

Psalm 76— Logotechnical Analysis

Guidelines

- Please read the [General Introduction](#) as well as the Introduction to [Book I](#) and [Book III](#).
- For common features found in the numerical analysis charts, see "[Key to the charts](#)".

Specific feature of Psalm 76

- The defining characteristic of the psalm is its spectacular 3-word meaningful centre (v. 8a): אַתָּה נִרְאָה אַתָּה, 'You, **awesome** You!', which is positioned in such a way that the pivotal word 'awesome' is flanked not only by 'You....You', but also by 41 words on each side; 41 is the numerical value of the keyword נִרְאָה, 'awesome'.
- Psalm 76 shares the feature of positioning a keyword in the arithmetic middle with many other psalms, e.g., Psalms 33, 35, 37, 51, 52 and 57 – see the General Introduction, "The centre of the text". The meaningful centre on word level coincides precisely with the middle colon, which strengthens its pivotal position.
- A feature it shares with Psalms 73-75 is the use of a single occurrence of the name YHWH as a highlighting device.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 2-4, 5-7 || 8-10, 11-13 (2 cantos with 4 strophes, 12 verselines and 24 cola, taking v. 12 as a bicolon, ignoring the atnach).
- Fokkelman: similarly, except that he regards v. 6 as a tricolon, finding 25 cola.
- Labuschagne: similarly, but I take v. 6 as a bicolon and v. 12 as a tricolon (seeing the atnach), and find 25 cola.

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.
- The numbering of the verselines is in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	לְמִנְצַחַת בְּגִינֹתָי מִזְמוֹר לְאַסָּף שִׁיר:	5	2	3		
	Heading, v. 1	5 = 2 + 3				
2	נִזְדַּע בֵּיהוָה אֱלֹהִים [^] 1	3	3			3
	בִּישְׂרָאֵל גְּדוֹל שְׁמוֹ:	3		3		3
	Total, v. 2	6 = 3 + 3 = 0 + 6				
3	וַיְהִי בְשָׁלֹם סְבוּ [^] 2	3	3			3
	וּמַעֲוֹנָתוֹ בְּצִיּוֹן:	2		2		2
	Total, v. 3	5 = 3 + 2 = 0 + 5				
	Total, v. 2-3	11 = 6 + 5 = 0 + 11				
4	שָׁמָּה שָׁבַר רִשְׁפֵי־קִשְׁתָּ [^] 3	4	4			4
	מִגֹּן וַיַּחַרְבּ וּמִלְחָמָה סָלָה:	3		3		3
	Total, v. 4	7 = 4 + 3 = 0 + 7				
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 2-4	18 = 10 + 8 = 0 + 18				

5	נָאֹר אֶתָּה אֲדִיר מִהַרְרֵי-טָרֶף: Total, v. 5 Total, v. 2-5	4	3	3	3	2	2	2	5 = 5 + 0 = 5 + 0 23 = 15 + 8 = 5 + 18
6	אֲשַׁתּוֹלְלוּ אֲבִירֵי לֵב נָמוּ שְׁנַתֶּם וְלֹא-מִצְאוּ כָל-אֲנָשֵׁי-חַיִל יְדִיהֶם: Total, v. 6 Total, v. 2-6	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	11 = 5 + 6 = 11 + 0 34 = 20 + 14 = 16 + 18
7	מִנְעֵרְתֶךָ אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב נִרְדָּם וְרָכַב וְסוּס: Total, v. 7 Total, v. 6-7 Strophe 2 Total, v. 5-7 Canto I Total, v. 2-7	6	3	3	3	3	3	3	6 = 3 + 3 = 6 + 0 17 = 8 + 9 = 17 + 0 22 = 13 + 9 = 22 + 0 29 = 17 + 12 = 22 + 7 40 = 23 + 17 = 22 + 18
8	Middle word(s): 83=41+1+41 אֶתָּה נֹרָא אֶתָּה וּמִי-יַעֲמֵד לְפָנֶיךָ מֵאֵז אֶפְדָּ: 83 = 40 + 3 + 40 Middle colon: 12+1+12 נֹרָא = 41 Total, v. 8	7	3	3	3	5	5	5	8 = 8 + 0 = 8 + 0
9	מִשְׁמֵימֵי הַשְּׁמַעַתָּ דִּין אֶרֶץ יִרְאָה וְשִׁקְטָה: Total, v. 9 Total, v. 2-9	8	3	3	3	3	3	3	6 = 3 + 3 = 6 + 0 54 = 34 + 20 = 36 + 18
10	בְּקוּמֵם-לְמִשְׁפַּט אֱלֹהִים לְהוֹשִׁיעַ כָּל-עַנְוֵי-אֶרֶץ סֵלָה: Total, v. 10 Strophe 3 Total, v. 8-10 Total, v. 2-10	9	3	3	3	4	4	4	7 = 3 + 4 = 7 + 0 21 = 14 + 7 = 21 + 0 61 = 37 + 24 = 43 + 18
11	כִּי-חַמַּת אָדָם תִּוְדָךָ שְׂאֵרֵי חַמַּת תַּחֲגֹר: Total, v. 11 Total, v. 7-11 Total, v. 6-11 Total, v. 2-11	10	4	4	4	3	3	3	7 = 4 + 3 = 7 + 0 34 = 21 + 13 = 34 + 0 45 = 26 + 19 = 45 + 0 68 = 41 + 27 = 50 + 18
12	נִדְרֹו וְשִׁלְמוּ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם כָּל-סִבְיֹוֹ יֹוֹבִילוּ שִׁי לְמוֹרָא: Total, v. 12 Occurs only here	11	4	4	4	2	2	2	9 = 6 + 3 = 0 + 9
13	יִבְצֹר רוּחַ נְגִידִים נֹרָא לְמַלְכֵי-אֶרֶץ: Total, v. 13 Coda Total, v. 12-13 Strophe 4 Total, v. 11-13 Canto II Total, v. 8-13 Total, v. 2-13	12	3	3	3	3	3	3	6 = 3 + 3 = 0 + 6 15 = 9 + 6 = 0 + 15 22 = 13 + 9 = 7 + 15 43 = 27 + 16 = 28 + 15 83 = 50 + 33 = 50 + 33
	With the heading and סֵלָה (2x), v. 1-13								90 = 52 + 38

