

# Psalm 88— 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 88

- Psalm 88 is the last of the Eleven Korahite Psalms in the book of Psalms. In Book III the two pairs of Korahite psalms (84-85 and 87-88) encompass the single Davidic Psalm 86. Psalm 88, additionally attributed to Heman, is also the first of the two Ezrahite Maskils concluding Book III (88 and 89).
- Though there is no concensus among scholars as regards its strophic structure, it has a pronounced numerical framework. The core of the poem, vs. 9-11, clearly demarcated by *selah*, is preceded by **52** (2 x **26**) words and surrounded by in total **102** (6 x **17**) words.
- The two last words of the psalm, מְדַעֵי, 'my companions', and מְהַשְׁךְ, 'darkness', are evident keywords, whose numerical value, **53**, gives structure to part of the text.
- In contrast to Psalm 87, which is throughout phrased as spoken *about* God, Psalm 88 is from beginning to end a prayer addressed to God.

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

- Van der Lugt: 2-3, 4-5, 6 | 7-8, 9-10a || 10b-11, 12-13, 14-15 | 16-17, 18-19 (2 cantos with Canticles, 10 strophes, 20 verselines and 40 cola, taking vs. 9-10 as 3 bicola).
- Fokkelman: 2-3, 4-5, 6-7 || 8-10, 11-13 || 14-16, 17-19 (3 stanzas with 7 strophes, 19 verselines and 40 cola).
- Labuschagne: 2-3, 4-5 | 6, 7-8 || 9-11 || 12-13, 14-15 | 16-18, 19 (taking the demarcating function of the *selahs* into account: 3 cantos with 9 strophes, 19 verselines and 40 cola, taking with Fokkelman vs. 9-10 as 2 tricola).

## Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: Prayer of a mortally ill person; **d**: Lament and Supplication.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	שִׁיר מְזִמּוֹר לְבְנֵי קָרַח לְמַנְצִיחַ עַל-מַחְלַת לְעִנּוֹתַי מִשְׁכִּיל לְהִימָן הָאֲזָרְחָי: Heading, v. 1	4 4 3 11	4 4 3 8	3 3 3 11	3 3 3 13	0 0 0 13
2	יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יְשׁוּעָתִי 1 יוֹם-צָעֲקוֹתִי בְלִילָה נִגְדָּדָה: 3	3 4 3	3 4 3	3 4 3	3 4 3	0 0 0
3	תָּבוֹא לְפָנַי תְּפִלָּתִי 2 הִטַּח-אֲזָנְךָ לְרַנְתִּי: Strophe 1 Total, v. 2-3	3 3 13	3 3 6	3 3 7	3 3 13	0 0 13
4	כִּי-שָׁבַעַת בְּרַעוֹת נַפְשִׁי 3 וְחַנִּי לְשֹׁאֵל הַגִּיעוּ: 3	4 3 4	4 3 4	4 3 4	4 3 4	0 0 4
5	נַחֲשֶׁבְתִי עַם-יִזְרְדֵי בּוֹרֵא 4 הָיִיתִי כְּגֹבֵר אֵין-אֵיִל: Strophe 2 Total, v. 4-5 Canticle I.1 Total, v. 2-5	4 4 15 28	4 3 8 14	4 3 7 14	4 3 15 28	0 0 4 0

