

Psalm 37— 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 37

- Psalm 37 is an intricate alphabetic acrostic, and in other ways as well the author managed to create an astoundingly skilful composition. He used the numerical value of the keyword רְשָׁעִים, 'the wicked' (80) to determine the number of words in the central section, vs. 12-22, a description of the ways of the wicked. The core is surrounded by a framework dealing with the contrast between the wicked and the righteous.
- The canto/sub-canto structure is determined by the contrast between the righteous and the wicked, in combination with four references to *the inheriting of the land by the righteous*, which appear to have a demarcating function. See Observation 3.
- In a most impressive way the author focusses attention on the meaningful centre, v. 20, which is about the *vanishing of the wicked*.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||| Sub-canto: || Canticle boundary: |

- Van der Lugt: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6 | 7-9, 10-11 || 12-13, 14-15 | 16-17, 18-20 ||| 21-22, 23-24, 25-26 | 27-28b, 28c-29 || 30-31, 32-33, 34-36 | 37-38, 39-40 (2 cantos with 4 sub-cantos and 8 canticles, 19 strophes, 42 verselines, and 89 cola).
- Fokkelman: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6 | 7, 8-9, 10-11 | 12-13, 14-15, 16-17 || 18-19, 20, 21-22, 23-24 || 25-26 | 27-28b, 28c-29 | 30-31, 32-33, 34 | 35-36, 37-38, 39-40 (8 stanzas with 22 strophes, 43 verselines and 90 cola, taking v. 34a as a bicolon and v. 34 as a 2-verseline strophe; he has 298 words, inserting one word in v. 28c (see *HBS*).
- Labuschagne: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6 | 7-9, 10-11 || 12-13, 14-15 | 16-17, 18-19, 20-22 ||| 23-24, 25-26 | 27-28b, 28c-29 || 30-31, 32-33, 34 || 35-36, 37-38, 39-40 (2 cantos with 5 sub-cantos and 8 canticles, 20 strophes, 42 verselines and 89 cola).
- For an overview of other divisions of the text, see Van der Lugt, *CAS*, Psalm 37, § 6.

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words describing the contrast between the righteous and the wicked;
- Column **d**: words specifically describing the ways of the wicked.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	לְדוֹר	Heading	1	1		
	אֶל־תִּתְחַר בַּמַּרְעִים	א 1	3	3	3	
	אֶל־תִּקְנֵא בְעֵשִׂי עוֹלָה:		4		4	4
2	כִּי כַחֲצִיר מִהֲרָה יִמְלֹא	ב 2	4	4	4	
	וּכְגֵרֶק דָּשָׁא יִבּוֹלוּן:		3		3	3
	Strophe 1	Total, v. 1-2	14	= 7	+ 7	= 14 + 0
3	בָּטַח בַּיהוָה וַעֲשֵׂה־טוֹב	ב 3	4	4	4	
	שָׁכַן־אֶרֶץ וְרַעַה אֲמוֹנָה:		4		4	4
4	וְהִתְעַנַּג עַל־יְהוָה	ג 4	3	3	3	
	וַיִּתֵּן־לֶךְ מִשְׁאֵלֹת לְבָבְךָ:		4		4	4
	Strophe 2	Total, v. 3-4	15	= 7	+ 8	= 15 + 0
	Total, v. 1-4		29	= 14	+ 15	= 29 + 0

