

Psalm 56— Logotechnical Analysis

Guidelines

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

Specific features of Psalm 56

- In terms of its 14 verselines, the psalm divides into two parts of 7 verselines each: Canto I (vs. 2-8) and Canto II (vs. 9-14). Each canto has its own distinct meaningful centre - a feature Psalm 56 shares with Psalms 55 and 57. In both cases the meaningful centre is a refrain (v. 5 and vs. 11-12). Compare also [Psalm 59](#).

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 2-3, 4-5, 6-8 || 9-10b, 10c-12, 13-14 (2 cantos with 6 strophes, 14 (7 + 7) verselines and 31 cola).
- Fokkelman: 2-3, 4-5 || 6-8, 9-10 || 11-12, 13-14 (3 stanzas with 6 strophes, 14 (4 + 5 + 5) verselines and 31 cola).
- Labuschagne: 2-3, 4-5, 6-8 || 9-10, 11-12, 13-14 (2 cantos with 6 strophes, 14 (7 + 7) verselines and 31 cola, taking vs. 2-3 and 9-10 as 3 + 2 cola, and 11-12 as two bicola).

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 shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	לִמְנַצְחָה עַל־יּוֹנָת אֱלֹהִים רְחֻקִים לְדָוִד מִכַּתָּם	7	7			
	בְּאַחֲזוֹ אֹתוֹ פְּלִשְׁתִּים בְּנֹת:	4		4		
	Heading, v. 1	11	= 7	+ 4		
2	חַגְגִּי אֱלֹהִים 1	2	2		2	
	כִּי־שָׁאֲפְנִי אֲנוּשׁ	3	3		3	
	כָּל־הַיּוֹם לֶחֶם יִלְחָצְנִי:	4		4	4	
	Total, v. 2	9	= 5	+ 4	= 9	+ 0
3	שָׁאֲפוּ שׁוֹרְרֵי כָל־הַיּוֹם 2	4	4		4	
	כִּי־רַבִּים לַחֲמִים לִי מְרוֹם:	5		5	5	
	Total, v. 3	9	= 4	+ 5	= 9	+ 0
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 2-3	18	= 9	+ 9	= 18	+ 0
4	יּוֹם אִירָא אֲנִי אֵלֶיךָ אֲבָטָח:	3	5	2	3	5
5	Refrain in Canto I: בְּאֱלֹהִים אֶתְלַל דְּבָרוֹ 4	3	3			3
	meaningful centre בְּאֱלֹהִים בְּטַחְתִּי לֹא אִירָא	4	4			4
	spoken about God מִה־יַעֲשֶׂה בְּשֵׁר לִי:	4		4		4
	Total, v. 5	11	= 7	+ 4	= 0	+ 11
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 4-5	16	= 9	+ 7	= 5	+ 11
	Total, v. 2-5	34	= 18	+ 16	= 23	+ 11

6	כָּל־הַיּוֹם דִּבְרֵי יַעֲצִיבוּ [^]	5	4	4	4	
	עָלִי כָּל־מַחֲשַׁבְתָּם לְרַע:		4		4	4
	Total, v. 6		8	= 4 + 4	= 8	+ 0
7*	יְגוּרוּ יַצְפּוּנוּ*	6	2	2	2	
	הִמָּה עֲקֵבֵי יִשְׁמְרוּ [^]		3	3	3	
	כַּאֲשֶׁר קוּי נַפְשִׁי:		3		3	3
	Total, v. 7		8	= 5 + 3	= 8	+ 0
8	עַל־אֵן פִּלְט־לְמוּ [^]	7	4	4	4	
	בַּאֲךָ עַמִּים הוֹרֵד אֱלֹהִים:		4		4	4
	Middle word		8	= 4 + 4	= 8	+ 0
	109 = 54 + 1 + 54	Total, v. 8	24	= 13 + 11	= 24	+ 0
	Strophe 3	Total, v. 6-8	58	= 31 + 27	= 47	+ 11
	Canto I	Total, v. 2-8				
9	נִדְרֵי סִפְרָתָהּ אֶתָּה	8	3	3	3	
	שִׁמָּה דְמַעְתִּי בְנֹאדְךָ [^]		3	3	3	
	הֲלֹא בְסִפְרָתְךָ:		2		2	2
	Total, v. 9		8	= 6 + 2	= 8	+ 0
10	אֲזִי יִשׁוּבוּ אוֹיְבֵי אַחֲזֹר בְּיוֹם אֶקְרָא [^]	9	6	6	6	
	וְהִידַעְתִּי כִּי־אֱלֹהִים לִי:		5		5	(3) 5
	Total, v. 10		11	= 6 + 5	= 6	+ 5
	Strophe 4	Total, v. 9-10	19	= 12 + 7	= 14	+ 5
11	בְּאֱלֹהִים אֶחְלַל דְּבָרִי [^]	10	3	3	3	
	בִּיהִנֵּה אֶחְלַל דְּבָרִי:		3		3	3
12	בְּאֱלֹהִים בְּשַׁחְתִּי לֹא אִירָא [^]	11	4	4	4	
	מִה־יַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם לִי:		4		4	4
	Total, v. 12		8	= 4 + 4	= 0	+ 8
	Strophe 5	Total, v. 11-12	14	= 7 + 7	= 0	+ 14
13	עָלִי אֱלֹהִים נִדְרִיךָ [^]	12	3	3	3	
	אֲשַׁלֵּם תּוֹדַת לְךָ:		3		3	3
14	כִּי הִצַּלְתָּ נַפְשִׁי מִמָּוֶת	13	4	4	4	
	הֲלֹא רִגְלִי מִדְּחִי		3	3	3	
	לְהַתְּחַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי אֱלֹהִים [^]	14	3	3	3	
	בְּאוֹר הַחַיִּים:		2		2	2
	Strophe 6	Total, v. 13-14	18	= 13 + 5	= 18	+ 0
	Total, v. 12-14		26	= 17 + 9	= 18	+ 8
	Canto II	Total, v. 9-14	51	= 32 + 19	= 32	+ 19
	Total, v. 6-14		75	= 45 + 30	= 56	+ 19
	Total, v. 2-14		109	= 63 + 46	= 79	+ 30
	With the heading, v. 1-14		120	= 70 + 50		

