

Psalm 83— 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 83

- Psalm 83 is the last of the closely connected 11 Asaphite Psalms in Book III sharing several common features in terms of form and content.

The psalm divides into three main sections:

- Canto I (vs. 2-9) **Cry for help** seeing the genocide planned by Israel's enemies
- Central Section (vs. 10-17) **Prayer** for their downfall, made up of **51** (3 x 17) words
- Coda (vs. 18-19) **Prayer** for their ruin and their recognition of Yahweh the Most High.

- In accordance with the compositional technique used in most of these psalms, the meaningful centre of Psalm 83 is primarily defined by the poetic structure: vs. 10-11, the 2 middle verselines, coinciding with the 5 middle cola.
- The last verse contains the 7th instance of the keyword עֲלִיּוֹן, 'Most High', permeating through the Asaphite psalms as their leading theological notion. See Observation 4.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 2-5, 6-9 || 10-13, 14-17, 18-19 (2 cantos with 5 strophes, 18 verselines and 38 cola, taking v. 12 as a tricolon).
- Fokkelman: 2-3, 4-6, 7-9 || 10-11, 12-13, 14-15 || 16-17, 18-19 (3 cantos with 8 strophes, 18 verselines and 37 cola).
- Labuschagne: same as Van der Lugt, except that I find 37 cola, taking v. 12 as a bicolon.

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after *atnach*.
- Column **c**: lament over the planned genocide and the prayer for its failure;
- Column **d**: Central Section: prayer specifically for the downfall of the enemies.
- The numbering of the verselines is in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	שִׁיר מִזְמוֹר לְאַסָּף: Heading, v. 1	3	= 3	+ 0		
2	אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מִי־לָדָּא אֶל־תִּחַרֶשׁ וְאֶל־תִּשְׁקֹט אֵל: Total, v. 2	9	= 4	+ 5	= 9	+ 0
3	כִּי־הִנֵּה אֹיְבֵיךָ יַהֲמִינִין וּמִשְׁנֵאֵיךָ נִשְׂאוּ רֹאשׁ: Total, v. 3	7	= 4	+ 3	= 7	+ 0
4	עַל־עַמֶּךָ יַעֲרִימוּ סוֹדָא וַיִּתְעַצְּוּ עַל־צַבּוֹנֶיךָ: Total, v. 4	7	= 4	+ 3	= 7	+ 0
5	אָמְרוּ לְכוּ וְנִכְחָדֵם מִגּוֹיֵי וְלֹא־יִזְכָּר שֵׁם־יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹד: Total, v. 5	9	= 4	+ 5	= 9	+ 0
	Total, v. 3-5	23	= 12	+ 11	= 23	+ 0
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 2-5	32	= 16	+ 16	= 32	+ 0

