

Psalm 34— 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 34

- Like its predecessor, the alphabetic acrostic Psalm 34 is characterized by its particularly regular poetical structure and its near-perfect acrostic pattern. The meaningful centre of the psalm on word level, [v. 12b](#), is positioned precisely in the middle of the alphabetic sequence: within the *lamedh*-line, as in the acrostics Psalm 9-10 and Psalm 25.
- Significant is the way the author differentiated - also expressed numerically - between the words spoken by the supplicant in a very personal way, vs. 2-7 and 12-15, and the rest of the text, vs. 8-11 and 16-23, in which he speaks in a more detached way.
- Canto II, vs. 12-23, divides into three equal parts of **28** words each (vs. 12-15, 16-19, and 20-23), skilfully concatenated by a numerical chiasmus. The number **28** represents the numerical value of **יְחַדְּרוּ**, 'together', in v. b ($10 + 8 + 4 + 6 = 28$), apparently a keyword.
- Another feature this psalm shares with Psalm 33 is the high frequency of the occurrences of the name YHWH and the *kabod* numbers.

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

- Van der Lugt: 2-3, 4-5, 6-7 | 8-9, 10-11 || 12-13, 14-15 | 16-17, 18-19, 20-21, 22-23 (2 cantos with 2 canticles each, 11 two-verseline strophes and 22 bicolic verselines).
- Fokkelman: 2-4, 5-7 || 8-9, 10-11 || 12-13, 14-15 || 16-17, 18-19 || 20-21, 22-23 (5 stanzas with 10 strophes, taking vs. 2-4 and 5-7 as 3-verseline strophes).
- Labuschagne: 2-3, 4-5, 6-7 | 8-9, 10-11 || 12-13, 14-15 | 16-17, 18-19 | 20-21, 22-23 (as Van der Lugt, except that I take vs. 20-23 as a separate canticle – cf. Fokkelman).
- For an overview of other divisions of the text, see Van der Lugt, *CAS*, Psalm 34, § 6.

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words spoken personally; **d**: words spoken in a more detached way.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	לְדָוִד בְּשִׁנּוֹתָו אֶת־טַעֲמוֹ לִפְנֵי אֲבִימֶלֶךְ וַיִּגְרָשׁוּהוּ וַיִּלְדָּ:	8	6	2		
2	אֲבָרְכָה אֶת־יְהוָה בְּכָל־עֵת תָּמִיד תְּהַלֵּלֵהוּ בְּפִי: Total, v. 2	8	5	3	5	0
3	בִּיהוָה = 28 See vs. 12-15, 16-19, and 20-23! Strophe 1	14	3	3	3	0
4	וַיִּגְדְּלוּ לִיהוָה אֲתֵי וַיִּרְוַמְזָה שְׁמוֹ יְחַדְּרוּ: See vs. 12-15, 16-19, and 20-23!	6	3	3	3	0

