

# Psalm 95— Logotechnical Analysis

## Guidelines

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

## Specific features of Psalm 95

- The exhortation of the prophet (vs. 1-7) and the 34-word oracle (vs. 8-11) define the major sections (cantos) of Psalm 95 in a natural way. Being an address to an audience in which a divine speech is quoted, it is very reminiscent of Psalm 81 and 91.
- A striking feature is the conspicuous correspondence – with respect to both form and content - between **Ps. 95:8-11** and six passages in the Psalter (Pss. 77:8-12, 95:8-11, 81:9-12, 105:40-44, 106:23-27, 107:23-26 + 40), and four in the book of Deuteronomy: 1:35-36 and 1:38-39, and 7:5-6 and 7:25-26). All ten are composed according to the formula **34=19+15** (or **15+19**), and all deal explicitly - or implicitly - with the all-important issue of the promised land: the entrance into, or loss of the land through apostasy.

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

- Van der Lugt and Labuschagne: 1-2, 3-5 || 6-7, 8-9, 10-11 (2 cantos, 5 strophes, **11** verselines and 25 cola, taking vs. 6-7 as two tricola).
- Fokkelman: 1-2, 3-5, 6-7b || 7c-9, 10-11 (2 stanzas, 5 strophes, 12 verselines and 24 cola, regarding vs. 6 and 7a-b as two bicolon verselines, and v. 7c as a separate verseline which he combines with vs. 8-9 to form Strophe 4).

## Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words in the main clauses; **d**: words in the subordinate clauses.
- **Total**: the numbers of words spoken about God are in **red**; those of the oracle in **green**.
- The numbering of the verselines in **brown** and **green** displays the pattern **11 = 7 + 4**.

			Total	a	b	c	d
1	לְכוּ נִרְנְנָה לַיהוָה <sup>^</sup>	1	3	3		3	
	נְרִיעָה לְצֹר יִשְׁעֵנוּ:		3		3	3	
	Total, v. 1		6	= 3	+ 3	= 6	+ 0
2	נִקְדְּמָה פָּנֵינוּ בְּתוֹדָה <sup>^</sup>	2	3	3		3	
	בְּזִמְרוֹת נְרִיעַ לֹא:		3		3	3	
	Total, v. 2		6	= 3	+ 3	= 6	+ 0
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-2		12	= 6	+ 6	= 12	+ 0
3	כִּי אֵל גָּדוֹל יִתְהַה <sup>^</sup>	3	4	4			4
	וּמִלְךָ גָּדוֹל עַל-כָּל-אֱלֹהִים:		5		5		5
	Total, v. 3		9	= 4	+ 5	= 0	+ 9
4	אֲשֶׁר בִּידוֹ מְחַקְרֵי-אָרֶץ <sup>^</sup>	4	4	4			4
	וְתוֹעֲפוֹת הָרִים לֹא:		3		3		3
	Total, v. 4		7	= 4	+ 3	= 0	+ 7
5	אֲשֶׁר-לֹא תִים וְהוּא עָשָׂה <sup>^</sup>	5	5	5			5
	וַיִּבְשֹׁת יַדָיו יִצְרוּ:		3		3		3
	Total, v. 5		8	= 5	+ 3	= 0	+ 8
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 3-5		24	= 13	+ 11	= 0	+ 24
	Total, v. 1-5		36	= 19	+ 17	= 12	+ 24

