

Psalm 20— 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 20

- After Psalms 6 and 12, Psalm 20 is the third of 9 psalms consisting of two exactly equal halves. It is also one of the 4 that have identical compositional formulae in each half.
The canto structure of the psalm is determined by the direction of address and the balanced structure in terms of verselines and words:

| | | |
|----------|-----------------------------|--|
| vs. 2-6 | words addressed to the king | 5 verselines with 33 = 18a + 15b words |
| vs. 7-10 | words spoken about the king | 5 verselines with 33 = 18a + 15b words |
- As in many psalms, the numerical value of a keyword in the psalm determines the number of words in the text. In this case, it is the number **33**, the numerical value of the word **נִדְגַל**, 'we set up our banners', occurring in v. 6b.
- The conspicuous absence of divine name numbers in the text is a result of the stringent numerical structure of the psalm.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 2-4, 5-6 || 7, 8-10 (2 cantos with 4 strophes, 10 verselines and 21 cola).
- Fokkelman: 2-3, 4-5, 6 || 7, 8-9, 10 (2 cantos with 6 strophes, 11 verselines and 23 cola, regarding 4-5 and 6, as well as 8-9 and 10 as independent strophes, and taking vs. 6c and 8b as bicola).
- Labuschagne: as Van der Lugt.
- For an overview of other divisions of the text, see Van der Lugt, CAS, Psalm 20, § 6.

Logotechnical analysis

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

| | | | Total | a | b | c | d |
|---|--|---|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1 | לְמִנְצַחַת מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד : Heading, v. 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | | | |
| 2 | יַעֲנֶדֶ יְהוָה בְּיוֹם צָרָה אֲ יִשְׁבֹּדֶ שֵׁם אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב : Total, v. 2 | 1 | 4 | 4 | | 4 | |
| | | | 4 | | 4 | 4 | |
| | 8 = 4 + 4 = 8 + 0 | | | | | | |
| 3 | יִשְׁלַח-עֲזָרָה מִקִּדְשׁ וּמִצִּיּוֹן יִסְעָדֶךָ : Total, v. 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | | 3 | |
| | | | 2 | | 2 | 2 | |
| | 5 = 3 + 2 = 5 + 0 | | | | | | |
| 4 | יִזְכֹּר כָּל-מְנַחֲתֶיךָ וְעוֹלָתֶיךָ יִדְשָׁנָה סֵלָה : Total, v. 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | | 3 | |
| | | | 2 | | 2 | 2 | |
| | 5 = 3 + 2 = 5 + 0 | | | | | | |
| | Strophe 1 Total, v. 2-4 | | 18 = 10 + 8 = 18 + 0 | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|--|----|-----------|-----------|--|
| 5 | | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | | יְתֹן־לָּךְ כָּל־בְּקֹדֶה | | | | |
| | | וְכָל־עֲצָתְךָ וְיִמְלֵא: | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | | Total, v. 5 | 6 | = 3 + 3 | = 6 + 0 | |
| | | Total, v. 2-5 | 24 | = 13 + 11 | = 24 + 0 | |
| 6 | גִּדְּגֹל = 33 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 2 | |
| | | וְבָשֶׁם־אֱלֹהֵינוּ גִּדְּגֹל | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | (14+4+3+12 = 33) | יִמְלֵא יְהוָה כָּל־מִשְׁאֲלוֹתֶיךָ: | 2 | 2 | 2 | |
| | Middle colon: | Total, v. 6 | 9 | = 5 + 4 | = 9 + 0 | |
| | (21=11+1+11) Meaningful centre | Total, v. 2-4 | 18 | = 10 + 8 | = 18 + 0 | |
| | Strophe 2 | Total, v. 5-6 | 15 | = 8 + 7 | = 15 + 0 | |
| | Canto I | Total, v. 2-6 | 33 | = 18 + 15 | = 33 + 0 | |
| Arithmetic centre in terms of strophes, verselines and words (33=18+15 + 33=18+15) | | | | | | |
| 7 | | 6 | 2 | 2 | 2 | |
| | | עֲתָה יְדַעְתִּי | | | | |
| | | כִּי הוֹשִׁיעַ יְהוָה מִשִּׁיחוֹ | 4 | 4 | 4 | |
| | | יַעֲנֶהוּ מִשְׁמֵי קָדְשׁוֹ | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | | בְּגִבְרוֹת יֵשַׁע יְמִינוֹ: | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | Strophe 3 | Total, v. 7 | 12 | = 9 + 3 | = 0 + 12 | |
| 8 | | 8 | 4 | 4 | 4 | |
| | | אֱלֹהִים בָּרַכְבּ וְאֱלֹהִים בְּסוּסֵיהֶם | | | | |
| | | וְאֶנְחֵנוּ בְּשֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ נִזְכִּיר: | 5 | 5 | 5 | |
| | | Total, v. 8 | 9 | = 4 + 5 | = 0 + 9 | |
| 9 | | 9 | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | | הִקְמָה כְּרַעוּ וְנִפְלְאוּ | | | | |
| | | וְאֶנְחֵנוּ קָמְנוּ וְנִתְעוֹדַד: | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | | Total, v. 9 | 6 | = 3 + 3 | = 0 + 6 | |
| | | Total, v. 8-9 | 15 | = 7 + 8 | = 0 + 15 | |
| | | Total, v. 7-9 | 27 | = 16 + 11 | = 0 + 27 | |
| 10 * | Coda | 10 | 3 | 2 | 3 | |
| | | יְעַנְנֵנוּ בְּיוֹם־קִרְאָנוּ: | 3 | 4 | 3 | |
| | | Total, v. 10 | 6 | = 2 + 4 | = 0 + 6 | |
| | Strophe 4 | Total, v. 8-10 | 21 | = 9 + 12 | = 0 + 21 | |
| | Canto II | Total, v. 7-10 | 33 | = 18 + 15 | = 0 + 33 | |
| | | Total, v. 2-10 | 66 | = 36 + 30 | = 33 + 33 | |
| | With the heading and סִלְהָ, v. 1-10 | | 70 | = 39 + 31 | | |