5	גול על-יתהר דרְקָדָא ובטח עליו והוא יעשה:	5 ג	4	4	4	
6	והוציא כאור צְדָקָדָא ומשפטך בצְהָרִים:	6	3	3	3	
	Strophe 3	Total, v. 5-6	13	= 7	+ 6	= 13 + 0
	Canticle I.1.1	Total, v. 1-6	42	= 21	+ 21	= 42 + 0
7	דום ליתהר והתחולל לו אל-תתחר במצליח דרְכָבָא באיש עשה מזמות:	7 ד	4	4	4	
	Total, v. 7		11	= 8	+ 3	= 11 + 0
	Total, v. 1-4		29	= 14	+ 15	= 29 + 0
	Total, v. 5-7		24	= 15	+ 9	= 24 + 0
	Numerical Chiasmus, v. 1-7		53	= 29	+ 24	= 53 + 0
8	הרף מאף ועזב חמָה אל-תתחר אד-להרע:	8 ה	4	4	4	
9	כי-מִרְעִים יכרתוּן יקוי יתנה המָה יירשׁוֹ-אַרְיָן : LAND	9	3	3	3	
	Strophe 4	Total, v. 7-9	27	= 15	+ 12	= 27 + 0
10	ועוד מעט ואין רשע והתבוננת על-מקומו ואיננו:	10 ו	4	4	4	
11	ועננים יירשׁוֹ-אַרְיָן LAND והתעננו על-רב שלום:	11	3	3	3	
	Middle words of Canto I		4		4	4
	(164 = 80+4+80) Strophe 5	Total, v. 10-11	15	= 7	+ 8	= 15 + 0
	Meaningful centre of Canto I	Total, v. 8-11	31	= 14	+ 17	= 31 + 0
	Canticle I.1.2	Total, v. 7-11	42	= 22	+ 20	= 42 + 0
		Total, v. 5-11	55	= 29	+ 26	= 55 + 0
	Sub-canto I.1	Total, v. 1-11	84	= 43	+ 41	= 84 + 0

12	זָמַם רָשָׁע לְצַדִּיקָא	12 ז	3	3	3
	וַחֲרַק עָלָיו שָׁנָיו:		3		3
13	אָדָנִי יִשְׁחַק-לוֹא	13	3	3	3
	כִּי-רָאָה כִּי-יָבֹא יוֹמוֹ:		5	5	5
	Strophe 6 Total, v. 12-13		14	= 6 + 8	= 0 + 14
14	חָרַב פָּתַחוּ ¹ רָשָׁעִים	14 ח	3	3	3
	וַדְרִכּוּ קִשְׁתָּם		2	2	2
	לְהַפִּיל עָנִי וְאֲבִיוֹן ^א	15	3	3	3
	לְטַבּוֹחַ יִשְׂרָאֵל-דְּרָדָ:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 1-14		109	= 57 + 52	= 84 + 25
15	חָרַבְם תָּבוֹא כְּלָפָם	16	3	3	3
	וְקִשְׁתוֹתָם תִּשְׁבְּרָנָה:		2	2	2
	Strophe 7 Total, vs. 14-15		16	= 11 + 5	= 0 + 16
	Canticle I.2.1 Total, v. 12-15		30	= 17 + 13	= 0 + 30
16	טוֹב־מַעַט לְצַדִּיקָא	17 ט	3	3	3
	מִהֶמוֹן ² רָשָׁעִים רַבִּים:		3	3	3
17	כִּי זְרוּעוֹת ³ רָשָׁעִים תִּשְׁבְּרָנָה	18	4	4	4
	וְסוֹמֵךְ צַדִּיקִים יִהְיֶה:		3	3	3
	Strophe 8 Total, v. 16-17		13	= 7 + 6	= 0 + 13
18	יֹדֵעַ יִהְיֶה יָמֵי תְּמִימָם	19 י	4	4	4
	וְנִחַלְתָּם לְעוֹלָם תְּהִיָּה:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 18		7	= 4 + 3	= 0 + 7
19	לֹא-יִבְשׂוּ בְּעַת רָעָה	20	4	4	4
	וּבִימֵי רָעוֹן יִשְׁבְּעוּ:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 19		7	= 4 + 3	= 0 + 7
	Strophe 9 Total, v. 18-19		14	= 8 + 8	= 0 + 14
	Canticle I.2.2 Total, v. 16-19		27	= 15 + 12	= 27 + 0
	Total, v. 14-19		43	= 26 + 17	= 43 + 0
20	כִּי ⁴ רָשָׁעִים יֵאָבְדוּ	21 כ	3	3	3
	וְאֲבֵי יִהְיֶה כִּי-קָרַב כְּרִים ^א	ככ	4	4	4
	כָּלֵן בְּעֶשֶׂן כָּלֵן: (146+5+146)	ככ	3	3	3
	Middle word כָּלֵן = 29 (148+1+148) Total, v. 20		10	= 7 + 3	= 0 + 10
21	לֹא־רָשָׁע וְלֹא יִשְׁלָם	22 ללל	4	4	4
	וְצַדִּיק חוֹנֵן וְנוֹתֵן: (44 + 1 + 44)		3	3	3
	Total, v. 20-21		17	= 11 + 6	= 0 + 17
22	כִּי מִבְּרַכּוֹ יִירָשׁוּ אֲרָץ ^א	23	4	4	4
	וּמִקְלָלָיו יִכְרְתוּ:		2	2	2
	Strophe 10 Total, v. 20-22		23	= 15 + 8	= 0 + 23
	Canticle I.2.3 Total, v. 12-22		80	= 47 + 33	= 0 + 80
	Canto I Total v. 1-22		164	= 90 + 74	= 84 + 80

