

# Psalm 82— 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 the "[Key to the charts](#)".

## Specific features of Psalm 82

- Like Psalm 81, to which it is the follow-up, Psalm 82 is a showpiece of numerical compositional craftsmanship. As in Psalm 81, the key to determining the compositional structure lies in differentiating between the words spoken by the prophet and those spoken by God. It turns out that the **58** words of the psalm, divide into **26** spoken by the prophet and **32** spoken by God, explicitly constituting the well-known *kebod*-YHWH formula **58 = 26 + 32**. The formula significantly reappears in the canto structure, which is not surprising, seeing that **58** also represents the numerical value of the important divine title עֶלְיוֹן, 'Most High' (16+12+10+6+14), a keyword of paramount importance.
- The meaningful centre of the psalm is the 6-word statement in **v. 5a-b** describing the complete lack of understanding and knowledge by the 'gods', significantly flanked by **26** words on either side: **58 = 26 + 6 + 26**.  
From the perspective of the apparent 'heavenly scene' (vs. 1-4) and the 'earthly scene' (vs. 5c-8), the author has arranged the text in an astoundingly skilful way so as to depict the 'nowhere' position of the 'gods' after God's judgement.
- The meaningful centre falls within the *middle strophe*, v. 5, which is the pivot of a perfect concentric menorah structure overlying the five strophes – see Observation 3.

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

- Van der Lugt, Fokkelman and Labuschagne: 1-2, 3-4 || 5, 6-7, 8 (2 cantos with 5 strophes, 8 verselines and **17** cola).

## Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words spoken by the prophet; **d**: words God addresses to the 'gods'.
- The numbering of the verselines is in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	מְזֹמֹר לְאַסָּף	Heading	2	2		
	אֱלֹהִים נִצָּב בְּעֵדֹתֶי-אֱלֹהִים	1	4	4	4	
	בְּקֶרֶב אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁפֹּט:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 1	7	= 4	+ 3	= 7	+ 0
2	עַד-מָתִי תִשְׁפֹּטוּ-עוֹלָם	2	4			4
	וּפְנֵי רְשָׁעִים תִּשְׁאוּ-סֵלָה:	3		3		3
	Total, v. 2	7	= 4	+ 3	= 0	+ 7
	<b>Strophe 1</b> Total, v. 1-2	14	= 8	+ 6	= 7	+ 7
3	שִׁפְטוּ-דָל וְיִתּוֹם	3	3			3
	עֲנֵי וְרֵשׁ הַצְּדִיקִים:	3		3		3
	Total, v. 3	6	= 3	+ 3	= 0	+ 6
4	פִּלְטוּ-דָל וְאַבְיוֹן	4	3			3
	מִיַּד רְשָׁעִים הַצִּילוּ:	3		3		3
	Total, v. 4	6	= 3	+ 3	= 0	+ 6
	Total, v. 3-4	12	= 6	+ 6	= 0	+ 12
	<b>Strophe 2</b> Total, v. 2-4	19	= 10	+ 9	= 0	+ 19
	<b>Canto I</b> Total, v. 1-4	26	= 14	+ 12	= 7	+ 19

5	Middle colon: 8 + 1 + 8	לא ידעו ולא יבינו	5a	4	4	4
	Middle words: 26 + 6 + 26	בחשכה יתהלכו	5b	2	2	2
		ימוטו כל־מוסרי ארץ:	5c	4	4	4
	Middle strophe: Strophe 3	Total, v. 5		10	= 6 + 4	= 10 + 0
		Total, v. 1-5		36	= 20 + 16	= 17 + 19
6	א, see v. 7.	אני־אמרתני אלהים אתם	6	4	4	4
		ובני עליון כל־כם:		3	3	3
	(16+12+10+6+14), the total	Total, v. 6		7	= 4 + 3	= 0 + 7
	number of words in the psalm.	Total, v. 5-6		17	= 10 + 7	= 10 + 7
	See Observation 5.	Total, v. 1-6		43	= 30 + 19	= 17 + 26
7		אכן באדם תמותו־אין	7	3	3	3
	Alphabetising device	וכאחד השרים תפלו:		3	3	3
	for inclusion. See Observation 3.	Total, v. 7		6	= 3 + 3	= 0 + 6
	אחד = 13 (1 + 8 + 4)	Strophe 4 Total, v. 6-7		13	= 7 + 6	= 0 + 13
	See Observation 3.	Total, v. 5-7		23	= 13 + 10	= 10 + 13
8		קומה אלהים שפטה הארץ	8	4	4	4
		כי־אתה תנחל בכל־הגוים:		5	5	5
	Strophe 5	Total, v. 8		9	= 4 + 5	= 9 + 0
	Canto II	Total, v. 5-8		32	= 17 + 15	= 19 + 13
		Total, v. 5c-8		26	= 11 + 15	= 9 + 17
		Total, v. 2-8		51	= 27 + 24	= 19 + 32
		Total, v. 1-8		58	= 31 + 27	= 26 + 32
	With the heading and סֵלָה (1x), v. 1-8			61	= 33 + 28	