6	בַּמַּיִם חָפְשִׁי	5	2	2	2
	כְּמוֹ חֲלָלִים שֶׁכָּבִי קָבַר		4	4	4
	אֲשֶׁר לֹא זָכַרְתָּם עוֹדֶ֤	6	4	4	4
	וְהִמָּה מִיָּדְךָ נִגְזְרוּ:		3	3	3
	<b>Strophe 3</b>	<b>Total, v. 6</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>= 10</b>	<b>+ 3 = 13</b>
		Total, v. 3-6	<b>34</b>	<b>= 21</b>	<b>+ 13 = 34</b>
		Total, v. 2-6	<b>41</b>	<b>= 24</b>	<b>+ 17 = 41</b>
7	שִׁתְּנִי בְּבוֹר תַּחְתִּיּוֹתֶ֤	7	3	3	3
	בְּמַחְשָׁבִים בְּמַצְלוֹת:		2	2	2
	Total, v. 7		<b>5</b>	<b>= 3</b>	<b>+ 2 = 5</b>
	Total, v. 5-7		<b>26</b>	<b>= 17</b>	<b>+ 9 = 26</b>
8	עָלֵי סִמְכָה חֲמַתְךָ֤	8	3	3	3
	וְכָל־מִשְׁבְּרֶיךָ עֲנִיתַ סֵּלָה:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 8		<b>6</b>	<b>= 3</b>	<b>+ 3 = 6</b>
	<b>Strophe 4</b>	<b>Total, v. 7-8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>= 6</b>	<b>+ 5 = 11</b>
	<b>Canticle I.2</b>	<b>Total, v. 6-8</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>= 16</b>	<b>+ 8 = 24</b>
	<b>Canto I</b>	<b>Total, v. 2-8</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>= 30</b>	<b>+ 22 = 52</b>
9	הִרְחַקְתָּ מִיָּדַי מִמְּנִי	9	3	3	3
	שִׁתְּנִי תוֹעֵבוֹת לְמוֹ֤		3	3	3
	(13 + 10 + 4 + 16 + 10)		4	4	4
	<b>*</b> (כָּל־אֵי) כָּל־אֵי וְלֹא אֶצְא:		<b>10</b>	<b>= 6</b>	<b>+ 4 = 10</b>
	Total, v. 9		<b>34</b>	<b>= 22</b>	<b>+ 12 = 34</b>
	Total, v. 6-9		<b>42</b>	<b>= 26</b>	<b>+ 16 = 42</b>
	Total, v. 5-9		<b>62</b>	<b>= 36</b>	<b>+ 26 = 62</b>
	Total, v. 2-9		<b>62</b>	<b>= 36</b>	<b>+ 26 = 62</b>
10	שִׁנֵּי דְאָבָה מִנִּי עֲנִי	10	4	4	4
	קְרֵאתֶיךָ יְהוָה בְּכָל־יּוֹם֤		4	4	4
	130 = 64 + 2 + 64		3	3	3
	Middle verseline: 19=9+1+9		<b>11</b>	<b>= 8</b>	<b>+ 3 = 11</b>
	Middle cola (10a-b): 40=19+2+19		<b>27</b>	<b>= 17</b>	<b>+ 10 = 27</b>
	Total, v. 10		<b>53</b>	<b>= 34</b>	<b>+ 19 = 53</b>
	Total, v. 8-10		<b>73</b>	<b>= 44</b>	<b>+ 29 = 73</b>
	Total, v. 5-10		<b>73</b>	<b>= 44</b>	<b>+ 29 = 73</b>
	Total, v. 2-10		<b>73</b>	<b>= 44</b>	<b>+ 29 = 73</b>
11	הַלַּמְתִּים תַּעֲשֶׂה־פְּלֵאָ֤	11	3	3	3
	אִם־רָפְאִים יִקְוֹמוּ יוֹדוּךָ סֵּלָה:		4	4	4
	The two selahs delimit	Total, v. 11	<b>7</b>	<b>= 3</b>	<b>+ 4 = 7</b>
	the core: <b>Canto II Strophe 5</b>	<b>Total, v. 9-11</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>= 17</b>	<b>+ 11 = 28</b>
12	הִסְפַּר בְּקָבֶר חֲסִדְךָ֤	12	3	3	3
	אֲמוֹנַתְךָ בְּאֲבֵדוֹן:		2	2	2
	Total, v. 12		<b>5</b>	<b>= 3</b>	<b>+ 2 = 5</b>
	Total, v. 11-12		<b>12</b>	<b>= 6</b>	<b>+ 6 = 12</b>
	Total, v. 8-12		<b>39</b>	<b>= 23</b>	<b>+ 16 = 39</b>
13	הַיּוֹדֵעַ בַּחֲשֶׁךְ פְּלֵאָ֤	13	3	3	3
	וְצַדִּיקְתֶּךָ בְּאֶרֶץ נִשְׁיָה:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 13		<b>6</b>	<b>= 3</b>	<b>+ 3 = 6</b>
	<b>Strophe 6</b>	<b>Total, v. 12-13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>= 6</b>	<b>+ 5 = 11</b>
		Total, v. 11-13	<b>18</b>	<b>= 9</b>	<b>+ 9 = 18</b>
		Total, v. 10-13	<b>29</b>	<b>= 17</b>	<b>+ 12 = 29</b>