6	כי נועצו לב יחדיו ^א עליה ברית יכרתו: Total, v. 6	5	4	4	4		
			3		3	3	
			<hr/>				
			7	= 4 + 3	= 7 + 0		
7	אֱהִי אֲדוֹם וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים מוֹצֵב וְהַגְרִים: Total, v. 7	6	3	3	3		
			2	2	2		
			<hr/>				
			5	= 5 + 0	= 5 + 0		
8	גָּבַל וַעֲמֹזַן וַעֲמֵלְקָא פְּלִשְׁתַּי עִם־יִשְׂבִי צוּר: Total, v. 8 Total, v. 2-8	7	3	3	3		
			4		4	4	
			<hr/>				
			7	= 3 + 4	= 7 + 0		
			<hr/>				
			51	= 28 + 23	= 51 + 0		
9	גַּם־אֲשׁוּר גָּלוּהָ עַמָּם הָיוּ זְרוּעַ לְבָנֵי־לוֹט סָלָה: Total, v. 9 Strophe 2 Total, v. 6-9 Canto I Total, v. 2-9	8	4	4	4		
			4		4	4	
			<hr/>				
			8	= 4 + 4	= 8 + 0		
			<hr/>				
			27	= 16 + 11	= 27 + 0		
			<hr/>				
			59	= 32 + 27	= 59 + 0		
10	The 2 middle words (126 = 62 + 2 + 62) The middle colon (37 = 18 + 1 + 18) Vs. 10-11: the 2 middle verselines the 5 middle cola (37 = 16 + 5 + 16)	עֲשֵׂה־לָהֶם כְּמִדְּוָיָן כְּסִיסְרָא כְּיָבִין בְּנַחַל קִישׁוֹן: Total, v. 10	9	3	3	3	
			2		2	2	
			<hr/>				
			2		2	2	
			<hr/>				
			7	= 3 + 4	= 0 + 7		
11		נִשְׁמְדוּ בְּעֵין־דָּאֲרָא הָיוּ דְמֵן לְאֲדָמָה: Total, v. 11 Total, v. 10-11	10	3	3	3	
			3		3	3	
			<hr/>				
			6	= 3 + 3	= 0 + 6		
			<hr/>				
			13	= 6 + 7	= 0 + 13		
12	שִׁיתְמוּ נְדִיבְמוּ כְּעַרְב וְכִזְאָבָא * See note below : כל־נְסִיכְמוּ : Total, v. 12	11	4	4	4		
			4		4	4	
			<hr/>				
			8	= 4 + 4	= 0 + 8		
13	Middle words of the Central Section: 51=23+5+23 (Middle) Strophe 3 Total, v. 10-13	אֲשֶׁר אָמְרוּ בִּירְשָׁה לְנוּ אֵת נְאוֹת אֱלֹהִים: Total, v. 13	12	4	4	4	
			3		3	3	
			<hr/>				
			7	= 4 + 3	= 0 + 7		
			<hr/>				
			28	= 14 + 14	= 0 + 28		
14	אֱלֹהֵי שִׁיתְמוּ כְּגִלְגֵּלָא כְּקַשׁ לְפָנֵי־רוּחַ: Total, v. 14 Total, v. 10-14	13	3	3	3		
			3		3	3	
			<hr/>				
			6	= 3 + 3	= 0 + 6		
			<hr/>				
			34	= 17 + 17	= 0 + 34		
15	כָּאֵשׁ תִּבְעַר־יַעֲרָא וְכִלְהָבָה תִּלְהַט הָרִים: Total, v. 15	14	3	3	3		
			3		3	3	
			<hr/>				
			6	= 3 + 3	= 0 + 6		
16	כֵּן תִּרְדְּפֶם בְּסַעֲרָא וּבְסוּפְתָא תִּבְהִלֶם: Total, v. 16	15	3	3	3		
			2		2	2	
			<hr/>				
			5	= 3 + 2	= 0 + 5		
17	מִלֵּא פְּנִיָּהֶם קָלוּן וַיִּבְקְשׁוּ שְׂמָךְ יְהוָה: Total, v. 17 Total, v. 15-17 Strophe 4 Total, v. 14-17 Central Section v. 10-17	16	3	3	3		
			3		3	3	
			<hr/>				
			6	= 3 + 3	= 0 + 6		
			<hr/>				
			17	= 9 + 8	= 0 + 17		
			<hr/>				
			23	= 12 + 11	= 0 + 23		
			<hr/>				
			51	= 26 + 25	= 0 + 51		

18	יבשו ויבהלו ערי־עד ויחפרו ויאבדו: Total, v. 18 Total, v. 16-18	17	4	4	4	2	2	2	<u>6 = 6 + 0 = 6 + 0</u> <u>17 = 12 + 5 = 6 + 11</u>
19	וידעו כי־אתה שמך יתנה לבדיה ^א על־כל־הארץ: Total, v. 19	18	6	6	6	4	4	4	<u>10 = 6 + 4 = 10 + 0</u> <u>16 = 12 + 4 = 16 + 0</u> <u>67 = 38 + 29 = 16 + 51</u> <u>126 = 70 + 56 = 75 + 51</u> <u>129 = 73 + 56</u> <u>130 = 73 + 57</u>
Coda	Strophe 5 Total, v. 18-19 Canto II Total, v. 10-19 Total, v. 2-19 With the heading, v. 1-19 With סֵלָה (1x), v. 1-19								

