְבֵּנִי קִיץ סָלַח:	2		2	2	
	<b>Strophe 2 Total, v. 3-4</b>	17	= 12	+ 5	= 17	+ 0
	<b>Canto I Total, v. 1-4</b>	32	= 24	+ 8	= 17	+ 15

5	חטאתי אודיעך	5	2	2	2
	ועוני לא־כסיתי		3	3	3
	אמרתי אודה עלי פשעי ליהודה <sup>^</sup>	6	5	5	5
	ואתה נשאת עון חטאתי סלה:		4	4	4
	<b>Strophe 3 Total, v. 5</b>		14	= 10 + 4	= 14 + 0
	I <b>Total, v. 1-5</b>		46	= 34 + 12	= 21 + 15
6*	על־זאת ותפלל כל־חסיד אליך	7	6	6	6
	לעת מצאר <b>1</b> + 52		2	2	2
	Middle word: 105 = 52 + <b>1</b> + 52				
	Middle two verselines קל שטף מים רבים <sup>^</sup>	8	4	4	4
	Middle cola: 32 = 14 + 4 + 14 לא וגיעו:		3	3	3
	Middle strophe: <b>Strophe 4 Total, v. 6</b>		15	= 12 + 3	= 15 + 0
7*	אתה סתר לי	9	3	3	3
	מצר תצרני		2	2	2
	רני פלטה <sup>^</sup> תסובבני סלה:		3	2	<b>1</b> 3
	<b>Strophe 5 Total, v. 7</b>		8	= 7 + <b>1</b>	= 8 + 0
	<b>Canto II Total, v. 5-7</b>		37	= 29 + 4	= 37 + 0
8	אשכילך ואורךך	10	2	2	2
	בדרך־זו תלך <sup>^</sup>		3	3	3
	אינני עליך עיני:		3	3	3
	<b>Total, v. 8</b>		8	= 5 + 3	= 0 + 8
9	אל־תהיו כסוס	11	3	3	3
	כפרד אין הבין		3	3	3
	במתגורסן עדיו לבלום <sup>^</sup>	12	4	4	4
	בל קרב אליך:		3	3	3
	<b>Total, v. 9</b>		13	= 10 + 3	= 0 + 13
	<b>Strophe 6 Total, v. 8-9</b>		21	= 15 + 6	= 0 + 21
	<b>Total, v. 6-9</b>		44	= 34 + 10	= 23 + 21
	<b>Total, v. 5-9</b>		58	= 44 + 14	= 37 + 21
10	רבים מכאובים לרשע	13	3	3	3
	והבוטח ביהודה <sup>^</sup>		2	2	2
	חסד יסובבנו:		2	2	4
	<b>Total, v. 10</b>		7	= 5 + 2	= 0 + 7
	<b>Total, v. 6-10</b>		51	= 39 + 12	= 23 + 28
11	שמחו ביהודה וגיילו צדיקים <sup>^</sup>	14	4	4	4
	והרנינו כל־ישרי־לב:		4	4	4
	<b>Total, v. 11</b>		8	= 4 + 4	= 0 + 8
	<b>Strophe 7 Total, v. 10-11</b>		15	= 9 + 6	= 0 + 15
	<b>Canto III Total, v. 8-11</b>		36	= 24 + 12	= 0 + 36
	<b>Total, v. 1-11</b>		105	= 77 + 28	= 54 + 51
	With the heading and סלה (3x), v. 1-11		110	= 79 + 31	

\* In v. 4b the word לְשָׁדִי, 'my sap?', should probably be read לְשֹׁנִי, 'my tongue' (see BHS).

\* V. 6b-c, as it stands, is problematic, if not unintelligible. In order to make sense out of the words **לְעֵת מְצוֹרָה**, we have to accept a correction of the text. Following A.S. van der Woude, “Zwei alte Cruces im Psalter” in *Studies on Psalms (Oudtestamentische Studiën XIII, Leiden 1963, p. 131-136)*, in the footsteps of B. Duhm, I read ... **לְעֵת מְצוֹרָה** קַל שֶׁטֶף מִיָּם רַבִּים, 'in a time of distress, the thundering flood of great waters shall not reach him.' (see *BHS* and compare Ps. 31:22). This emendation does not affect the total number of words in the psalm.