5	דְּרַשְׁתִּי אֶת־יְהוָה וְעֲנֵנִי [^] וּמְכַל־מַגְדֹּרֹתַי הַצִּילֵנִי: Total, v. 5	4 ד 4 4 4	3 3 3	$7 = 4 + 3 = 7 + 0$
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 4-5 Total, v. 2-5			$13 = 7 + 6 = 13 + 0$ $27 = 15 + 12 = 27 + 0$
6*	הִבִּיטוּ אֵלָיו וְנִהְרוּ [^] וּפְנִיָהֶם אֶל־יַחְפָּרוֹ: Total, v. 6	5 ה 3 3 3	3 3 3	$6 = 3 + 3 = 6 + 0$
7	זֶה עָנִי קָרָא וַיְהִינָה שְׁמֵעָ [^] וּמְכַל־צָרוֹתָיו הוֹשִׁיעֵנו: Total, v. 7	6 ז 5 5 5	3 3 3	$8 = 5 + 3 = 8 + 0$
	Strophe 3 Total, v. 6-7 Canticle I.1 (1st person), v. 2-7			$14 = 8 + 6 = 14 + 0$ $41 = 23 + 18 = 41 + 0$
8	חָנָה מִלְאֲדֵי־יְהוָה [^] סָבִיב לִירְאֵיו וַיִּחַלְצֵם: Total, v. 8	7 ח 3 3 3	3 3 3	$6 = 6 + 0 = 0 + 6$
9	טַעֲמוּ וּרְאוּ כִי־טוֹב יְהוָה [^] אֲשֶׁר־יִחַסֶּה־בּוֹ: Total, v. 9	8 ט 5 5 5	4 4 4	$9 = 5 + 4 = 0 + 9$
	Strophe 4 Total, v. 8-9 Total, v. 2-9			$15 = 11 + 4 = 0 + 15$ $56 = 34 + 22 = 41 + 15$
10	יִרְאוּ אֶת־יְהוָה קְדָשָׁיו [^] כִּי־אֵין מַחְסוֹר לִירְאֵיו: Total, v. 10	9 י 4 4 4	4 4 4	$8 = 4 + 4 = 0 + 8$
11	כְּפִירִים רָשׁוּ וְרַעֲבוּ [^] וְדַרְשֵׁי יְהוָה לֹא־יִחַסְרוּ כָל־טוֹב: Total, v. 11	10 כ 3 3 3	6 6 6	$9 = 3 + 6 = 0 + 9$
	Strophe 5 Total, v. 10-11 Canticle I.2 Total, v. 7-11 Total, v. 6-11 Canto I Total, v. 2-11			$17 = 7 + 10 = 0 + 17$ $32 = 18 + 14 = 0 + 32$ $40 = 23 + 17 = 8 + 32$ $46 = 26 + 20 = 14 + 32$ $73 = 41 + 32 = 41 + 32$
12	לְכוּ־בָנִים שְׁמְעוּ־לִי [^] וּרְאֵת יְהוָה אֱלֹמֶדְכֶם: Total, v. 12	11 ל 4 4 4	3 3 3	$7 = 4 + 3 = 7 + 0$
	Three middle words: 157 = 77 + 3 + 77			
13	מִי־הָאִישׁ הִחְפֵּץ חַיִּים [^] אֲהַב יָמִים לְרְאוֹת טוֹב: Total, v. 13	12 מ 4 4 4	4 4 4	$8 = 4 + 4 = 8 + 0$
	Strophe 6 Total, v. 12-13			$15 = 8 + 7 = 15 + 0$
14	נָצַר לְשׁוֹנֵה מִרְעָ [^] וּשְׁפָתָיָהּ מִדְּבַר מִרְמָה: Total, v. 14	13 נ 3 3 3	3 3 3	$6 = 3 + 3 = 6 + 0$
15	סוֹר מִרְעַע וְעִשָּׂה־טוֹב [^] בִּקְשׁ שְׁלוֹם וְרַדְפָּהוּ: Total, v. 15	14 ס 4 4 4	3 3 3	$7 = 4 + 3 = 7 + 0$
	Strophe 7 Total, v. 14-15 Canticle II.1 (1st person), v. 12-15			$13 = 7 + 6 = 13 + 0$ $28 = 15 + 13 = 28 + 0$

