

Psalm 54— Logotechnical Analysis

Guidelines

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

Specific features of Psalm 54

- The use of the menorah pattern on the level of the seven verselines of the poem is a feature Psalm 54 shares with Psalms 14, 67, and 22:13-19.
- As in the two preceding psalms, the numerical value of a keyword is used to define the total number of words in the poem: in this case, **בְּאֵמֶתְךָ**, 'in your faithfulness' (v. 7b).
- The change of the direction of address (in vs. 5c and 7b) serves to mark the caesurae in the text.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 3-4, 5 || 6-7, 8-9 (2 cantos with 4 strophes, 7 verselines and 15 cola).
- Fokkelman: 3-5, 6-7, 8-9 (3 strophes with 7 verselines and 15 cola).
- Labuschagne: same as Van der Lugt.

Logotechnical analysis

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

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	לְמִנְצַחַת בְּנִינֹת מְשָׁכִיל לְדָוִד:	4	4			
2	בְּבוֹא הַיָּפִים וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְשֹׁאֵלֵי־ הָלֹא דָוִד מִסְתַּתֵּר עִמָּנוּ:	4	4			
	Heading, v. 1-2	12	= 8	+ 4		
3	אֱלֹהִים בְּשִׁמְךָ הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי וּבְגִבּוֹרֶתְךָ תְּדַיְנֵנִי: Total, v. 3	3	3		3	
		2		2	2	
	Total, v. 3	5	= 3	+ 2	= 5	+ 0
4	אֱלֹהִים שְׁמַע תְּפִלָּתִי תִּצְוֶנָה לְאִמְרֵי־פִי: Total, v. 4	3	3		3	
		3		3	3	
	Total, v. 4	6	= 3	+ 3	= 6	+ 0
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 3-4	11	= 6	+ 5	= 11	+ 0
5	כִּי זָרִים קָמוּ עָלַי וְעִרְצִים בִּקְשׁוּ נַפְשִׁי לֹא שְׁמוֹ אֱלֹהִים לְיִגְדֵם סֶלַח: Total, v. 5	3	4	4	4	
		3	3		3	
		4		4		4
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 5	11	= 7	+ 4	= 7	+ 4
	Canto I Total, v. 3-5	22	= 13	+ 9	= 18	+ 4

6	Middle words:	הַיְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עֹזֵר לִי	4	4	4	4
		אֲדֹנָי בְּסִמְכֵי נַפְשִׁי:		3	3	3
		49 = 23 + 3 + 23		7	= 4 + 3 = 0 + 7	
	Middle colon (6a):	15 = 7 + 1 + 7	Total, v. 6			
	Middle verseline (6):	7 = 3 + 1 + 3	Total, v. 3-6	29	= 17 + 12 = 18 + 11	
		יָשִׁיב הָרַע לְשֹׂרְרָיו	5	3	3	3
		בְּאַמְתָּךְ הַצְמִיתָם:		2	2	2
		בְּאַמְתָּךְ = 49		5	= 3 + 2 = 2 + 3	
		(2 + 1 + 13 + 22 + 11 = 49)	Total, v. 7	23	= 14 + 9 = 9 + 14	
			Total, v. 5-7	12	= 7 + 5 = 2 + 10	
	Strophe 3		Total, v. 6-7	34	= 20 + 14 = 20 + 14	
			Total, v. 3-7			
8		בְּנִדְבָה אֲזַבְחָה-לְךָ	6	3	3	3
		אֲזַרְחָה שְׂמֹךְ יְהוָה		3	3	3
		כִּי-טוֹב:		2	2	2
			Total, v. 8	8	= 3 + 5 = 8 + 0	
			Total, v. 5-8	31	= 17 + 14 = 17 + 14	
9	Coda	כִּי מִכָּל-צָרָה הַצִּילָנִי	7	4	4	4
		וּבְאֵיבֵי רְאִתָּה עֵינַי:		3	3	3
			Total, v. 9	7	= 4 + 3 = 0 + 7	
	Strophe 4		Total, v. 8-9	15	= 7 + 8 = 8 + 7	
			Total, v. 5-9	38	= 21 + 17 = 17 + 21	
			Total, v. 3-4 + 8-9	26	= 13 + 13 = 19 + 7	
			Total, v. 3-5	22	= 13 + 9 = 18 + 4	
	Canto II		Total, v. 6-9	27	= 14 + 13 = 10 + 17	
			Numerical Chiasmus, Total, v. 3-9	49	= 27 + 22 = 28 + 21	
			With the heading and סְלָה (1x), v. 1-9	62	= 35 + 27	

