

Psalm 85— 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 85

- Like Psalm 84, with which it forms a pair sharing many features, Psalm 85 has a strong and lucid canto structure based on the division of the text into words addressed to God (Canto I, vs. 2-8), and words spoken *about* God (Canto II, vs. 9-14).
- Another feature this psalm shares with Psalm 84 - but also with several others - is the use of the numerical value of important words in the text to define the number of words in part of it: in this case, **47**, the numerical value of Jacob, the words spoken *about* God, and **32**, the numerical value of **כְּבוֹד**, 'glory', the number of words in vs. 4-8 and 10-14.
- A feature Psalm 85 shares with several other psalms, is that it has more than one meaningful centre, as observed by Van der Lugt: the middle verseline (v. 5) in Canto I, and the middle verseline (v. 11) in Canto II, in addition to that of the entire psalm (v. 9). The latter **15**-word centre is embedded in the numerical structure of the 79-word section, vs. 4-14, flanked by the *kabod* number **32** (**32** + **15** + **32**).
- Psalm 85 is concluded by a coda, like Psalm 84.

Strophic structure Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 2-4, 5-6, 7-8 || 9-10, 11-12, 13-14 (2 cantos with 6 strophes, 14 verselines, and 28 cola).
- Fokkelman: similarly (2 stanzas with 6 strophes, 14 verselines, and 28 cola).
- Labuschagne: 2-3, 4-6, 7-8 || 9, 10, 11-12, 13-14 (2 cantos with 7 strophes, 14 verselines and 28 cola).

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words addressed to God (Canto I); **d**: words spoken about God (Canto II).
- The numbering of the verselines is in **brown**.

			Total	a	b	c	d
1	לְמִנְצִיחַ לְבֵנֵי־קִרְחַ מְזֻמּוֹר:	Heading, v. 1	4	4			
2	קִרְחַ = 47	רְצִיחַ יְהוָה אֲרֻצְדָּה 1	3	3		3	
	יַעֲקֹב = 47	שְׁבֹת שְׁבוֹת יַעֲקֹב:	3		3	3	
		Total, v. 2	6	= 3	+ 3	= 6	+ 0
3		נְשָׂאתָ עֵינַי עֲמֻדָּה 2	3	3		3	
		כָּסִיתָ כָּל־חַטָּאתָם סֶלָה:	3		3	3	
		Total, v. 3	6	= 3	+ 3	= 6	+ 0
		Strophe 1 Total, v. 2-3	12	= 6	+ 6	= 12	+ 0

4	אֶסְפֹּת כָּל־עֲבָרְתָּ֣הּ	3	3	3	3
	הַיְשִׁיבוֹתָ מִחֲרוֹן אַפְּיָ֑הּ:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 4		6	= 3 + 3	= 6 + 0
5	Middle verseline of שׁוּבְנוּ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעֵנוּ֙	4	3	3	3
	וְהִפֵּר כַּעֲסָךָ עִמָּנוּ:		3	3	3
	Canto I (7 = 3 + 1 + 3)		6	= 3 + 3	= 6 + 0
	Total, v. 5		6	= 3 + 3	= 6 + 0
6	הִלְעוֹלָם תִּאֲנַף־בְּנוֹיֶ֑הּ	5	3	3	3
	תִּמְשֵׁךְ אַפְּיָהּ לְדָרַךְ וְדָרַךְ:		4	4	4
	Total, v. 6		7	= 3 + 4	= 7 + 0
	Total, v. 5-6		13	= 6 + 7	= 13 + 0
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 4-6		19	= 9 + 10	= 19 + 0
7	הֲלֹא־אַתָּה תִּשׁוּב תַּחֲנוּנֵי־	6	4	4	4
	וְעַמְּךָ יִשְׁמַח־בְּךָ:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 7		7	= 4 + 3	= 7 + 0
8	הֲרֵאֵנוּ יְהוָה חֲסֵדְךָ֙	7	3	3	3
	וְיִשְׁעָךָ תַּתֵּן־לָנוּ:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 8		6	= 3 + 3	= 6 + 0
	Total, v. 5-6		13	= 6 + 7	= 13 + 0
	Strophe 3 Total, v. 7-8		13	= 7 + 6	= 13 + 0
	Numerical Chiasmus, v. 5-8		26	= 13 + 13	= 26 + 0
	Total, v. 4-8		32	= 16 + 16	= 32 + 0
	Canto I Total, v. 2-8		44	= 22 + 22	= 44 + 0
9	Middle words הָאֵל יְהוָה אֲשַׁמְעָה מִהֲיִדְבַּר	8	5	5	5
	(44 + 3 + 44)		3	3	3
	כִּי יְדַבֵּר שְׁלוֹם		4	4	4
	אֶל־עַמּוֹ וְאֶל־חֲסִידָיו֙	9	4	4	4
	וְאֶל־יְשׁוּבוֹ לְכִסְלָהּ:		3	3	3
	at the centre of the middle strophe:		15	= 12 + 3	= 0 + 15
	(15 = 7 + 1 + 7)		15	= 12 + 3	= 0 + 15
	Strophe 4 Total, v. 9		15	= 12 + 3	= 0 + 15
10	אֵךְ קָרוֹב לִירְאָיו יִשְׁעוּ֙	10	4	4	4
	לְשֹׁכֵי כְבוֹד בְּאַרְצֵנוּ:		3	3	3
	כְּבוֹד = 32		7	= 4 + 3	= 0 + 7
	Strophe 5 Total, v. 10		7	= 4 + 3	= 0 + 7
11	Middle verseline of חֲסֵד־וְאַמֶּת נִפְגְּשׁוּ֙	11	3	3	3
	צַדִּיק וְשְׁלוֹם נִשְׁקוּ:		3	3	3
	Canto II (7 = 3 + 1 + 3)		6	= 3 + 3	= 0 + 6
	Total, v. 11		6	= 3 + 3	= 0 + 6
	Total, v. 10-11		13	= 7 + 6	= 0 + 13
12	אַמֶּת מֵאֲרִיץ תִּצְמַח־	12	3	3	3
	וְצַדִּיק מִשְׁמַיִם נִשְׁקַף:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 12		6	= 3 + 3	= 0 + 6
	Strophe 6 Total, v. 11-12		12	= 6 + 6	= 0 + 12
	Total, v. 9-12		34	= 22 + 12	= 0 + 34