6	Middle verseline (6-7a):	בֹּאוּ נִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנִכְרַעְהָ	6	3	3	3	
		11 = 5 + 1 + 5		4		4	4
7	Middle colon:	25=12+1+12	כִּי הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ	7	3	3	3
	words:	89 = 43 + 3 + 43	וְאַנְחֵנוּ עִם מְרֵעֵינוּ	7	3	3	3
			וְצֹאן יְדוּיָ		2	2	2
			הַיּוֹם אִם־בְּקִלּוֹ תִשְׁמְעוּ:		4	4	4
	Strophe 3	Total, v. 6-7		19	= 11	+ 8	= 11 + 8
	<b>Words spoken about God: Canto I, v. 1-7</b>			55	= 30	+ 25	= 23 + 32
The boundary between the Prophet's Exhortation and YHWH's Oracle							
8			אֵל־תִּקְשׁוּ לְבַבְכֶם כַּמְרִיבָהָ	8	4	4	4
			כִּיּוֹם מִסָּה בַמִּדְבָּר:		3	3	3
		Total, v. 8		7	= 4	+ 3	= 7 + 0
		Total, v. 6-8		26	= 15	+ 11	= 18 + 8
9			אֲשֶׁר נִסּוּנִי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם	9	3	3	3
			בְּחַנּוּנֵי גַם־רָאוּ פִעְלֵי:		4	4	4
		Total, v. 9		7	= 3	+ 4	= 0 + 7
	Strophe 4	Total, v. 8-9		14	= 7	+ 7	= 7 + 7
		Total, v. 7-9		26	= 15	+ 11	= 11 + 15
10	Vs. 8-10b <sup>1</sup>		אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה אָקוּט בְּדוֹר	10	4	4	4
	Admonitory Oracle:		וַיֹּאמֶר עִם תֵּעִי לְבַב הָאֵם		5	5	5
	19 words		וְהֵם לֹא־יָדְעוּ דְרָכָי:		4	4	4
		Total, v. 10		13	= 9	+ 4	= 13 + 0
11	Divine Resolution		אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי בְּאִפְיָ	11	3	3	3
	quoted: 15 words		אִם־יִבְאוּן אֶל־מְנוּחָתִי:		4	4	4
		Total, v. 11		7	= 3	+ 4	= 0 + 7
	Strophe 5	Total, v. 10-11		20	= 12	+ 8	= 13 + 7
	<b>Words spoken by God: Canto II, v. 8-11</b>			34	= 19	+ 15	= 20 + 14
		Total, v. 1-11		89	= 49	+ 40	= 43 + 46

## Observations

1. In terms of the 89 words of the poem, the 3 words in v. 7a constitute its arithmetic centre (89 = 43 + 3 + 43). The middle words coincide precisely with the middle colon (12+1+12), falling within the middle verseline, vs. 6-7a (11 = 5 + 1 + 5):

כִּי הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ For he is our God.

In my judgement, these words form the consciously designed meaningful centre expressing the gist of the poem: the relationship between YHWH and his people.

2. The apparent disagreement between Van der Lugt and myself, on the one hand, and Fokkelman on the other, illustrates the uncertainty among scholars about the structure of vs. 6-7. Fokkelman, to begin with, takes v. 6 and v. 7a-b as two bicolic verselines:

בֹּאוּ נִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנִכְרַעְהָ נְבִרְכָה לְפָנֵי־יְהוָה עֲשֵׂנוּ: <sup>6</sup>  
כִּי הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאַנְחֵנוּ עִם מְרֵעֵינוּ וְצֹאן יְדוּיָ <sup>7a-b</sup>

At the same time, he regards the last four words of v. 7 as a separate verseline, which he joins with 8-9 to constitute his Strophe 4, the beginning of his Stanza II (vs. 7c-11):

הַיּוֹם אִם־בְּקִלּוֹ תִשְׁמְעוּ: <sup>7c</sup>  
אֵל־תִּקְשׁוּ לְבַבְכֶם כַּמְרִיבָהָ כִּיּוֹם מִסָּה בַמִּדְבָּר: <sup>8</sup>  
אֲשֶׁר נִסּוּנִי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם בְּחַנּוּנֵי גַם־רָאוּ פִעְלֵי: <sup>9</sup>

However, the four words of v. 7c (MT) cannot possibly be separated from v. 7a-b (MT), since they strictly belong to the words of the prophet in vs. 1-7.

Van der Lugt, on his part, finds 25 cola and 11 verselines, deviating from MT by regarding vs. 6-7 as two tricolonic verselines. He takes 7a as belonging to v. 6 and regards 7b-c (MT) as "a break-up of a stereotyped phrase (cf. Pss. 79,13a and 100,3c)", which he recognizes as 3 cola (7b-d):

בֹּאֵי נִשְׁתַּחֲוּהוּ וְנִכְרְעוּהוּ 6  
 נִבְרַכְתָּהּ לְפָנֵי־יְהוָה עֲשׂוּ: 7a כִּי הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ  
 וַיִּנְחֵנוּ עִם מְרֵעֵתוֹ וַצֵּאֵן יְרוּי־ הַיּוֹם אִם־בְּקִלּוֹ תִשְׁמְעוּ: 7b-d

According to this division, the last four words (his v. 7d) form an integral part of the prophet's call to worship (vs. 1-7). I agree with Van der Lugt's restructuring of vs. 6-7. The words in v. 7a are after all phrased as the prophet's words, not God's. The oracle starts only in v. 8.

Having said enough about Fokkelman's division of vs. 6-7 as untenable, let us now consider in greater depth the problem of the major division of the text into two cantos.