14	וְאָנִי אֶלֶיךָ יְהוָה שְׁנֵעַתִּי <sup>^</sup>	14	4	4	4
	וּבִבְקָר תִּפְלְתִי תִקְרָה מִךָ :		3	3	3
	Total, v. 14		7	= 4 + 3	= 0 + 7
15	לְמַה יְהוָה תִּזְנַח נַפְשִׁי <sup>^</sup>	15	4	4	4
	תִּסְתִּיר פְּנֵיךָ מִמֶּנִּי :		3	3	3
	Total, v. 15		7	= 4 + 3	= 0 + 7
	Strophe 7 Total, v. 14-15		14	= 8 + 6	= 0 + 14
	<b>Canticle III.1 Total, v. 12-15</b>		<b>25</b>	= 14 + 1	= 0 + 25
	Total, v. 11-15		32	= 17 + 15	= 0 + 32
	Total, v. 9-15		<b>53</b>	= 31 + 22	= 0 + 53
16	עָנִי אָנִי וְגִזַּע מִזְעֵר <sup>^</sup>	16	4	4	4
	נִשְׂאֵתִי אִמִּיךָ אֶפְוֶנָה :		3	3	3
	Total, v. 16		7	= 4 + 3	= 0 + 7
	Total, v. 15-16		14	= 8 + 6	= 0 + 14
17*	עָלִי עָבְרוּ חֲרוֹנֵיךָ <sup>^</sup>	17	3	3	3
	בְּעוֹתֶיךָ צְמֹתוֹתַי [צְמֹתוֹנִי] :		2	2	2
	Total, v. 17		5	= 3 + 2	= 0 + 5
	Total, v. 14-17		26	= 15 + 11	= 0 + 26
18	סִבּוּנֵי כַמִּים כָּל־הַיּוֹם <sup>^</sup>	18	4	4	4
	הַקִּיפוּ עָלַי יָחַד :		3	3	3
	Total, v. 18		7	= 4 + 3	= 0 + 7
	Strophe 8 Total, v. 16-18		19	= 11 + 8	= 0 + 19
	Total, v. 11-18		51	= 28 + 23	= 0 + 51
	Total, v. 10-18		62	= 36 + 26	= 0 + 62
	Total, v. 2-18		124	= 72 + 52	= 52 + 72
19	הֲרַחֲקֵת מִמֶּנִּי אֱהָב וְרַעִי	19	4	4	4
	מִיְדַעִי מַחְשֶׁךְ : (13 + 8 + 21 + 11) = 53 מַחְשֶׁךְ		2	2	2
Compare v. 9a!	Strophe 9 Total, v. 19		6	= 4 + 2	= 0 + 6
	Canticle III.2 Total, v. 16-19		25	= 15 + 10	= 0 + 25
	<b>Canto III Total, v. 12-19</b>		<b>50</b>	= 29 + 21	= 0 + 50
	Total, v. 10-19		68	= 40 + 28	= 0 + 68
	Total, v. 2-19		130	= 76 + 54	= 52 + 78
	Total, v. 1-19		141	= 84 + 57	
	Total with סֵלָה (2x), v. 1-19		143	= 84 + 59	

\* V. 9c: instead of MT's כָּלָא, 'imprisoned' - which is an incomplete phrase – I read two words כָּלָא אָנִי, 'imprisoned am I' – on the basis of the LXX and Syr – see *BHS*.

This brings the total number of words in the psalm up to **130** (5 x 26), as in Psalms 79 and in 80 (the emended text). Moreover, the correction adds substance to the supposition that the numerical value of the words מִיְדַעִי, 'my companions', and מַחְשֶׁךְ, 'darkness', 53, features in the text - see Observation 5 below.

\* V. 17b: so MT; see *BHS*.

## Observations

1. The arithmetic centre of the (corrected) text is constituted by the two middle words in v. 10a, מְנִי עֵינַי, 'through anguish', (130 = 64 + 2 + 64). They aptly express what the psalm is all about: the anguished misery and desolation of the speaker.

The two pivotal words fall within the two middle cola, v. 10a-b, the 8 words of which the author apparently intended to be the meaningful centre of his poem on colon level (40 = 19 + 2 + 19):

יְיָ יִזְכֶּנְנוּ יְהוָה יִזְכֶּנְנוּ יְהוָה יִזְכֶּנְנוּ

My eyes grow dim through anguish // I invoke you, YHWH, every day.

These 8 words, in their turn, fall within the middle verseline, v. 10 (19 = 9 + 1 + 9); moreover, they also form the centre of the 28 words in vs. 9-11 (28 = 10 + 8 + 10), which, in my view, constitute the meaningful core of the psalm.