## Observations

- The 2 middle words of the poem are **לא ידעו ולא יבינו**, ‘and they understand nothing’ (v. 5a), but it is the 6 words in **5a-b** that constitute the meaningful centre. It is significantly flanked by **26** words on either side (**58 = 26 + 6 + 26**):

**לא ידעו ולא יבינו בחשכה יתהלכו**

They know nothing and understand nothing; in darkness they walk about.

The statement about the insignificance of the non-gods expresses the leading idea of the psalm: the outcome of God’s charge against them and his challenge to prove what they presume to be. No wonder that it is positioned at the centre and flanked by **26** words symbolizing the presence of the One and Only God in heaven and earth.

In terms of ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’, the psalm divides into two scenes: the *heavenly scene*, where God presides at the meeting of the ‘divine council’ (vs. 1-4), and the *earthly scene* (vs. 5c-8), demarcated by the *inclusion* **ארץ**, ‘earth’ (vs. 5c and 8a).

It is most intriguing to note how the mere compositional arrangement of the text vividly expresses the ‘nowhere’ disposition of the ‘gods’:

vs. 1-4	Heavenly scene: God challenges the gods	<b>26</b> words
vs. 5a-b	<b>The gods are literally nowhere</b>	<b>6</b> words
vs. 5c-8	Earthly scene: implications for the earth	<b>26</b> words.

The phoney gods are literally depicted as dangling in the middle of nowhere, in the void between heaven and earth. For particulars I refer to my remarks on Psalm 82 in my book *Numerical Secrets of the Bible*, p. 143-145.

In terms of the 5 strophes of the psalm, the meaningful centre falls within the *middle strophe*, v. 5, the pivot of a perfect menorah structure – see below - which stands out as the only tricoloric verseline in the poem.

The meaningful centre of the **58-word** psalm is highlighted by the *middle instance* of the **17** cola (v. 5a): **17 = 8 + 1 + 8**. In light of this, it is intriguing to note that in the closely related Psalm 81, the *middle colon* is flanked by **17** cola (**17 + 1 + 17**), and by **58** words on either side (**58 + 4 + 58**)! See Observation 1 in my analysis of [Psalm 81](#).

- There is another striking similarity between the two psalms: in both psalms the division of the **58** words articulates the *kebod*-YHWH formula, **58 = 26 + 32**, in a most explicit way. Here, exactly **26** words are spoken by the prophet (Column c), while **32** words are spoken by God (Column d). In Column c (v. 8), **9** words are directly addressed to God, which gives the striking division: **26 = 17 + 9**. The *kebod*-YHWH formula reappears in the canto structure: **26** words in Canto I and **32** in Canto II.

This is a crucial piece of evidence shedding new light on the question in regards the identity of the speaker in vs. 6-7, about which there is no agreement among scholars. However, the problem can now be resolved decisively: the **13** words in vs. 6-7 should be attributed to God speaking as the Judge, who gives his final verdict as the follow-on to the conclusion already drawn by the prophet in v. 5. For more than 40 years, I had confidently defended the view that vs. 6-7 was spoken by the prophet,\* but in light of the new insights into the logotechnical framework of the psalm I have now definitely changed my mind.