23	מִיִּתְּנָה מְצַעֲרֵי־נֶבֶר	24	מ	3	3	3
	פּוֹנְנֵוּ וְדַרְכּוֹ יִחַפְּצִין:			3	3	3
24	כִּי־יִפְּלֵל לֹא־יִטְּלֵה	25	4	4	4	4
	כִּי־יִתְּנָה סוֹמֵךְ יָדָו:		4	4	4	4
	Strophe 11 Total, v. 23-24		14	= 10	+ 4 = 14	+ 0
25	נֶעַר הָיִיתִי גַם־זָקְנָתִי	26	נ	4	4	4
	וְלֹא־רָאִיתִי צַדִּיק נֶעְזָב־		4	4	4	4
	וְזָרְעוֹ מִבְּקֶשׁ־לֶחֶם:		3	3	3	3
26	כָּל־הַיּוֹם חוֹנֵן וּמְלֻוֶּה־	27	4	4	4	4
	וְזָרְעוֹ לִבְרָכָה:		2	2	2	2
	Strophe 12 Total, v. 25-26		17	= 12	+ 5 = 17	+ 0
	Canticle II.1.1 Total, v. 23-26		31	= 22	+ 9 = 31	+ 0
	Total, v. 20-26		54	= 34	+ 20 = 31	+ 23
27	סוֹר מְרַע וְעֵשֶׂה־טוֹב	28	ס	4	4	4
	וְשָׁכֵן לְעוֹלָם:		2	2	2	2
28a	כִּי יִתְּנָה אֱהָב מִשְׁפָּט	29	4	4	4	4
28b	וְלֹא־יֵעֻזֵב אֶת־חֲסִידָיו		4	4	4	4
	Strophe 13 Total, v. 27-28b		14	= 14	+ 0 = 14	+ 0
28c	לְעוֹלָם נִשְׁמְרוּ־	30	ע*	2	2	2
28d	וְזָרַע רְשָׁעִים נִכְרַת:		3	3	3	3
29	LAND צַדִּיקִים יִרְשׁוּ־אֶרֶץ־	31	3	3	3	3
	וְיִשְׁכְּנוּ לְעַד עָלֶיהָ:		3	3	3	3
	Strophe 14 Total, v. 28c-29		11	= 5	+ 6 = 11	+ 0
	Canticle II.1.2 Total, v. 27-29		25	= 19	+ 6 = 25	+ 0
	Sub-canto II.1 Total, v. 23-29		56	= 41	+ 15 = 56	+ 0
	Total, v. 21-29		86	= 60	+ 26 = 73	+ 13
	Total, v. 12-29		136	= 88	+ 48 = 56	+ 80
	Total, v. 1-29		220	= 131	+ 89 = 220	+ 0
30	פִּי־צַדִּיק יִהְיֶה חֲכָמָה־	32	פ	4	4	4
	וּלְשׁוֹנוֹ תִּדְבַּר מִשְׁפָּט:		3	3	3	3
31	תּוֹרַת אֱלֹהֵיוּ בְּלִבּוֹ־	33	3	3	3	3
	לֹא תִמְעַד אֲשֶׁר־יוֹ:		3	3	3	3
	Strophe 15 Total, v. 30-31		13	= 7	+ 6 = 13	+ 0
32	צוֹפֵה רָשָׁע לְצַדִּיק־	34	צ	3	3	3
	וּמִבְּקֶשׁ לְתַמִּיתוֹ:		2	2	2	2
33	יִתְּנָה לֹא־יֵעֻזְבוּ בְּיָדָיו־	35	4	4	4	4
	וְלֹא יִרְשִׁיעֵנוּ בְּהַשְׁפָּטוֹ:		3	3	3	3
	Strophe 16 Total, v. 32-33		12	= 7	+ 5 = 12	+ 0
	Total, v. 23-33		81	= 55	+ 26 = 81	+ 0
34	קִוָּה אֵל־יִתְּנָה וּשְׁמֵר דַּרְכּוֹ־	36	ק	5	5	5
	וּיְרוֹמְמוּ־לְרֵשֶׁת אֶרֶץ־		3	3	3	3
	בְּהַכְרַת רְשָׁעִים תִּרְאֶה:		3	3	3	3
	Strophe 17 Total, v. 34		11	= 8	+ 3 = 11	+ 0
	Sub-canto II.2 Total, v. 30-34		36	= 22	+ 14 = 36	+ 0

