

Psalm 21— Logotechnical Analysis

Guidelines

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

Specific features of Psalm 21

- Psalm 21 is the follow-up to the royal poem, Psalm 20, with which it shares many formal features, despite some differences: Psalm 20 is addressed to the king and Psalm 21 is for the most part a prayer. Both psalms have a bipartite canto structure, but this one is not as stringent as that of Psalm 20 with its two numerically equal halves. A characteristic feature of the second canto is the frequent change in the direction of address.

vs. 2-7 First part of the prayer 6 verselines, 12 cola 48 = 24+24 words

vs. 8-14 Continuation with interruptions 7 verselines, 15 cola 52 (2 x 26) words.

- Both poems are concluded by a coda, in which the 1st person *plural* form is used, showing that it is a device for conclusion.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 2-4, 5-7 || 8-10, 11-13 | 14 (2 cantos with 4 strophes and a 'relatively separate one-line strophe': altogether 13 verselines and 27 cola).
- Fokkelman: 2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8 || 9-10b, 10c-11, 12-13, 14 (2 stanzas with 8 strophes, 14 verselines and 28 cola (taking v. 10a as a bicolon).
- Labuschagne: 2-4, 5-7 || 8, 9-11, 12-13, 14 (2 cantos with 6 strophes, 13 verselines and 27 cola, concurring with Van der Lugt that v. 8 belongs to Canto I, contra Fokkelman).
- For an overview of other divisions of the text, see Van der Lugt, CAS, Psalm 21, § 6.

The logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words *spoken to God* about the king; **d**: *spoken to the king* about God.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	לְמִנְצַח מְזִמּוֹר לְדָוִד: Heading, v. 1	3	3			
2	וְהִתְנַחֵם בְּעֵזָה יְשׁוּחֵי-מִלְחָמָה וּבִישׁוּעָתָהּ מִהַיְגִיל מְאֹד:	4	4		4	
	Total, v. 2	8 = 4 + 4		4	8	0
3	תֵּאֲזַנְתָּ לְבוֹ נִתְתָּה לֵוִי וְאַרְשֵׁת שְׁפָתָיו בַּל־מְנַעַת סֶלָה:	4	4		4	
	Total, v. 3	8 = 4 + 4		4	8	0
4	כִּי־תִקְדָּמְנוּ בְּרִכּוֹת שׁוֹבֵב תְּשִׁית לְרֵאשִׁי עֲטֹרַת פָּז:	4	4		4	
	Total, v. 4	8 = 4 + 4		4	8	0
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 2-4	24 = 12 + 12		12	24	0

5	חַיִּים שָׁאֵל מִמֶּה נִתְּתָה לִּי אַרְבָּע יָמִים עוֹלָם וָעֶד: Total, v. 5	4	5	5	5	
			4		4	4
			9	=	5	+ 4 = 9 + 0
6	גָּדוֹל כְּבוֹדוֹ בִּישׁוּעָתְךָ הוֹד וְהַדָּר תִּשְׁוֶה עָלָיו: Total, v. 6	5	3	3	3	
			4		4	4
			7	=	3	+ 4 = 7 + 0
7	כִּי־תִשְׁתַּחֲוּ בְּרַכּוֹת לְעֵד תִּתְחַדְּהוּ בְּשִׂמְחָה אֶת־פָּנֶיךָ: Total, v. 7	6	4	4	4	
			4		4	4
			8	=	4	+ 4 = 8 + 0
Vs. 2-7 Numerical Chiasmus Total, v. 2-4			24	=	12	+ 12 = 24 + 0
Strophe 2 Total, v. 5-7			24	=	12	+ 12 = 24 + 0
Canto I Total, v. 2-7			48	=	24	+ 24 = 48 + 0
8	מִיָּדְךָ לְכָל־אִיְבֹהֶיךָ יִמְיָדְךָ תִּמְצָא שְׂנְאֵיךָ: Total, v. 9	7	4	4	4	
			3		3	3
			7	=	4	+ 3 = 7 + 0
10	תִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ אֵשׁ לְעַת פָּנֶיךָ יְהוָה בְּאִפְנוֹ יִבְלַעֵם וְתֹאכְלֵם אֵשׁ: Total, v. 10	9	5	5	5	
			3		3	3
			2		2	2
			10	=	8	+ 2 = 5 + 5
			17	=	12	+ 5 = 12 + 5
11	פָּרְיָמוֹ מֵאֶרֶץ הָאֲבָדָה זוֹרְעֵם מִבְּנֵי אָדָם: Total, v. 11	10	3	3	3	
			3		3	3
			6	=	3	+ 3 = 6 + 0
	Strophe 4 Total, v. 9-11		23	=	15	+ 8 = 18 + 5
12	כִּי־נָטוּ עָלֶיךָ רַעְדָה חָשְׁבוּ מְזֻמָּה בְּלִי־וְכֹלֹו: Total, v. 12	11	4	4	4	
			4		4	4
			8	=	4	+ 4 = 0 + 8
13	כִּי תִשְׁתַּחֲוּ שָׁכֶם בְּמִיתְרֵיךָ תִּכְוֶנֶן עַל־פָּנֵיהֶם: Total, v. 13	12	3	3	3	
			4		4	4
			7	=	3	+ 4 = 0 + 7
	Strophe 5 Total, v. 12-13		15	=	7	+ 8 = 0 + 15
	Total, v. 8-13		46	=	26	+ 20 = 18 + 8 + 20
14	רוֹמָה יְהוָה בְּעֵזְךָ נְשִׁירָה וְנִזְמְרָה גְבוּרָתְךָ: Total, v. 14	13	3	3	3	
			3		3	3
			6	=	3	+ 3 = 6 + 0
	Coda Strophe 6 Total, v. 14		52	=	29	+ 23 = 24 + 8 + 20
	Canto II Total, v. 8-14		100	=	53	+ 47 = 72 + 8 + 20
	Total, v. 2-14		104	=	56	+ 48
	With the heading and סֵלָה, v. 1-14					