13	Coda: vs. 13-14?	גַּם־יִהְיֶה יִתֵּן הַטּוֹבָה ^	13	4	4	4
		וְאֶרְצֶנּוּ תִתֵּן יְבוּלָהּ:		3	3	3
		Total, v. 13		7	= 4 + 3	= 0 + 7
14	Coda: v. 14?	צֶדֶק לְפָנָיו יִהְיֶה־אֱ	14	3	3	3
		וַיִּשֶׁם לְדָרֶךְ פְּעָמָיו:		3	3	3
		Total, v. 14		6	= 3 + 3	= 0 + 6
	Strophe 7	Total, v. 13-14		13	= 7 + 6	= 0 + 13
		Total, v. 10-14		32	= 17 + 15	= 0 + 32
	Canto II	Total, v. 9-14		47	= 29 + 18	= 0 + 47
		Total, v. 4-14		79	= 45 + 34	= 32 + 47
		Total, v. 2-14		91	= 51 + 40	= 44 + 47
	With the heading and סְלָה (1x),	Total, v. 1-14		96	= 55 + 41	

Observations

- In terms of the 91 words of the psalm, the arithmetic centre is constituted by v. 9a, אֲשַׁמְעָה מִה־יְדַבֵּר, 'Let me hear what [God YHWH] will speak' (91 = 44 + 3 + 44). These three words cannot be regarded as the consciously devised meaningful centre of the poem, since the sentence is incomplete, missing a subject for the second verb. The meaningful centre is to be found in Strophe 4, the middle strophe: the entire v. 9, YHWH's proclamation of peace, which clearly expresses the gist of the psalm:

שְׁלוֹם אֲשַׁמְעָה מִה־יְדַבֵּר הָאֵל יְהוָה כִּי יְדַבֵּר
 אֶל־עַמּוֹ וְאֶל־חֲסִידָיו ^ וְאֶל־יְשׁוּבוֹ לְכַסְלָהּ:

Let me hear what God YHWH will speak for he proclaims peace
 to his people and to his loyal servants // and let them not turn back to folly.

Note that the meaningful centre is composed in such a way that שְׁלוֹם, 'peace', is positioned precisely at the centre, flanked by 7 words on either side (15 = 7 + 1 + 7). Moreover, this pivotal word is also at the arithmetic centre of the 79-word section, vs. 4-14, surrounded by 78 (3 x 26) words, or flanked by 39 words, representing the idea of YHWH's uniqueness (39 + 1 + 39). The factual structure is 32 + 7 + 1 + 7 + 32, which is very reminiscent of the meaningful centre of Psalm 1.

The meaningful centre, v. 9, is highlighted by being positioned just after the switch from 2nd person (vs. 2-8) to 3rd person (vs. 9-14). See the [General Introduction](#), "Special devices to highlight the meaningful centre".