35	רְאִיתִי רֶשַׁע עֲרִיץ [^]	37	ר	3	3	3	
	וּמַחְעָרָה כְּאַזְרַח רַעְנָן:			3		3	
36	וַיַּעֲבֹר וְהָיָה אֵינְנוּ [^]	38	3	3		3	
	וְאַבְקִשְׁהוּ וְלֹא נִמְצָא:		3		3	3	
	Strophe 18 Total, v. 35-36			<u>12</u>	= 6 + 6	= 12	+ 0
	Total, v. 23-36		104	= 69	+ 35	= 104	+ 0
37	שָׁמְרֵתֶם וּרְאֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל	39	ש	4	4		4
	כִּי־אַחֲרִית לְאִישׁ שְׁלוֹם:		4			4	4
38	וּפְשָׁעִים נִשְׁמְדוּ יַחְדָּו	40	3	3			3
	אַחֲרִית לְרָשָׁעִים נִכְרְתָה:		3			3	3
	Strophe 19 Total, v. 37-38			<u>14</u>	= 7 + 7	= 14	+ 0
	Total, v. 35-38		26	= 13	+ 13	= 26	+ 0
39	וְתִשׁוּעַת צְדִיקִים מִיְהוָה [^]	41	ת*	3	3		3
	מְעוֹזִים בְּעַת צָרָה:		3			3	3
40	וַיַּעֲזְרֵם יְהוָה וַיַּפְלְטֵם	42	3	3			3
	יַפְלְטֵם מִרְשָׁעִים וַיּוֹשִׁיעֵם [^]		3	3			3
	כִּי־חָסוּ בוּ:		3			3	3
	Strophe 20 Total, v. 39-40			<u>15</u>	= 9 + 6	= 15	+ 0
	Total, v. 37-40		29	= 16	+ 13	= 29	+ 0
	Sub-canto II.3 Total, v. 35-40		41	= 22	+ 19	= 41	+ 0
	Total, v. 34-40		52	= 30	+ 22	= 52	+ 0
	Total, v. 27-40		102	= 63	+ 39	= 102	+ 0
	Canto II Total, v. 23-40		133	= 85	+ 48	= 133	+ 0
	Total, v. 20-40		156	= 100	+ 56	= 123	+ 33
	Total, v. 1-40		<u>297</u>	= 175	+ 122	= 217	+ 80
	With the heading, v. 1-40		298	= 176	+ 122		

- * V. 28: the ל before the adverb לְעוֹלָם in v. 28 has probably been added at a later stage, in accordance with the more common usage of לְעוֹלָם instead of עוֹלָם. In all probability, the ו before וְתִשׁוּעַת in v. 39 has also been added later - see *BHS*. The addition of the word עוֹלָם in 28c to restore the *ayin*-verseline (see *BHS*), would spoil the numerical structure.