Observations

- The arithmetic centre of the poem is constituted by the three words in v. 6a, אֱלֹהִים עֹזֵר לִי, 'God is my helper', which is a particularly meaningful centre for a prayer of supplication for help: 49 = 23 + 3 + 23. The 3 words at the centre are embraced by 23 words on either side to generate the divine name number 26:

$$23 + 3 | 3 + 23 = 26 | 26.$$

- In terms of the 7 verselines (coinciding with the 7 Masoretic verses), the middle verseline is constituted by the 7 words in v. 6, which may have been intended as the meaningful centre in terms of verselines:

הַיְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עֹזֵר לִי ^ אֲדֹנָי בְּסִמְכֵי נַפְשִׁי:

Behold, God is my helper, the Lord the sustainer of my life!

It might be a matter of chance, but these 7 words have altogether exactly 13 + 13 = 26 letters, as Pieter van der Lugt has noticed (private communication).

- In terms of the 15 cola, the middle colon is v. 6a, which is flanked by 7 cola on either side: 15 = 7 + 1 + 7. In light of this, it is not surprising that the number of fullness, 7, appears also in the 49 (7 x 7) words of the poem. The centre is highlighted by the sudden switch from 2nd to 3rd person, and by the numerical chiasmus formed by vs. 3-5 and 6-9. See in the General Introduction, "Special devices to highlight the meaningful centre".

4. The total number of words, **49**, represents the numerical value of **בְּאֵמֶנֶךָ**, 'in your faithfulness' (v. 7b), which appears to be an important keyword: God's faithfulness is the basis for what is expressed in the arithmetic centre of the poem, 'God is my helper'. Compare the two preceding psalms.
5. The sudden change in the direction of address in v. 5c (from words addressed to God to words spoken about him) obviously functions a transition marker to usher in the 3rd person passage in vs. 6-7. In the same way, the abrupt change back to 2nd person in v. 7b heralds the 2nd person passage in v. 8.

The last verseline of the concluding strophe, v. 9, is significantly phrased in 3rd person form, which is a clear indication that it has been designed as a coda. See the General Introduction, "The use of a coda as a device for conclusion." Since v. 9 is a coda, the particle **וְ** should not be regarded as a conjunction, 'because', but as a demonstrative, deictic or stressing particle: 'yes' or 'surely'.

The function of the *selah* after v. 5 is obviously to mark the canto division and perhaps also to draw attention to the meaningful centre in v. 6. See Observation 6 in my Analysis of [Psalm 55](#).

6. Though the name YHWH occurs only once (in v. 8b – compare [Ps. 52:11](#)), it is woven into the text in quite a number of ways by means of the divine name numbers:

vs. 3-6	17 words before atnach
vs. 3-7	34 (2 x 17) words in total
vs. 5-8	17 words before atnach (31 = 17a + 14b)
vs. 5-8	17 words in 2 nd person form (31 = 17c + 14d)
vs. 5-9	17 words after atnach (38 = 21a + 17b)
vs. 5-9	17 words in 2 nd person form (38 = 17c + 21d)
vs. 6-9	17 words in 3 rd person form
vs. 2-9	26 words after atnach
vs. 3-4+8-9	26 words in total (respectively 11 + 15).*

- * For the formula **26 = 11 + 15** see Observation 4 in the Analysis of [Psalm 53](#).

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