Van der Lugt's canto division (vs. 1-5 and vs. 6-11) rests on his observation that Psalms 95, 96 and 97 show a rather similar framework. The first part of each poem deals with God's greatness *in heaven*, particularly in relation with the 'gods' and as Creator (95:1-5; 96:1-6; 97:1-6). The second part of each poem, on the other hand, is about *the earth*, about history and God's judgement on the nations (95:6-11; 96:7-13; 97:7-12). If the major framework of these psalms were indeed based on the two categories in question, there would be something to say for Van der Lugt's division.

However, this is only to a certain extent true, for in the 'heaven'-passages in Pss. 95:1-5, 96:1-6 and 97:1-6 there are unmistakable references to situations on earth. This weakens the argument that the first parts of these psalms deal with 'God's greatness *in heaven*'. It is very doubtful whether such spatial considerations have determined the structure of the text in these psalms. Psalm 82 would be a better example of this – see my Analysis of [Psalm 82](#).

My own division of the text of Psalm 95 is primarily based on the two main categories in the poem: the *prophet's summons* to the people to praise YHWH and worship him, in which God is spoken *about*, vs. 1-7 (Canto I), and the *oracle*, where God himself speaks, vs. 8-11 (Canto II). Distinguishing these two categories also rests on unequivocal numerical evidence in regards the conspicuous compositional formulas: Canto I is composed according to the formula: **55 = 23c + 32d**, and Canto II according to the formula: **34 = 19 + 15**.

What has been said earlier strongly suggests that there is an unmistakable caesura between vs. 1-7 and vs. 8-11. This does not rule out the specific function of 7c, which clearly serves as a bridge between the prophet's exhortation and YHWH's oracle. In fact, these four words, spoken by the prophet, clearly introduce the divine speech.

There is ample numerical evidence confirming this particular division of the text.

First, the fact that the prophet's exhortation in vs. 1-7 is made up of **55** words divided into precisely **23** in the main clauses and **32** in the subordinate clauses, strongly suggests authorial intent: the deliberate use of the double *kabod* formula, **55 = 23 + 32**, as compositional device. For this widely used compositional formula, which represents the presence of God, see the [General Introduction](#) under "Special Patterns".

Apart from the use of the conjunction כִּי, occurring in vs. 3a and 7a, the deliberate use of syntax to structure the text becomes apparent when we consider the no less than 4 occurrences of the relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר (4a, 5a, 9a, 11a), which is exceptional in poetry.

Second, the oracle in vs. 8-11 is an undeniable literary unity, consisting of exactly **34** words, with **19** before, and **15** after atnach, structured according to a most significant compositional formula **34 = 19 + 15**. Moreover, on verse and verseline level, the psalm is

clearly structured in the well-known pattern  $11 = 7 + 4$ , as in [Psalm 46](#). So there is no reason to doubt the correctness of the canto division of the text into vs. 1-7 and 8-11.

- I encountered the latter most intriguing compositional formula,  $34 = 19 + 15$ , for the first time in Deut. 1:34-40, where it occurs twice (in vs. 35-36 and vs. 38-39) in the four corresponding arms of the beautiful concentric menorah structure. See for particulars, my commentary *Deuteronomium* (De Prediking van het Oude Testament, Nijkerk 1987), Vol. 1A, p. 40 and 130-132, as well as the Supplement, p. 10.

Let me display the astoundingly intricate menorah pattern of this 95-word section:

1:34	YHWH's response to Israel's lack of faith			
1:35	No entrance in Canaan for the old generation		15	} 34
1:36	Entrance for Kaleb who shall occupy it	34	19	
1:37	No entrance for Moses		11	} 34 34
1:38	Entrance for Joshua to help Israel occupy it		15	} 34
1:39	Entrance for the young generation	34	19	
1:40	Israel commanded to turn and set out		8	

Both sections directly on either side of the centre, vs. 35-36 and vs. 38-39, are structured according to the fixed formula  $34 = 15 + 19$ . Additionally, the corresponding arms v. 35 and v. 39, as well as v. 36 and v. 38, also contain this formula! The passage deals explicitly with the crucial issue of apostasy, which fundamentally determines the entrance or non-entrance into the promised land.

The present formula was apparently used as an archetype in the book of Psalms.

[Psalm 95](#) was the first example of this phenomenon I discovered outside the book of Deuteronomy: the formula  $34 = 19 + 15$  is to be found in the 34-word oracle (vs. 8-11) which divides into 19 words in the admonitory oracle, and 15 in the divine resolution quoted in the oracle (see the chart). The formula is skilfully repeated, as we have already noted, in the number of words before and after atnach: 19 (column a) and 15 (column b). The second occurrence of the formula not only corroborates this particular division; it also demonstrates deliberate intent on the part of the author.