Observations

1. The arithmetic centre of the 297 words of the psalm is constituted primarily by the middle word **כָּלוּ**, 'they vanish' (the wicked): $297 = 148 + 1 + 148$, but also by the 5 words at the end of v. 20, ($297 = 146 + 2 + 1 + 2 + 146 = 146 + 5 + 146$):

כִּיקַר כְּרִים כָּלוּ כְּעֶשֶׂן קָלוּ:

Like the glory of the pastures, **they vanish** - like smoke *they vanish*.

Though these five words overlap the colon structure, they are grammatically correct (see the layout in *BHS*) and can therefore be regarded as the meaningful centre of the psalm on word level. Its central position is highlighted by several compositional devices.

- The centre on word level occurs at the boundary of the two halves of the alphabetic acrostic, in the first of the 2 middle verselines: the line with initial *kaph*, v. 20, which constitute the meaningful centre in terms of the alphabetic acrostic.¹

כִּי רְשָׁעִים יִאֲבְדוּ וְאֹיְבֵי יְהוָה כִּיקַר כְּרִים ^ כָּלוּ כְּעֶשֶׂן קָלוּ: ²⁰

But the wicked perish / the enemies of YHWH, like the glory of the pastures // they vanish - like smoke they vanish!

- The centre is significantly highlighted by the fivefold *kaph*-alliteration - or even a sixfold, if we read with several Hebrew manuscripts כְּעֶשֶׂן instead of כָּלוּ in v. 20c! This reminds us of the alliteration in the middle verseline of Psalm 34 and in Psalms 111 and 112 - see Observation 1 in my analysis of [Psalm 34](#).
- The centre is immediately followed by the middle colon ($89 = 44 + 1 + 44$) in v. 21a, with its threefold *lamedh*-alliteration, evidently supporting the *kaph*-alliteration.
- The centre falls within the 17 (slightly off-centre) words of the 2 middle verselines, vs. 20-21, which constitute the heart of the psalm: $297 = 141 + 17 + 139$.
- The centre is additionally highlighted by the middle occurrence of the 7 instances of the keyword רְשָׁעִים, 'the wicked', in v. 20a, the (vs. 14, 16, 17, 20, 28, 34, 38).²
- The last device is the middle occurrence of the name YHWH, positioned in v. 20b, immediately before the arithmetic centre. For the use of the divine name as a highlighting device, compare Psalms 2, 11, 12, 30, 40, and 92, and see General Introduction, "Special devices to highlight the meaningful centre".

2. There are two significant keywords in v. 20. The first, occurring 7 times, is רְשָׁעִים, 'the wicked', whose numerical value of 80 ($20 + 21 + 16 + 10 + 13$) defines the number of words in the passage dealing explicitly with the wicked, Sub-canto I.2, vs. 12-22.

The two occurrences of the second keyword, כָּלוּ, 'they vanish', are positioned exactly within the meaningful centre. The numerical value of this (literally) most central keyword, 29 ($11 + 12 + 6 = 29$), reverberates no less than 4 times at the beginning and end of the psalm to signify numerically the vanishing of the wicked:

vs. 1-4	29 words in total
vs. 1-7	29 words before atnach; note the numerical chiasmus
vs. 5-11	29 words before atnach
vs. 37-40	29 words in total.

¹ For the rules governing the middle of the alphabetic acrostics – either the *kaph*- or the *lamedh*-verseline, or both -, see "The alphabetic acrostics" in the General Introduction.

² Note that it concerns only the sheer plural form – the word מְרַשָּׁעִים in v. 40 is excluded.

It is important to note that the apparent emphasis on *the vanishing of the wicked* is perfectly balanced by the consistent reference (5 times!) to *the inheriting of the land by the righteous* – in box: vs. 9b, 11a, 22a, 29a and 34b!³

This brings us to the canto and sub-canto structure, because 4 of the 5 references to the *inheriting of the the land* function, in my opinion, as a demarcating device.