* In v. 7a I follow the Masoretic Qere reading – see BHS.

Observations

1. The middle word is **בְּאַרְף**, 'in wrath', in v. 8b (109 = 54 + 1 + 54). A meaningful centre may be found on colon level: **v. 9a** (31 = 15 + 1 + 15):

נָדַרְתָּ סִפְרָתָהּ אָתָּה You yourself record my wailing.*

* Literally 'my nodding', accompanying the act of wailing. Compare the typical body movements to be seen at the Wailing (western) Wall in Jerusalem.

However, It is doubtful whether the middle colon is really the consciously designed meaningful centre, for it does not exactly represent the essence of the psalm. In my judgment, Psalm 56 has *two* meaningful centres, one in each of its two cantos.

2. The poem divides into two **7**-verseline cantos (which Van der Lugt calls 'a double menorah-like pattern - compare the structure of Psalm 92):

Canto I (vs. 2-8) with **7** verselines and **58** words

Canto II (vs. 9-14) with **7** verselines and **51** (3 x 17) words.

The refrain in Canto I, **v. 5**, is clearly its meaningful centre. Its outstanding position is reinforced by the fact that it is phrased as words spoken *about* God within the context of words directly addressed to God:

בְּאֱלֹהִים אֶתְלַל דְּבָרֹךְ בְּאֱלֹהִים בְּטַחְתִּי לֹא אֵירָא ^ מִהַיְעֲשֶׂה בְּשָׂרִי לִי

In God whose word I praise, in God I trust, I fear not; what can flesh do to me?

In Canto II, it is likewise the refrain, **vs. 11-12**, that constitutes its meaningful centre:

בְּאֱלֹהִים אֶתְלַל דְּבָרֹךְ ^ בֵּיתְךָ אֶתְלַל דְּבָרֹךְ¹¹

בְּאֱלֹהִים בְּטַחְתִּי לֹא אֵירָא ^ מִהַיְעֲשֶׂה אֲדָם לִי¹²

In God whose word I praise, in YHWH whose word I praise,

In God I trust, I fear not; what can man do to me?

The two meaningful centres are almost identical refrains. They clearly express the gist of the psalm: the poet's conviction that the God, in whom he trusts, will protect him from man's hostility.

3. The sudden change in the direction of address in vs. 13-14, the concluding strophe, is reminiscent of the codas in Psalms 54:9, 55:24, and 59:18b-c. This means that the concluding strophe, v. 13-14, is a coda. For the coda, see the General Introduction.
4. The author appears to have used not only the direction of address to give structure to his text and to weave the divine name numbers into its fabric, but also syntax:

vs. 2-5	34 (2 x 17) words: 26 in the main, 8 in the subordinate clauses
vs. 2-10	34 (2 x 17) words after atnach
vs. 12-14	26 words in total, with 17 before atnach
vs. 9-14	51 (3 x 17) words in total (Canto II)
vs. 6-12	51 (3 x 17) words in the main clauses
vs. 2-14	26 words in the subordinate clauses.

5. There are 10 references to God: **אֱלֹהִים** occurs 9 times and **יְהוָה** once (v. 11b).

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