* On structural grounds (*metri causa*) many commentators (Gunkel, Schmidt, Kraus, Fokkelman, and others) regard the two words **וּכְזַבְחָהּ וּכְזַלְמוֹנָהּ**, ‘and like Zebah and Zalmunna’, in v. 12b, as a later insertion. In my view, on logotechnical grounds, the two words should be retained. Deleting them would involve moving the attached one word back (see *BHS*). Moreover, the loss of two names will play havoc with the exactly **17** names mentioned in vs. 6-12, namely the **10** conspiring, and the **7** conquered enemies. Note that Lot (9b) is left out of the count, because his sons, Moab and Ammon, are already mentioned (vs. 7b and 8a).

Observations

- In terms of the 126 words of the psalm, the two words **כְּסִיסְרָא כְּיַבִּין**, ‘as with Sisera and Jabin’, in v. 10b, form the arithmetic centre: $126 = 62 + 2 + 62$. Since the two words could hardly have been intended to constitute a meaningful centre, we have to look for such a centre in terms of the poetical structure, in line with the commonly used compositional technique in the Asaphite psalms.

The middle colon is **v. 10c**, **בְּנַחַל קִישׁוֹן**, ‘at the river Kison’, the 3rd colon of the only tricolonic verseline in the poem ($37 = 18 + 1 + 18$). In its turn, this colon is situated at the centre of the **5** middle cola ($37 = 16 + 2+1+2 + 16$) coinciding with the 2 central verselines, **vs. 10-11**, which are the best candidate for meaningful centre.

עֲשֵׂה־לָהֶם כְּמִדְיָן אֱ
כְּסִיסְרָא כְּיַבִּין בְּנַחַל קִישׁוֹן:
נִשְׁמְרוּ בְּעֵין־דְּאֵרָא הָיוּ דָמָן לְאֲדָמָה:

Deal with them as with Midian, as with Sisera and Jabin at the river Kison,
Who were destroyed at En-dor, who became dung for the ground!

The prayer for the total destruction of the enemies may be regarded as the leading idea of the psalm. Its meaningfulness is underscored by the concluding prayer - the coda as the high point at the end of the psalm - vs. 18-19: “Let them be put to shame and dismayed for ever; let them perish in disgrace. Let them know that you alone, whose name is YHWH, are the Most High over all the earth.”

In addition to the meaningful centre of the entire poem, Canto I and the Central Section have their own central peaks, a feature our psalm shares with a considerable number of other psalms. In Canto I, vs. 2-9, it is to be found in the **8** words attributed to the enemies (v. 5), which is slightly off-centre, but significantly surrounded by **51** words ($24 + 27 = 3 \times 17$), giving prominence to the central peak ($59 = 24 + 8 + 27$):

לְכוּ וּנְכַחֲדֵם מִגּוֹי אֱ וְלֹא־יִזְכָּר שֵׁם־יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹד:

Let us wipe them out as a nation / let the name of Israel be remembered no more!

In the Central Section, vs. 10-17, the meaningful centre is to be found in the 5 words attributed to the enemies in v. 13. Here their words precisely constitute the arithmetic centre on word level, which is obviously deliberately designed ($51 = 23 + 5 + 23$):

נִרְשָׁה לָנוּ ^ אֶת נְאוֹת אֱלֹהִים:

Let us seize for ourselves / the territory of God!

Both central peaks forcefully direct attention to the reason behind the prayer for the ruin of the enemies: their plan to root out the people of Israel and seize their territory.

2. In terms of material content and the logotechnical features, the psalm divides into 3 sections, of which the Central Section, vs. 10-17, comprises the prayer for the downfall of the enemies. The Central Section is significantly made up of 17 cola and 51 (3 x 17) words (Column d). Compare the 78-word (3 x 26) central section of [Psalm 77](#), and the 52-word (2 x 26) central section of [Psalm 80](#) surrounded by 78 (3 x 26) words, as well as that of [Psalm 81](#), which is surrounded by 51 (3 x 17) words!