3. There is no agreement among scholars when it comes to identifying the framework of the psalm, but the use of exactly **80** words to describe the wicked (vs. 12-22), in combination with the 4 presumed demarcating references to the land, appears to be a great help. Considering vs. 12-22 a numerically determined, coherent literary unit, we find strong caesurae between vs. 11||12 and between vs. 22||23, which suggest a tripartite structure: 1-11, 12-22, 23-40, or a bipartite one: 1-22, 23-40.

There is evidence showing that a bipartite structure is the better option, because vs. 1-22 appears to be a consciously designed literary unit with a distinct meaningful centre:

vs. 1-11a	Those who trust in YHWH will inherit the land	80 words
v. 11b	They will delight in abundant prosperity	4 words
vs. 12-22	The wicked will neither prevail nor inherit the land	80 words.

Since the striking arrangement of these 164 words cannot simply be explained away as a matter of coincidence, there is every reason to regard vs. 1-22 as Canto I, and consequently vs. 23-40 as Canto II. Van der Lugt also found a bipartite structure, which differs from the one presented here. His division of the text, vs. 1-20 and vs. 21-40, is mainly based on rhetorical considerations. For particulars, see CAS, pp. 367-380.

Canto I is made up of 10 strophes and clearly divides into two sub-cantos, which are both concluded by a reference to *the inheritance of the land*: vs. 1-11 and vs. 12-22.

Canto II, also made up of 10 strophes, divides on the same grounds into three sub-cantos, because the two references to *the inheritance of the land*, in vs. 29 and 34, suggest hard breaks in the text between vs. 29||30 and 34||35, which divide the text into: vs. 23-29, vs. 30-34, and vs. 35-40.

Sub-canto II.1	The wicked will be cut off and the righteous will inherit the land
Sub-canto II.2	Despite the threat from the wicked, the righteous will inherit the land
Sub-canto II.3	The wicked will vanish, but YHWH will let the righteous prevail.

4. Apart from the impressive logotechnical achievements noted above, the author has performed similarly when it comes to the weaving of the divine name numbers **17** and **26** into the fabric of the text, in no less than 20 instances (11 and 9 respectively):

vs. 8-11	17 words after atnach,	vs. 1-14	52 words after atnach
vs. 12-15	17 words before atnach,	vs. 5-11	26 words after atnach
vs. 14-19	17 words after atnach,	vs. 14-19	26 words before atnach
vs. 20-21	17 words in total,	vs. 21-29	26 words after atnach
vs. 25-26	17 words in total,	vs. 23-33	26 words after atnach
vs. 21-26	17 words after atnach,	vs. 23-36	104 (4 x 26) words in total
vs. 20-26	34 words before atnach,	vs. 35-38	26 words in total
vs. 23-40	85 (5 x 17) words in total,	vs. 34-40	52 (2 x 26) words in total
vs. 25-26	17 words in total,	vs. 20-40	156 (6 x 26) words in total
vs. 12-29	136 (8 x 17) words in total		
vs. 27-40	102 (6 x 17) words in total.		

³ I owe thanks to Jim McMillan for having drawn my attention to the balance between *the vanishing of the wicked* and *the inheriting of the land* by the righteous.

5. In vs. 1-11 (Sub-canto I.1) the 84 words of the text divide into 42 in vs. 1-6 (Canticle I.1.1) and 42 in vs. 7-11 (Canticle I.1.2), which suggests, as Van der Lugt observed, that the number of fullness, **7**, has been used to structure this part of the text, apparently to express the fullness of the expectations about peace and the possession of land. This is corroborated by the fact that the two initial verselines are both made up of **7** words, and that vs. 30-40 (Sub-canto II.2) have exactly **77** words, the product of **7** and **11**.

The number of fulfilment, **11**, is a structuring number too. It appears in the **11** verselines in Sub-canto I.1, vs. 1-11, in the **55** words of vs. 5-11, in the **220** words of vs. 1-29, and finally in the total number of words: **297** (27×11).

6. The name יהוה occurs 15 times, with the pivotal instance immediately before the meaningful centre. For the positioning of the middle instance of the divine name as a highlighting device, see the General Introduction, "Special devices to highlight the meaningful centre." The word אֱלֹהֵי, 'his God', occurs only in v. 31a.

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