2. The *selahs* before and after vs. 9-11 clearly delimit this central section, determining the canto structure of the entire text. Compare Psalm 84, of which the core is similarly delimited by *selah*. See Observation 2 in my Analysis of [Psalm 84](#).

Here is the canto framework of the psalm in terms of its 130 (5 x 26) words:

vs. 2-8	Canto I	52 (2 x 26) words	}	102 (6 x 17)
vs. 9-11	Canto II	28 words		
vs. 12-19	Canto III	50 words		
vs. 2-19	Canto I-III	130 (5 x 26) words		

Note that the off-centre core is enveloped by 102 (6 x 17) words (52 + 50). For a rather similar use of the divine name numbers to envelop the central section of a given text, compare Psalms 77, 80, 81 and 83.

3. The canto structure proposed here overlies the frameworks put forward by Van der Lugt and Fokkelman. Both scholars ignore the apparent delimiting function of the *selahs* and therefore fail to see that vs. 9-11 constitute the heart of the psalm:

<b>Van der Lugt</b>	<b>Fokkelman</b>
Canticle I.1 vs. 2-6 (Strophe 1-3)	Stanza I vs. 2-7 (Strophe 1-3)
Canticle I.2 vs. 7-10a (Strophe 4-5)	Stanza II vs. 8-13 (Strophe 4-5)
Canticle II.1 vs. 10b-15 (Strophe 6-8)	Stanza III vs. 14-19 (Strophe 6-7)
Canticle II.2 vs. 16-19 (Strophe 9-10)	

4. In terms of material content, in my opinion, the psalm divides into two main parts, vs. 2-8 and 9-19, which coincide precisely with my Canto I and Cantos II-III:

vs. 2-8 Prayer of a person at death's door (52 = 2 x 26 words, Column c)

vs. 9-19 Lament from his utterly desolate situation (78 = 3 x 26 words, Column d).

Vs. 9-19 (Cantos II-III) are skilfully delimited by the reference in v. 9 and v. 19 to the key-word מִיְיָדַי, 'my companions'. In addition to its function as a literary device for inclusion, it also defines the supplicant's position as being totally deprived of his companions, which is almost as if he were dead.

5. There are two keywords having the numerical value of **53**, namely, **מִיָּדַעַי**, 'my companions' (vs. 9b and 19b), and **מִתְּשֻׁדָּה**, 'darkness' (19b, cf. the plural form in 7b). The first expresses the idea of *utter desolation*, i.e., cut off from the world of the living, while the second signifies the *utter darkness* of the grave. Therefore, it is not surprising to find the number **53** in the text: in the number of words in vs. 5-10 and 9-15. See the [General Introduction](#) under "The numerical value of a keyword in the text".
6. In addition to the divine name numbers already mentioned, there are many more of them woven into the text to buttress its unity:
- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| vs. 3-6   | <b>34</b> (2 x <b>17</b> ) words in total                                  |
| vs. 2-6   | <b>17</b> words after atnach   |
| vs. 5-7   | <b>26</b> words in total, with <b>17</b> before atnach                     |
| vs. 2-8   | <b>52</b> (2 x <b>26</b> ) words in total                                  |
| vs. 6-9   | <b>34</b> (2 x <b>17</b> ) words in total                                  |
| vs. 5-9   | <b>26</b> words before atnach  |
| vs. 2-9   | <b>26</b> words after atnach   |
| vs. 8-10  | <b>17</b> words before atnach  |
| vs. 5-10  | <b>34</b> (2 x <b>17</b> ) words before atnach                             |
| vs. 9-11  | <b>17</b> words before atnach  |
| vs. 10-13 | <b>17</b> words before atnach  |
| vs. 11-15 | <b>17</b> words before atnach  |
| vs. 14-17 | <b>26</b> words in total, with <b>15</b> before and <b>11</b> after atnach |
| vs. 11-18 | <b>51</b> (3 x <b>17</b> ) words in total                                  |
| vs. 10-18 | <b>26</b> words after atnach   |
| vs. 2-18  | <b>52</b> (2 x <b>26</b> ) words after atnach                              |
| vs. 10-19 | <b>68</b> (4 x <b>17</b> ) words in total                                  |
| vs. 2-19  | <b>130</b> (5 x <b>26</b> ) words in total.                                |
7. The name יהוה occurs 4 times (vs. 2a, 10b, 14a, and 15a), and אלהים only in v. 2a.

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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](mailto:labuschagne.cj@planet.nl) University of Groningen, The Netherlands