\* In v. 7c, there is no explanation for the unusual positioning of the *atnach* within a colon. Disregarding this *atnach* would bring the total number of words before *atnach* to **78 (3x26)**.

## Observations

1. In terms of the 105 words of the poem, its arithmetic centre consists of the word **לְעֵת**, 'at a time of', in v. 6b, which is by itself not particularly meaningful (**52 + 1 + 52**). The number **52 (2 x 26)**, on either side of the pivotal word, represents the numerical value of the keyword **אֲשֶׁרִי**, 'happy', in vs. 1a and 2a (**1 + 21 + 20 + 10 = 52**).

This is strongly reminiscent of the use of the numerical value of this keyword in Psalm 1 and Psalm 41, as well as in Psalms 33 and 40. See Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 1](#) and Observation 2 in that of [Psalm 41](#).

The pivotal word **לְעֵת** is situated within the passage I regard as the real meaningful centre of the poem, v. 6, comprising the two middle verselines (**14 = 6 + 2 + 6**), which coincide with the four middle cola (**32 = 14 + 4 + 14** cola):

עַל-זֹאת יִתְפַּלֵּל כָּל-חֹסֵד אֵלֶיךָ      לְעֵת מְצוֹרָה  
 קַל שֶׁטֶף מִיָּם רַבִּים      אֵלֶיךָ לֹא יִגִּיעַ:

Therefore, let every faithful one pray to you // at a time of distress:  
 the thundering flood of great waters // will not reach him.

The idea of complete safety for those who trust in God represents the essential message of the poem. This idea is corroborated by the opening and concluding strophes (Strophes 1 and 7):

vs. 1-2, the assurance of happiness for those whose iniquities are pardoned,  
 vs. 10-11, the affirmation that God's love surrounds those who trust in him.

2. As in many psalms, the direction of address determines its canto structure, which is, in this case, additionally marked by *selah*:

vs. 1-4	Canto I	words spoken about God ( <i>selah</i> )
vs. 5-7	Canto II	words directly addressed to God ( <i>selah</i> )
vs. 8-11	Canto III	words spoken about God.

The sudden switch to words directly addressed to God in v. 4a is apparently a rhetorical device to prelude the address in vs. 5-7. The 5 words referring to God in 3<sup>rd</sup> person in v. 5c are to be regarded as integral to the address: speaking to God, the speaker *cites* his resolve to confess his transgressions.

The *selah* after v. 5 suggests that there is a caesura between vs. 5||6. This brings us to the strophic structure, which can be outlined in a menorah pattern:

1. vs. 1-2      Happiness for those whose iniquities are pardoned
2. vs. 3-4      Refusing to confess brings distress (*selah*)
3. v. 5          Forgiveness begins with the confession of sins (*selah*)
4. v. 6          Those whose sins are pardoned are safe in times of distress
5. v. 7          YHWH is a hiding place in times of distress (*selah*)
6. vs. 8-9      Exhortation not to refuse sound advice and instruction
7. vs. 10-11    Only those who trust in God may rejoice in his loving kindness.

What makes the menorah pattern all the more plausible is the fact that its centre, v. 6, coincides precisely with the the meaningful centre of the poem.

The strophic structure presented here is similar to Christensen's menorah but differs in regards vs. 6-7 from the strophic division proposed by Van der Lugt. I take Van der Lugt's Strophe 4 (vs. 6-7) as two independent strophes, because v. 6 (my Strophe 4) deals with 'every faithful one', while v. 7 (Strophe 5) is about *the speaker personally*.

3. The divine name numbers **17** and **26** feature in the following fashion:

vs. 3-4	<b>17</b> words in total
vs. 1-5	<b>34</b> (2 x 17) words before atnach
vs. 6-9	<b>34</b> (2 x 17) words before atnach
vs. 6-10	<b>51</b> (3 x 17) words in total
vs. 1-2+8-11	<b>51</b> (3 x 17) words spoken about God (Column d)
vs. 1-11	<b>104</b> ( <b>52</b> + <b>52</b> = <b>4</b> x <b>26</b> ) words enveloping the pivotal word.

4. The name יהוה occurs 4 times: vs. 2b, 5c, 10b, and 11a.

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