- As observed by Van der Lugt (private communication), the text divides into two 7-verseline cantos, which coincide with the division of the text into words addressed to God (Column c), and words spoken about God (Column d):

Canto I , vs. 2-8	Words addressed to God	7 verselines, 14 cola, 44 w
Canto II , vs. 9-14	Words spoken about God	7 verselines, 14 cola, 47 w

Both cantos have their own meaningful centres. V. 5 constitutes that of Canto I:

שׁוּבוּנִי אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעֵנוּ ^ וְהַפֵּר כַּעֲסֶךָ עָמָנוּ:

Restore us, God of our salvation and put away your displeasure towards us.

The fact that the centre is made up of 26 letters gives prominence to the prayer.

The meaningful centre of Canto II is constituted by the 6-word v. 11:

חֶסֶד־וְאֱמֶת נִפְגְּשׁוּ ^ צֶדֶק וְשְׁלוֹם נִשְׁקָו:

Love and faithfulness have come together justice and piece have embraced.

This centre is given prominence by the fact that it contains four words which are constitutive of the restoration of the people of Israel (Van der Lugt). Additionally it expresses the fulfilment of the prayer for piece in the meaningful centre of the psalm.

- Like Psalm 84, its sister poem, Psalm 85 has a very lucid numerical structure, which comes to light only when we recognize the demarcating function of the *selah* (once again as in Psalm 84!), which indicates a caesura between vs. 3||4. In terms of content, the psalm divides into 7 strophes in a menorah pattern, with v. 9 as the meaningful centre in the middle:

Vs. 2-3	Introductory prayer praising YHWH's forgiveness	4 cola	12 w
Vs. 4-6	Prayer for restoration based on his forgiveness	6 cola	19 +
Vs. 7-8	Prayer for new life and salvation	4 cola	13 = 32 w
V. 9	YHWH proclaims peace	4 cola	15 w
V. 10	His glory dwells in the land	2 cola	7 +
Vs. 11-12	Faithfulness, love, justice and peace meet	4 cola	12 = 19 +
Vs. 13-14	Moreover, YHWH will grant prosperity	4 cola	13 = 32 w

Logotechnically, vs. 2-3 stand apart from the rest of the poem, as indicated by the *selah* after v. 3, because vs. 4-14 constitute a skilfully designed logotechnical unity, with v. 9 at the *arithmetic* centre, flanked by 32 words on either side (32 + 15 + 32). Compare the 32-word arithmetic core of [Psalm 84](#) (38 + 32 + 38).

As in Psalm 84, a coda concludes the psalm, which is in this case difficult to define precisely: it may comprise vs. 13-14 or perhaps only v. 14.

- In terms of the direction of address, the text divides into two sections, which coincide precisely with the canto structure. Canto I is delimited by the name YHWH, in the first and last verseline (vs. 2 and 8). Canto II is delimited in much the same way by the two occurrences of the divine name in its first and last strophes (v. 9 and v. 13).

The 47 words in Canto II represent the numerical value of the name יַעֲקֹב, 'Jacob', in v. 1b (10 + 16 + 19 + 2 = 47). Incidentally, this is also the numerical value of the name קֹרַח, 'Korah', occurring in the heading (19 + 20 + 8 = 47).

The fact that exactly 47 words were chosen for gematric reasons lends credence to the analogous use of precisely 32 words to envelop the meaningful core. This number represents the numerical value of כְּבוֹד, 'glory' (20 + 2 + 6 + 4) occurring in v. 10b. Compare the apparently designed use of the numerical value of the keywords מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ, 'your dwellingplace', and כְּבוֹד, 'glory' in Psalm 84.

- There are several occurrences of the divine name number 17, apart from that of the number 26 mentioned above:

vs. 2-9	34 (2 x 17) words before atnach
vs. 9-12	34 (2 x 17) words in total
vs. 10-14	17 words before atnach
vs. 4-14	34 (2 x 17) words after atnach
vs. 2-14	51 (3 x 17) words before atnach.

6. As in Psalm 84, the number of fullness, 7, has an important structuring role: 7 strophes, 7 verselines with 2 x 7 cola in each of the two cantos, and 7 words on either side of the keyword **שָׁלוֹם**, 'peace', in the 15-word meaningful centre.
7. The name **יְהוָה**, which has a demarcating function, as we have seen, occurs 4 times (vs. 2a, 8a, 9a and 13a). The designation **אֱלֹהִים**, 'God', occurs only in v. 5a, and **אֵל**, 'God', only in v. 9a, significantly with the definite article: **הָאֵל**.

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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