

Psalm 116— Logotechnical Analysis

Guidelines

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

Specific features of Psalm 116

- Psalm 116 is a personal psalm of an individual expressing his gratitude for God's help and protection in situations of distress and his determination to pay his vows to God. In reviewing his present situation, the poet displays a great measure of retrospection and introspection, using a great variety of literary techniques to articulate his feelings and intentions. This makes it difficult to grasp the complex structure of the poem.
- Despite this, the psalm is a meticulously designed numerical composition determined by two leading themes: first, God's help and protection in times of distress, and second, vows and intentions aimed at expressing gratitude for salvation. In addition, the words explicitly addressed to God in vs. 4b, 8 and 16-17, as well as the refrainlike "I call on the name of YHWH" in vs. 4, 13 and 17, mark important breaks in the text, enabling us to identify the caesurae and recognize its basic strophic structure.

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

- Van der Lugt: 1-2, 3-4 | 5-6, 7-9 || 10-11, 12-14 | 15-16, 17-19 (2 cantos with 4 canticles, 8 strophes, 19 verselines and 41 cola).
- Fokkelman: 1-2, 3-4 || 5-6, 7-8 || 9-11, 12-14 || 15-16, 17-19 (4 stanzas with 8 strophes, 20 verselines - taking v. 16 as two bicolic verselines – and 42 cola).
- Labuschagne: 1-2 | 3-4 || 5-6 | 7-8 || 9-11 || 12-13, 14-15 || 16-17 | 18-19 (5 cantos, of which the first two and the last have canticles, 9 strophes, 19 verselines and 41 cola).

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: grateful recollections of God's help in situations of distress.
- Column **d**: vows and intentions on the part of the speaker.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	אֶתְּקוּלִי תַחֲנוּנֵי־ אֶתְּקוּלִי תַחֲנוּנֵי־ Total, v. 1	1 4 3 7 = 4 + 3 = 7 + 0	4	3	4	3
2	כִּי־הִטָּה אָזְנוֹ לִי וּבְיָמַי אֶקְרָא־ Total, v. 2	2 4 2 6 = 4 + 2 = 4 + 2	4	2	4	2
Canticle I.1 Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-2		13 = 8 + 5 = 11 + 2				
3	אֶפְפוּנֵי חֶבְלֵי־מָוֶת וּמִצְרֵי שְׂאוֹל מִצְאוּנֵי־ צָרָה וְיָגוֹן אֶמְצָא־ Total, v. 3	3 3 3 3 3 9 = 6 + 3 = 9 + 0	3	3	3	3
4	וּבְשֵׁם־יְהוָה אֶקְרָא־ אֲנִי יְהוָה מִלְּטָה נַפְשִׁי־ Total, v. 4	4 3 4 7 = 3 + 4 = 7 + 0	3	4	3	4
Canticle I.2 Strophe 2 Total, v. 3-4		16 = 9 + 7 = 16 + 0				
Canto I Total, v. 1-4		29 = 17 + 12 = 27 + 2				

5	תַּנּוּן יְהוָה וְצַדִּיקֶ֑ךָ וְאֵלֵהֶינּוּ מִרְחֹם׃ Total, v. 5 Total, v. 1-5	5	3	3	3	2	2	2	$5 = 3 + 2 = 5 + 0$ $34 = 20 + 14 = 32 + 2$
6	שֹׁמֵר פְּתָאִים יְהוָה־ ^א דְּלוֹתָי וְלִי יְהוֹשִׁיעַ׃ Total, v. 6 Canticle II.1 Strophe 3 Total, v. 5-6 Total, v. 1-6	6	3	3	3	3	3	3	$6 = 3 + 3 = 6 + 0$ $11 = 6 + 5 = 11 + 0$ $40 = 23 + 17 = 38 + 2$
7	שׁוֹבֵי נַפְשֵׁי לְמִנוּחֵיכֶ֑יָּהּ כִּי־יְהוָה נִמְלַע עָלֶיכֶי׃ Total, v. 7 Total, v. 1-7	7	3	3	3	4	4	4	$7 = 3 + 4 = 7 + 0$ $47 = 26 + 21 = 45 + 2$
8	כִּי חֲלַצְתָּ נַפְשֵׁי מַמּוֹת אֶת־עֵינַי מִן־הַמַּעֲהָהּ אֶת־רַגְלֵי מִדְּחַי׃ Total, v. 8 Canticle II.2 Strophe 4 Total, v. 7-8 Canto II Total, v. 5-8 Total, v. 1-8	8	4	4	4	4	4	4	$11 = 8 + 3 = 11 + 0$ $18 = 11 + 7 = 18 + 0$ $29 = 17 + 12 = 29 + 0$ $58 = 34 + 24 = 56 + 2$
9	אֶתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה־ ^א בְּאַרְצוֹת הַחַיִּים׃ Total, v. 9 Total, v. 5-9 Total, v. 1-9	9	3	3	3	2	2	2	$5 = 3 + 2 = 0 + 5$ $34 = 20 + 14 = 29 + 5$ $63 = 37 + 26 = 56 + 7$
10	Middle words: 63+3+63 הָאֲמַנְתִּי כִּי אֲדַבְרָה Middle colon: 20 + 1 + 20 : אֲנִי עֲבִיתִי מְאֹד׃ Middle verseline: 9 + 1 + 9 Total, v. 10 Total, v. 5-10	10	3	3	3	3	3	3	$6 = 3 + 3 = 0 + 6$ $40 = 23 + 17 = 29 + 11$
11	אֲנִי אֲמַרְתִּי בְּחַפְזִי־ ^א כָּל־הָאָדָם כּוֹזֵב׃ Total, v. 11 Canto III Strophe 5 Total, v. 9-11	11	3	3	3	3	3	3	$6 = 3 + 3 = 0 + 6$ $17 = 9 + 8 = 0 + 17$
12	מִה־אָשִׁיב לִיהוָה־ ^א כָּל־תַּנְמוּלוֹהֶי עָלַי׃ Total, v. 10-12	12	3	3	3	3	3	3	$18 = 9 + 9 = 6 + 12$
13	כּוֹס־יִשׁוּעוֹת אֲשֶׁאֱ וּבִשְׁם יְהוָה אֶקְרָא׃ Strophe 6 Total, v. 12-13 Total, v. 8-13	13	3	3	3	3	3	3	$12 = 6 + 6 = 6 + 6$ $40 = 23 + 17 = 17 + 23$
14	נִדְרֵי לִיהוָה אֲשַׁלֵּם־ ^א נִנְדְּהָנָא לְכָל־עַמּוֹ׃ Total, v. 1-14	14	3	3	3	4	4	4	$94 = 52 + 42 = 62 + 32$
15	יִקַּר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה־ ^א הַמּוֹתֵה לַחֲסִידָיו׃ Strophe 7 Total, v. 14-15 Canto IV Total, v. 12-15	15	3	3	3	2	2	2	$12 = 6 + 6 = 5 + 7$ $24 = 12 + 12 = 11 + 13$