Important to note is that the passage deals with apostasy and that there is a clear reference to the land issue in v. 11!

[Psalm 106](#) is another evident example: vs. 23-27 deal explicitly with the disastrous consequences of Israel's apostasy: the loss of the land and the Diaspora. The 34 words of the passage divide into 19 words before and 15 after atnach. At the same time, the 34 words divide into 17 in vs. 23-24 and 17 in vs. 25-27.

[Psalm 105](#) apparently preludes what is said more specifically in Ps. 106:23-27. The 34-word passage, vs. 40-44, is composed according to precisely the same formula, viz.,  $34 = 19 + 15$ . There are clear references to Israel's apostasy in the desert, and the passage concludes with a reference to the promised land.

[Psalm 107](#), the sister psalm of 105 and 106, is a very special case. The formula  $34 = 19 + 15$  occurs in the last five verses marked by the inverted nun: vs. 23-26 + 40. The first four verses deal with God's judgement on "those who go to sea in ships", while v. 40 is about the contempt he pours upon the princes. The reason why the Masoretes conjoined these verses by means of inverted nun and this particular formula remains a mystery.

[Psalm 81](#) is yet another example: in vs. 9-12 the divine admonition, with an unambiguous reference to Israel's apostasy in the desert (v. 12), is made up of 34 words, once again with 19 words before, and 15 after atnach. Like in Psalm 106, the 34 words also divide into 17 words in each of the two sections (vs. 9-10 and 11-12).

[Psalm 77](#) may be mentioned too, as my final example, at least for the time being. When I was revising my logotechnical Analysis of this psalm – after I had written the present Observation -, I noticed that the formula in question also occurs in vs. 8-12. The passage

has **34** words in total, with **15** before and **19** after atnach, and clearly alludes to apostasy and its consequences. See Observation 6 in my Analysis of Psalm 77.

I encountered the formula **34 = 19 + 15** also elsewhere in the book of **Deuteronomy**: 7: 5-6 and 25-26. Both passages deal with the destruction of pagan cult objects after the occupation of the land. This did not surprise me, seeing the inextricable connection between idolatry and the loss of the land!

In vs. 5-6 the **34** words divide into **15** before and **19** after atnach. In vs. 25-26 they divide into **19** in v. 25 and **15** in v. 26.

In sum, there are no less than ten cognate texts (as regards material content) dealing explicitly or implicitly with apostasy and the land issue, which are all structured by the same compositional formula **34 = 19 + 15** (or v.v.)!

Up to the present, we are completely in the dark regarding the reason behind this specific division of these texts into 15 + 19 (or v.v.). However, it would be worthwhile to study all texts dealing with the land issue elsewhere in the O.T. to see whether there are more examples of the explicit use of this mysterious formula. Compare, e.g., Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 136](#).

4. Worth noting is how the divine name numbers have been woven into the text, in addition to the use of the two strict compositional formulas ( $55 = 23 + 32$  and  $34 = 19 + 15$ ):
  - vs. 1-5            **17** words after atnach
  - vs. 6-8           **26** words in total, divided into **15** before, and **11** after atnach
  - vs. 7-9           **26** words in total, divided into **15** before, and **11** after atnach
5. The word **יְהוָה** occurs twice (vs. 3b and 7a), and **אֱלֹהִים** once (v. 3a). The name **יהוה** features three times (vs. 1, 3 and 6). Most significantly, in Psalms 90-100, the **63** occurrences of the divine name YHWH/YH show the pattern  $63 = 26 + 3 + 34$ :

Psalm 90	1	}	<b>26</b>
Psalm 91	2		
Psalm 92	<b>15</b> 7		
Psalm 93	5		
Psalm 94	<b>11</b>		
<b>Psalm 95</b>	<b>3</b>		
Psalm 96	<b>11</b>	}	<b>34</b>
Psalm 97	6 <b>17</b>		
Psalm 98	6		
Psalm 99	7 <b>17</b>		
Psalm 100	4		

The distribution of the divine name over these eleven psalms in this fashion underscores the supposition (put forward by Pieter van der Lugt) that Psalms 90-100 form a distinct sub-group, with Psalm 95 positioned at the centre. See the [Introduction to Book IV](#).

© 2008  
 Dr. C.J. Labuschagne    Senior Lecturer in Semitic Languages (retired),  
 Brinkhorst 44            University of Pretoria, South Africa  
 9751 AT Haren (Gron)    and  
 The Netherlands        Professor of Old Testament (retired),  
[labuschagne.cj@planet.nl](mailto:labuschagne.cj@planet.nl)    University of Groningen, The Netherlands