Canto I, vs. 2-9 (16 cola, 59 words) Lament over the planned genocide

Central Section, vs. 10-17 (17 cola, 51 w.) Prayer for the death of the enemies

Coda, vs. 18-19 (4 cola, 16 words) The concluding prayer.

The lament in Canto I is significantly delimited by the *selah* at the end of v. 9. To reinforce the unity of Canto I, its two subsections, vs. 2-5 and 6-9, are closely linked by a numerical chiasmus based on the division by *atnach*:

vs. 2-5 32 = 16 + 16 words

vs. 6-9 27 = 16 + 11 words

vs. 2-9 59 = 32 + 27 words.

The 51 (3 x 17) words of the Central Section are divided into 26 before and 25 after *atnach*, which supports my supposition that the choice for exactly 51 words was deliberate. Moreover, within this section, vs. 10-14 have exactly 34 words, with 17 before and 17 after *atnach*, while vs. 14-16 and 15-17 have 17 words each.

3. In light of the clear delimitation of vs. 10-17, I agree with Van der Lugt, that we have to regard vs. 18-19 as a coda within Canto II, containing the concluding prayer for the downfall of the enemies in utter disgrace. The lesson to be learned by the enemies is that they should recognize once and for all the superiority of the God of Israel - whose name is YHWH, the Most High over all the earth.

In this way, Psalm 83 brings to completion the theme of Psalm 82. YHWH's unmasking of the 'gods' as non-entities implies the downfall of those who serve them.

4. Of particular interest is the use - in the last verse - of the Supreme God's important title, עֲלִיּוֹן, 'Most High'. It does not only fit the immediate context excellently, it also completes the series of 7 occurrences of this crucial keyword in the Asaphite Psalms of Book III (73:11, 77:11, 78:17, 78:35, 78:56, 82:6 and 83:19).

For the significance of the middle occurrence in Ps. 78:35, see Observation 1 and 2 in my Analysis of [Psalm 78](#). See also my remarks on the Asaphite Psalms in the Introduction to the Psalms of [Book III](#).

5. Including the 3-word heading and the *selah*, the total number of words in the whole text amount to **130** (5 x **26**). From a logotechnical viewpoint, the grand total of **130** words may be regarded as deliberately designed. If so, it can be adduced as an additional argument to maintain the two disputed words of MT in v. 12b. In other words, in the final redaction of the text – in the editorial phase in the formation of the Psalter - the 3-word heading and the *selah*, were added, among other reasons, to achieve exactly **130** words – precisely as in the poetical bodies of Psalms 79 and 80.
6. The divine name numbers and the *kabod* numbers are woven into the fabric of the text in the following fashion:
- vs. 3-5 **23** words in total
 - vs. 2-5 **32** words in total
 - vs. 2-8 **51** (3 x **17**) word in total, with **23** after atnach
 - vs. 2-9 **32** words before atnach
 - vs. 10-14 **34** words in total, with **17** before and **17** after atnach
 - vs. 14-16 **17** words in total
 - vs. 15-17 **17** words in total
 - vs. 10-17 **51** (3 x **17**) words in total, with **26** before atnach
 - vs. 16-18 **17** words in total
 - vs. 6-9 **10** nations that conspire to annihilate Israel are mentioned: Edomites, Ishmaelites, Moabites, Hagrites, Gebal, Ammon, Amalek, Philistia, Tyre, and Assyria, and
 - vs. 10-12 **7** conquered enemies: Midian (Judges 6-7), Sisera and Jabin (Judges 4-5), Oreb and Zeeb (Judg. 7:25), Zebah and Zalmunna (Judg. 8:21). Altogether **17**.
 - vs. 1-19 **130** (5 x **26**) words in the entire text.
7. The name יהוה occurs 2x, only at the end of the psalm, in vs. 17 and 19, while אלהים appears 3x (vs. 2, 13, and 14). The designation אל features in the first verseline, vs. 2b, and the important title עֲלֵי־יוֹן in the last, v. 19b, together clearly functioning as a device for inclusion. This means that there are altogether **7** references to God in the psalm – a symbolical expression of the 'fullness' of his presence. Compare Observation 7 in my Analysis of [Psalm 84](#).

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