Observations

1. The arithmetic centre in terms of the 100 words of the poem is constituted by the four words in **v. 8a** ($100 = 48 + 4 + 48$):

כִּי־תִמְלֹךְ בְּטֶחַח בַּיהוָה For the king trusts in YHWH.

This statement is most appropriate to a royal psalm and has undoubtedly been designed as its meaningful centre. It coincides precisely with the middle colon ($27 = 13 + 1 + 13$) and falls within the middle verseline, **v. 8** ($13 = 6 + 1 + 6$). The pivotal position of **v. 8** is significantly highlighted by the fact that it is phrased as words spoken *about* both God and the king. For the striking technique of highlighting the centre of the text by the sudden change in the direction of address, see the General Introduction, "Special devices to highlight the meaningful centre".

From a logotechnical point of view, **v. 8a**, is, as it were, 'encapsulated' or 'embraced' by **52** (2×26) words: **52** = $48 + 4 \mid 4 + 48 = 52$. This highlights the pivotal position of the meaningful centre in still another way.

2. Including the heading and the *selah* the psalm has **104** (4×26) words, which is, in my opinion, a matter of conscious design on the part of the editor of the psalm - see Observation 2 in my Analysis of [Psalm 20](#).
3. **Verse 8** marks the beginning of a new section: Canto II, vs. 8-14, dealing particularly with the fate of the enemies of the king. In fact it forms a bridge between the two parts of the prayer. Van der Lugt and others regard the entire Canto II as addressed to the king (cf. Van der Lugt, CAS, p. 238), but in my judgement, it is for the most part the continuation of the prayer. It is only in vs. 8, 10b-c and 12-13 that God is not directly addressed. A striking feature of Canto II is the frequent change in the direction of address, in contrast with Canto I, which is from beginning to end a prayer. This rhetorical technique may be regarded as an attention-drawing device.

Canto I	vs. 2-7	words addressed to God	48
Canto II	v. 8	words spoken <i>about</i> both God and the king	8
	vs. 9-10a	words addressed to God	12 +
	vs. 10b-c	words spoken about God	5 = 17
	v. 11	words addressed to God	6
	vs. 12-13	words specifically addressed to the king	15
	v. 14	words addressed to God	6.

Note the abrupt switch to words addressed to *the king* in **vs. 12-13** and then back again to words addressed to *God* in v. 14.

The concluding verseline is clearly a coda - compare the coda in Psalm 20. See the General Introduction, "The use of a coda as a device for conclusion."

The **48** (4×12) words in Canto I may be a matter of deliberate design to symbolize the **12** tribes of Israel. The fact that there are exactly **72** (6×12) words addressed to God (Column c) may endorse this supposition.

4. The address to God in **Canto I** (vs. 2-7), with its 6 verselines, 12 cola and 48 words, has a particularly regular structure: it divides into two equal strophes forming on word level a perfect numerical chiasmus in terms of the *atnach*, which buttresses its unity:

Strophe 1 (vs. 2-4)	3 verselines	6 cola	24 words (12a + 12b)
Strophe 2 (vs. 5-7)	3 verselines	6 cola	24 words (12a + 12b).

Van der Lugt delineates **Canto II** as comprising vs. 8-13, because he regards v. 14 as a 'relatively separate one-line strophe'. According to him Canto II has a similar poetic structure as Canto I, but it lacks the regularity of Canto I in terms of cola and words:

Strophe 3 (vs. 8-10)	3 verselines	7 cola	25 words
Strophe 4 (vs. 11-13)	3 verselines	6 cola	21 words.

In my opinion, v. 14, being a coda, is structurally part of **Canto II** (vs. 8-14), which means that it consists of 4 strophes with **7** verselines and 15 cola: vs. 8, 9-10, 12-13, and 14. Note the use of the first person plural in v. 14b, as in Psalm 20, where we find a 'we'-passages at the end of both Cantos.

5. The divine name numbers are conspicuously absent in Canto I, due to its stringent structure, a feature Canto I shares with Psalm 20. They only appear in Canto II: the **17** words in vs. 9-10, the **26** before atnach in 8-13 and the **52** (2 x **26**) in 8-14.
6. The name יהוה occurs 4 times: vs. 2, 8, 10 and 14; the designation עֲלֵינוּ occurs in v. 8b.

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