- In terms of the utterances by the prophet and the words spoken by God, the psalm divides into a perfect concentric menorah pattern, with v. 5 at the centre:

v. 1	The prophet introduces God as Judge		7	} 17
v. 2	God charges the gods	7	} 19	
vs. 3-4	God challenges the gods	12		
v. 5	The prophet draws his conclusion		10	} 13
v. 6	God considers their presumed status	7	} 6	
v. 7	God announces his verdict	6		
v. 8	The prophet calls on God to judge		9	
vs. 1-8	The entire dialogue		<b>32 + 26 = 58</b>	

Note how the keyword, שָׁפֵט, 'to judge', functions as an *inclusion*: יִשְׁפֹּט, 'he judges', (1b) and שֹׁפֵטָה, 'judge!' (8a), in support of the real *inclusion*: אֱלֹהִים stands' in v. 1a and 'stand up, אֱלֹהִים' in v. 8a. The inclusion is all the more significant, because it is only in vs. 1a and 8a that אֱלֹהִים, refers to YHWH, although the name YHWH does not occur in the poem. The other instances of אֱלֹהִים (1b, 6a) refer to the 'gods'.

Another device for inclusion, noticed by Pieter van der Lugt (private communication) is the use of the initial letters *aleph* and *taw* in the first and last words of vs. 6-7, to delimit this **13**-word passage, which is the high point of the psalm: God's final judgement and condemnation of the phoney gods. For the Aleph-Taw device for inclusion, see my Analysis of [Psalm 1](#).

\* See my article "Some Remarks on the Translation and Meaning of 'amarti in the Psalms", in *New Light on some Old Testament Problems: Papers Read at 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting* (O.T. Werkgeemenskap in Suid-Afrika) Pretoria 1962, pp. 27-33, as well as my dissertation *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament*, Leiden 1966, pp. 83-86, and most recently *Numerical Secrets of Bible*, 200, pp. 143-145.

The use of exactly **13** words for God's judgement is, in my opinion, deliberate in order to highlight Yahweh's one-ness, for **13** is the numerical value of **אחד**, 'one' (1+8+4). Note that the word occurs in v. 7b.

4. Apart from the divine name numbers encountered above, they feature also, together with the *kabod* numbers **23** and **32**, in the following instances:

vs. 1-4	<b>26</b> words in total
vs. 5-6	<b>17</b> words in total
vs. 1-6	<b>43</b> words in total: <b>17</b> spoken by the prophet and <b>26</b> by God
vs. 5-7	<b>23</b> words in total
vs. 5-8	<b>32</b> words in total, with <b>17</b> words before <i>atnach</i>
vs. 5c-8	<b>17</b> words in Column <b>d</b>
vs. 2-8	<b>51</b> (3 x <b>17</b> ) words in total
vs. 1-8	<b>58</b> words in total: <b>26</b> in Column <b>c</b> , and <b>32</b> in Column <b>d</b> .

5. As in most Asaphite psalms, the name YHWH is lacking; in Psalm 82 he is twice referred to as **אֱלֹהִים**, 'God' (vs. 1a and 8a). In vs. 1b and 6a the word designates the 'gods'. In v. 1a God is called **אֵל**, and more importantly, **עֲלִיּוֹן**, 'the Most High', in 6b. The word **אֵל** in the phrase **בְּעֵדֹתֶיךָ אֵל**, 'in the divine assembly', relates to the pagan idea of a meeting of gods at which the 'High God' presides, in this case, God! That is why the title **עֲלִיּוֹן**, 'the Most High', was explicitly chosen in the term denoting the divine beings: **בְּנֵי עֲלִיּוֹן**, 'sons of the Most High' in v. 6b. This honorific and highest title is strictly reserved for YHWH, to indicate his exalted status above the gods.

It is therefore not surprising to find that **עֲלִיּוֹן** occurs exactly **7x** in the Asaphite Psalms (73-83): Pss. 73:11, 77:11, 78:17.**35.56**, 82:6, 83:19, which expresses the fullness of Yahweh's elevated status above all gods, the leading theme of these eleven Psalms. In fact, the Asaphite Psalms are fundamentally concerned with the idea of divine justice and Yahweh's mysterious rule over the world and its 'gods, with Psalm 82 as the absolute high point: Yahweh's condemnation of the gods because of their mismanagement of the world. See pp. 6-7 in the [Introduction to Book III](#).

No wonder that the numerical value of **עֲלִיּוֹן**, **58**, has been used to determine the total number of words in Psalm 82, exactly as in the heart of Psalm 78 (vs. 32-39)! Please consult Observations 2 and 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 78](#).

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