16	עיני יְהוָה אֶל-צַדִּיקִים ^א וְאֵזְנוּ אֶל-שׁוֹעֲתָם: Total, v. 16	15 ע	4	4	4	3	3	7	7 = 4 + 3 = 0 + 7
17	פְּנֵי יְהוָה בַּעֲשֵׂי רָעָ ^א לְהַכְרִית מֵאֶרֶץ זְכָרָם: Total, v. 17	16 פ	4	4	4	3	3	7	7 = 4 + 3 = 0 + 7
Strophe 8		Total, v. 16-17	14 = 8 + 6 = 0 + 14						
18	צַעֲקוּ וַיהוָה שָׁמַע ^א וּמִכָּל-צָרוֹתֵם הִצִּילָם: Total, v. 18	17 צ	3	3	3	3	3	6	6 = 3 + 3 = 0 + 6
19	קָרוֹב יְהוָה לְנֹשְׁבְרֵי-לֵב ^א וְאֶת-דַּבְּאֵי-רוּחַ יוֹשִׁיעַ: Total, v. 19	18 ק	4	4	4	4	4	8	8 = 4 + 4 = 0 + 8
Strophe 9		Total, v. 18-19	14 = 7 + 7 = 0 + 14						
Canticle II.2		Total, v. 16-19	28 = 15 + 13 = 0 + 28						
20	רַבּוֹת רַעוֹת צַדִּיק ^א וּמִכָּלֵם יִצְיִלְנוּ יְהוָה: Total, v. 20	19 ר	3	3	3	3	3	6	6 = 3 + 3 = 0 + 6
21	שֹׁמֵר כָּל-עֲצֻמוֹתָיו ^א אֶחָת מִהֲנִיחַ לֹא נִשְׁבְּרָה: Total, v. 21	20 ש	3	3	3	4	4	7	7 = 3 + 4 = 0 + 7
Strophe 10		Total, v. 20-21	13 = 6 + 7 = 0 + 13						
22	תְּמוֹתַת רִשָּׁע רָעָה ^א וְשִׁנְאֵי צַדִּיק יֶאֱשָׁמוּ: Total, v. 22	21 ת	3	3	3	3	3	6	6 = 3 + 3 = 0 + 6
23	פּוֹדֵה יְהוָה נַפְשׁ עַבְדָּיו ^א וְלֹא יֶאֱשָׁמוּ כָּל-הַחֹסִים בּוֹ: Total, v. 23	22 פ	4	4	4	5	5	9	9 = 4 + 5 = 0 + 9
Strophe 11		Total, v. 22-23	15 = 7 + 8 = 0 + 15						
Canticle II.3		Total, v. 20-23	28 = 13 + 15 = 0 + 28						
		Total, v. 16-23	56 = 28 + 28 = 0 + 56						
Canto II		Total, v. 12-23	84 = 43 + 41 = 28 + 56						
		Total, v. 2-23	157 = 84 + 73 = 69 + 88						
		With the heading, v. 1-23	165 = 90 + 75						

- The psalm is not a perfectly arranged acrostic: there is no verseline with initial *waw* and there are two *peh*-verselines (v. 17 and v. 23). The initial *waw* is not totally absent, for it appears in the second colon of the *heh*-verseline. This is not a matter of negligence on the part of the poet, but intentional design. See Specific Feature 4 in my Analysis of [Psalm 9-10](#).

The author concluded the psalm with an extra *peh*-verseline in order to achieve in total **23** initial letters on verseline level with the **פ** at the arithmetic centre in v. 12b (23 = 11 + **פ** + 11):

פ, ת, ש, ר, ק, צ, ע, ס, ג, מ, **ל**, כ, י, ט, ח, ז, **ו**, ה, ד, ג, ב, **א**. By means of the first, middle and final of the 23 letters he spelled the root **אלף**, 'to teach' (pi.), a synonym of **למד**, 'to teach'. Thus, the verb **אלף** strengthens and highlights the verb **למד** in v. 12b, the meaningful centre. In order to retain the required **22** verselines of an alphabetic acrostic, he replaced the expected *waw*-verseline with a *waw*-colon (v. 6b).

For this insight I am indebted to A.R. Ceresko, "The ABCs of wisdom in Psalm xxxiv", VT 35 (1985), 99-104, and L. Eriksson, 'Come children, listen to me!' Psalm 34 in the Hebrew Bible and in Early Christian Writings (Coniectanea Biblica, OT Series 32), Stockholm, 1991.

Observations

1. On the level of words the arithmetic centre falls on the three words in v. 12b,

יְרֵאת יְהוָה אֶלְמִדְכֶם I will teach you the fear of YHWH

with **77** words on either side: $157 = 77 + 3 + 77$. Given the theme of the psalm as a whole, these words may be regarded as its deliberately designed meaningful centre. It expresses the gist of what the speaker had in mind. The use of exactly **77** (7×11) words to flank the meaningful centre was most probably consciously designed to express the idea of fullness and fulfilment.