16	אָנָה יְהוָה כִּי־אֲנִי עֲבָדְךָ	16	5	5	5
	אֲנִי־עֲבָדְךָ בְּגִן־אֶמְתָּדָּךְ		4	4	4
	פִּתְחַת לְמוֹסְרָי:		2	2	2
	Total, v. 16		11	= 9 + 2	= 11 + 0
17	לֵךְ־אֲזַבֵּחַ זִבְחַת־תּוֹדָה	17	4	4	4
	וּבְשֵׁם יְהוָה אֶקְרָא:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 17		7	= 4 + 3	= 0 + 7
	Strophe 8 Total, v. 16-17		18	= 13 + 5	= 11 + 7
	Total, v. 3-17		104	= 60 + 44	= 67 + 37
	Total, v. 1-17		117	= 68 + 49	= 78 + 39
18 Vs. 18-19 Coda	נִדְרֵי לַיהוָה אֲשַׁלֵּם	18	3	3	3
	נִנְדְּהָ־נָא לְכָל־עַמּוֹ:		4	4	4
	Total, v. 18		7	= 3 + 4	= 0 + 7
	Total, v. 10-18		61	= 34 + 27	= 22 + 39
19	בְּחֻצוֹת בַּיִת יְהוָה בְּתוֹכִי	19	3	3	3
	יְרוּשָׁלַם הַלְלוּ־יָהּ:		2	2	2
	Total, v. 19		5	= 5 + 0	= 0 + 5
	Coda Strophe 9 Total, v. 18-19		12	= 8 + 4	= 0 + 12
	Canto V Total, v. 16-19		30	= 21 + 9	= 11 + 19
	Total, v. 1-19		129	= 76 + 53	= 78 + 51
	Including הַלְלוּ־יָהּ, total, v. 1-19		131	= 78 + 53	= 78 + 53

Observations

- In terms of the 129 words of the psalm, its arithmetic centre falls on the 3 words in v. 10a (129 = 63 + 3 + 63), which coincides with the middle colon (41 = 20 + 1 + 20). This incomplete phrase cannot be regarded as the consciously designed meaningful centre. A more plausible candidate would be the middle verseline, the entire v. 10, or still better, the 3 middle verselines of vs. 9-11 (19 = 8 + 3 + 8), comprising 17-words, similarly as in the meaningful centre of [Psalm 113](#).

The meaningful centre reads as follows:

אֶתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה ^ בְּאַרְצוֹת הַחַיִּים:

הָאֶמְנָתִי כִי אֶדְבַר ^ אֲנִי עֲנִיתִי מְאֹד:

אֲנִי אֶמְרָתִי בְּחַפְזִי ^ כָּל־הָאָדָם כֹּזֵב:

I shall walk before YHWH // in the land of the living.

I kept my faith, when I said: // "I am greatly afflicted."

I, who said in my consternation: // "Everybody is unreliable."