Observations

1. In terms of the 83 words of the psalm, the pivotal word is **נִרְאָה**, 'awesome', in v. 8a: $83 = 41 + 1 + 41$. It is flanked by the number 41, which represents the numerical value of the word, **נִרְאָה**, which occurs also in v. 13b.

This word is not only very meaningful but also a keyword of paramount importance. First, in combination with the reference to the 'rider and the horse' in v. 7b and to 'majestic' in v. 5b, it is strongly reminiscent of the Song of the Sea (Exod. 15: 1-18). Compare in Exod. 15:1 the reference to 'the horse and its rider', and more particularly 15:11, the affirmation of YHWH's incomparability due to his *majesty* and his *awesomeness*:

'Who is like you, YHWH, among the gods?
Who is like you, *majestic* in holiness,
awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?

In this respect Psalm 76 clearly precludes the affirmation of YHWH's incomparability in [Psalm 77](#) – see 77:12-16!

Second, the keyword **נִרְאָה** - in combination with the reference to *God's abode* (v. 3), and the term 'God of Jacob' (v. 7a) – reminds the reader/hearer of Jacob's encounter with God at Bethel, more specifically his declamatory exclamation:

'How *awesome* is this place! This is none other than the *house of God!*' (Gen. 28:17).

2. The meaningful centre in v. 8a is achieved by including the two words flanking the pivotal word ($83 = 40 + \boxed{3} + 40$):

אַתָּה נִרְאָה אַתָּה, 'You, **awesome** You!'

The tersely phrased affirmation of God's awesome character expresses the central idea of the poem most eloquently and emphatically. Compare the emphasizing function of the 7 instances of **אַתָּה**, 'you', in Ps. 74:13-17 – see Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 74](#).

The pivotal position of the meaningful centre is underscored and reinforced by the fact that v. 8a is also the arithmetic centre on colon level: $25 = 12 + \boxed{1} + 12$.

It may be difficult to define the cola unambiguously, especially as regards v. 6 and 12. I agree with Van der Lugt who argues that the poem is consistently made up of bicolon verselines, except that I regard v. 12 as a tricolon, divided by the *atnach* and the *ole weyored* (the only one in the poem). Therefore, I find 25 cola, which causes v. 8a to be the central colon coinciding with the three middle words.

Fokkelman, e.g., also discerns 25 cola, but takes v. 6 as a tricolon and v. 12 as a bicolon. In his view the pivotal colon is v. 7b, 'rider and horse lie stunned'. However, it is not likely that this metaphor has been consciously intended as the meaningful centre of the psalm. It does not express the quintessential idea - which is *YHWH's awesomeness* - in such a straightforward way as the impressive affirmation in v. 8a.

3. The *selahs* at the end of vs. 2-4 and 8-10 obviously serve to draw attention to these passages. Note that they explicitly deal with the YHWH's awesome acts as a warrior! The sudden change in the direction of address has, as always, primarily a rhetorical function, to alert the reader/hearer.

vs. 2-4	3 rd person, concluded by <i>selah</i>
vs. 5-11	2 nd person
vs. 12-13	3 rd person, the coda.

However, it has a logotechnical function as well, seeing the division of the text based on the 2nd and 3rd person passages: 50 words in Column c and 33 in Column d, coinciding precisely with the compositional formula in terms of atnach: 50a + 33b.

4. The divine name numbers feature in the following instances:

vs. 2-6	34 (2 x 17) words in total
vs. 6-7	17 words in total
vs. 4-7	17 words before atnach
vs. 2-7	17 words after atnach
vs. 2-9	34 (2 x 17) words before atnach
vs. 7-11	34 (2 x 17) words in total
vs. 6-11	26 words before atnach
vs. 2-11	68 (4 x 17) words in total
vs. 1-11	52 (2 x 26) words in total before atnach.

The editors of the Psalter have devised the 5-word heading, with 2 words before and 3 words after atnach, in order to achieve the desired compositional 88 = 52 + 36. For a similar device – see Observation 6 in my Analysis of [Psalm 75](#).

5. As in Psalms 73, 74 and 75, the name יהוה occurs only once (v. 12a) and has a highlighting function: in this case, to draw attention to the coda (vs. 12-13). See Observation 7 in my Analysis of Psalm 75. The word אלהים occurs 4x (2, 7, 10, 12).

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