As in all other alphabetic acrostics, the meaningful centre on word level coincides with the middle of the alphabetical sequence, in this case, the *lamedh*-verseline. The three alliterating *lamedhs* in v. 12 highlight the meaningful centre. This is strongly reminiscent of the remarkable two middle verselines of Psalm 37, with a fivefold *kaph*-alliteration (37:20) and a threefold *lamedh*-alliteration (37:21). Compare also the beautiful *lamedh*-alliterations in [Psalms 111](#) and [112](#)! See Observation 1 in my Analysis of [Psalm 37](#), and “The alphabetic acrostics” in the General Introduction.

The pivotal position of the meaningful centre is underscored by the poetical structure: it falls within the middle strophe and the middle verselines. It is additionally highlighted by the fact that it is part of the address to the children (vs. 12-15).

2. The two **1st person** sections can be differentiated without any difficulty (Column **c**). The first passage is vs. 2-7. Note that the speaker refers to himself as ‘this poor man’ (v. 7), obviously to prelude the next passage, vs. 8-11, in which he speaks in a more detached way. The other **1st person** passage is to be found in vs. 12-15, his address to the children, introduced by the invitation: ‘Come, children, listen to me!’ (v. 12a). The two **1st person** passages are made up of **69** words (3×23). The *kabod* number **23** features in 4 other instances in the poem: vs. 2-7 (**23** words before atnach), vs. 7-9 (**23** words), vs. 6-11 (2×23 words) and vs. 7-11 (**23** words before atnach). The *kabod* number **32** appears in the number of words in vs. 8-11 (see Column **d**) and in the words after atnach in vs. 2-11.
3. The 16 occurrences of the name YHWH and the 7 occurrences of the *kabod* numbers compensate for the relatively low frequency of the divine name numbers, which appear only in vs. 2-9 (**34** words before atnach), vs. 10-11 (**17** in total), vs. 7-11 (**17** after atnach), and vs. 6-11 (**26** before atnach). One can imagine that the intricate structure of the text in vs. 12-23, dominated by the compositional formula $28 = 15 + 13$ (and $13 + 15$), did not leave room for generating additional divine name numbers.
4. Other significant numbers are **13** as well as **7** and **11** and their multiples, especially the **77** words surrounding the meaningful centre: the product of **7** (symbolizing fullness) and **11** (symbolizing fulfilment). In light of this, the **88** words in Column **d** may have been deliberately chosen to express the idea of fulfilment (8×11).
5. There are two clear instances of the use of a numerical chiasmus. The first relates to the whole text of the poem: the 73 words of vs. 2-11 form a chiasmus with the 84 words of vs. 12-23 in terms of the division by atnach (Columns a and b):

vs. 2-11	73 = 41 + 32
vs. 12-23	84 = 43 + 41
vs. 2-23	157 = 84 + 73

The second chiasmus completes the concatenation of the three **28**-word passages. The concatenation device links vs. 12-15 (Canticle II.1) to (Canticle II.2), which have

similar compositional formulas, and vs. 16-19 to vs. 20-23, by means of their chiastically structured compositional formulas:

$$\begin{array}{l}
 \text{vs. 12-15} \quad 28 = 15 + 13 \\
 \text{vs. 16-19} \quad 28 = 15 + 13 \\
 \text{vs. 20-23} \quad 28 = 13 + 15 \\
 \hline
 \text{vs. 16-23} \quad 56 = 28 + 28
 \end{array}
 \left. \vphantom{\begin{array}{l} \\ \\ \\ \\ \end{array}} \right\} 26$$

The frequent occurrence of the number **28** can hardly be a matter of chance. Its threefold use may be explained by the fact that **28** is the numerical value of the keyword **יַחְדָּו**, 'together' (v. 4b). The author employed this number to emphasize symbolically the idea of 'togetherness', not only the togetherness of all who take part in exalting God's name (v. 4), but also their togetherness with God. It is meaningful that the only other word having the numerical value of **28** is **בְּיְהוָה**, 'in YHWH' (v. 3).

6. For the function of the keyword **אֲשֶׁרִי**, 'happy' (v. 9b), preluding **אֲשֶׁרִי** in Ps. 41:1, see Observation 1 in my Analysis of [Psalm 32](#) and Observation 3 in that of [Psalm 41](#).
7. The name **יְהוָה** occurs no less than 16 times – see Observation 3.

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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