- Having identified and delimited the meaningful centre, we may conclude that there are two caesurae: between vs. 8||9 and vs. 11||12. This is in tension with Van der Lugt's strophic structure, which has a caesura between vs. 9||10. His division is primarily based on the pattern of verbal repetitions, which reveals a *linear* canticle arrangement of, on the one hand, vs. 1-4.10-14 and on the other, vs. 5-9.15-19, as well as a *symmetric* Canticle arrangement of vs. 1-4.15-19 and vs. 5-9.10-14.

However, in my opinion, this arrangement does not necessarily reflect the basic structure of the text; it may only have been devised to buttress its unity. To identify the basic structure of the psalm, we have to look for more basic features. Two of such features are: first, the refrainlike phrase **וּבְשֵׁם יְהוָה אֶקְרָא** occurring in vs. 4, 13 and 17, and second, the three passages in which the speaker addresses God, vs. 4, 8 and 16-17.

I consider the refrainlike phrase as a device for conclusion, a function it evidently has in v. 4, where it rounds off the argument in vs. 3-4, causing a break between 4||5. Presuming that it has a similar function in vs. 13 and 17, then there must be caesurae between vs. 13||14 and between vs. 17||18.

Let us now examine the passages directly addressed to God, occurring in vs. 4 (once again v. 4!), 8 and 16-17 (once again v. 17!). In v. 4 the address to God apparently concludes the argument in vs. 3-4, therefore, this may also be the case in v. 8, giving a caesura between 8||9, and in v. 17, giving a caesura between 17||18. Taking vs. 17-19 as a distinct strophe (Van der Lugt, Fokkelman and Christensen) is therefore at variance with the basic structure.

3. On the strength of the above considerations, we can outline the strophic structure:
 - vs. 1-2b Strophe 1 I love YHWH, therefore I will call on him al my days
 - vs. 3-4 Strophe 2 At death's door in dire straits, *I invoked his name*: he saved me
 - vs. 5-6 Strophe 3 Being the merciful caretaker of the lowly, he saved me
 - vs. 7-8 Strophe 4 O my soul, return to your rest: YHWH, you have rescued me
 - vs. 9-11 Strophe 5 *Having kept my faith, I will walk in the presence of YHWH*
 - vs. 12-13 Strophe 6 To repay him, I take the cup of salvation and *invoke his name*
 - vs. 14-15 Strophe 7 I will pay my vows; costly is the death of his devoted ones
 - vs. 16-17 Strophe 8 O YHWH, I, your servant, will thank you and *invoke his name*
 - vs. 18-19 Strophe 9 I will publicly pay my vows to YHWH, in your midst, Jerusalem

Note how the refrainlike phrase indicates the end of Strophes 2, 6 and 8. The parts of the strophes marked green at the left of this chart (2b, 9-11, 13-14 and 17-19) contain the words counted in Column d – see below, Observation 4.

Strophes 1-2 form **Canto I**, Strophes 3-4 **Canto II**, *Strophe 5 Canto III*, Strophes 6-7 **Canto IV**, and Strophes 8-9 **Canto V**.

The pivotal position of *Strophe 5*, coinciding with *Canto III*, is buttressed by the fact that it has 4 strophes and 8 verselines on either side. Therefore, I refrain from endeavouring to readjust these nine strophes to achieve a menorah pattern. A forced menorah would contribute nothing to the understanding of the structure of the psalm, but rather blur it.

The menorah proposed by Christensen (1-3, 4-6, 7-8, 9-11, 12-14, 15-16, and 17-19) does not take the obvious caesurae into account: between vs. 13||14, 15||16 and 17||18.

4. Strophe 9 (vs. 18-19) is a typical concluding remark and may therefore be regarded as a coda. For the characteristics of a coda, see the [General Introduction](#), "The use of a coda as a device for conclusion."
5. When I instructed my computer program to count the words in the two categories: 'grateful recollections of YHWH's help in situations of distress' (Column c in the chart), and 'vows and intentions on the part of the first person speaker' (marked green in the text, with the word-count in Column d), I was amazed to read the outcome: **78** (3 x **26**) words in Column c and **51** (3 x **17**) in Column d. This illustrates the astounding way in which the text was logotechnically organized to achieve these numbers.
6. The divine name numbers appear in the following instances:
 - vs. 1-4 **17** words before atnach
 - vs. 1-5 **34** (2 x **17**) words in total
 - vs. 1-6 **17** words after atnach
 - vs. 1-7 **26** words before atnach
 - vs. 5-8 **17** words before atnach
 - vs. 1-8 **34** (2 x **17**) words before atnach
 - vs. 5-9 **34** (2 x **17**) words in total
 - vs. 9-11 **17** words in total
 - vs. 1-14 **52** (2 x **26**) before atnach

vs. 3-17 **104** (4 x **26**) words in total
 vs. 1-17 **68** (4 x **17**) words before atnach
 vs. 1-19 **78** (3 x **26**) words in Column c, with 51 (3 x 17) in Column d
 vs. 1-19 **78** (3 x **26**) words before atnach, including hallelu-yah.

7. The name יהוה occurs no less than 15 times throughout the psalm, which is more than 11% of the total number of words! The word אֱלֹהִים, 'God', appears only in v. 5b.

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