* The unusual placement of the *atnach* in v. 10a – within a colon – has to do with the author's desire to achieve identical compositional formulae in the two halves. The same holds true for Pss. 6 and 79, where we find the same phenomenon. Psalm 121, the fourth psalm with two identical formulae, is an exception, given the normal placement of *atnach* in the text.

Observations

1. In terms of its 66 words, the arithmetic centre of the psalm falls between v. 6 and v. 7, which means that there is no meaningful centre on word level. However, the meaningful centre of the poem can be found in terms of its 21 cola; the pivotal colon is v. 6c (21 = 10 + 1 + 10):

יִמְלֵא יְהוָה כָּל־מִשְׁאֲלוֹתֶיךָ, 'May YHWH fulfil your every request'.

That the wish for the king has pride of place in the middle of the text is most fitting for a royal psalm. The meaningful centre is highlighted by the fact that v. 6 is the only tricolon in the entire psalm, and by the fact that v. 6 is phrased as a 'we'-verseline.

2. If we include the 3-word heading and the word *selah* (v. 4b), the arithmetic centre of the 70 words of the entire text ($70 = 33 + 4 + 33$) appears to coincide exactly with the meaningful centre. This leads to the conclusion, in my opinion, that the editor has consciously chosen a 3-word heading and one *selah* precisely for this purpose. Compare Observation 2 in my Analysis of [Psalm 21](#).
3. The division of the text into two equal halves of **33** words is underscored not only by the fact that each part is made up of 2 strophes and 5 verselines, but also by the direction of address. Moreover, each half is significantly concluded by a 'we'-section, respectively v. 6 and v. 8b-10 (compare the last colon of Psalm 21):

| | | |
|----------|----------|--|
| Canto I | vs. 2-6 | 33 (18a+15b) words <i>addressed to the king</i> (Column c) |
| Canto II | vs. 7-10 | 33 (18a+15b) words <i>spoken about the king</i> (Column d). |

To crown it all, in terms of the atnach, the two parts have identical compositional formulas: $33 = 18a + 15b$. Compare Psalms 6, 79 and 121, and see the General Introduction, "Special devices to highlight the meaningful centre", § 6.

It is also worth noting that throughout the poem the poet speaks *about* God, but in the first colon of the final verseline, he addresses God directly (v. 10a). This sudden change in the direction of address is a most effective attention-drawing device. Here it focuses on the final prayer and the concluding statement in v. 10, which is a coda – see the General Introduction, "The use of a coda as a device for conclusion." Compare also the coda in Psalm 21 (v. 14).

4. The **66**-word text of the poem, with **33** words in each half, is certainly not a matter of coincidence, since **33** is the numerical value of נִדְּגַל, 'we set up our banners' in v. 6b ($14 + 4 + 3 + 12 = 33$), which may be regarded as an important keyword. It features explicitly in the colon preceding the meaningful centre, בְּשֵׁם־אֱלֹהֵינוּ נִדְּגַל, 'in the name of our God we set up our banners', significantly formulated as words spoken by the *entire* community. The phrase is repeated in a slightly different form in v. 8b: בְּשֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ נִזְכִּיר, 'in the name of YHWH our God we boast'.
5. This is the first of a small number of psalms in which none of the divine name numbers feature. In this case, it is not surprising, seeing the stringent numerical structure of the text.
6. The name יהוה occurs 5 times (2a, 6c, 7b, 8b, 10a); אֱלֹהֵי[נו] 3 times (2b, 6b, 8b).

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| © 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 | University of Groningen, The Netherlands |