

Psalm 141— 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 141

- Like the preceding Psalm 140 and the following Psalms 142 and 143, this poem is a prayer of an individual for deliverance from a troublesome situation: here, more specifically, from the danger of giving in to temptation.
- In terms of cantos and strophes, Psalm 141 has a lucid and regular structure, but from the viewpoint of numerical composition and in comparison with the preceding psalms, it is less striking. Its meaningful centre is also rather obscure.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 1-2 || 3-4, 5 || 6-7, 8-10 (3 cantos, 5 strophes, 12 verselines and 24 cola).
- Fokkelman: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10 (5 strophes with 12 verselines and 24 cola).
- Labuschagne: 1-2, 3-4 || 5, 6-7 || 8-10 (3 cantos, 5 strophes, 12 verselines and 24 cola).

Logotechnical analysis

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

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	מְזֹמֹר לְדָוִד Heading	2 = 2 + 0				
	1 יהוה קראתיך חושה לי ^א	4	4		4	
	האזינה קולי בקראי לך:	4		4	4	
	Total, v. 1	8 = 4 + 4 = 8 + 0				
2	2 תבון תפלתי קטרת לפניך ^א	4	4		4	
	משאת כפי מנחת-ערב:	4		4	4	
	Total, v. 2	8 = 4 + 4 = 8 + 0				
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-2	16 = 8 + 8 = 16 + 0				
3	3 שיתה יהוה שמרה לפי ^א	4	4		4	
	נצרה על-דל שפתי:	4		4	4	
	Total, v. 3	8 = 4 + 4 = 8 + 0				
4	4 אל-תט-לבי לדבר רע	5	5		5	
	להתעולל על-לוח ברשע	3	3		3	
	5 את-אשים פעל-און ^א	4	4		4	
	ובל-אלחם במנעמיהם:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 4	15 = 12 + 3 = 15 + 0				
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 3-4	23 = 16 + 7 = 23 + 0				
	Canto I Total, v. 1-4	39 = 24 + 15 = 39 + 0				

5	Middle verselines: 5+2+5	יְהַלְמִנִּי צַדִּיק חֶסֶד	6	3	3	3
	Middle cola: 10 + 4 + 10	וְיֹכִיחֵנִי שְׁמֹן רֹאשׁ		3	3	3
	Middle words: 93 = 45 + 3 + 45	אֶל־יְנִי רֹאשִׁי	7	3	3	3
		כִּי־עוֹד וּתְפַלְתִּי בְרַעוּתֵיהֶם:		4	4	4
	Middle strophe: Strophe 3	Total, v. 5		13	= 9 + 4 = 0 + 13	
	In terms of words: 39 + 13 + 41	Total, v. 3-5		36	= 25 + 11 = 23 + 13	
		Total, v. 1-5		52	= 33 + 19 = 39 + 13	
6		נִשְׁמָטוּ בִידֵי־סֹלֶעַ שְׁפָטֵיהֶם	8	4	4	4
		וְשָׁמְעוּ אֶמְרֵי כִי נַעֲמֹ:		4	4	4
		Total, v. 6		8	= 4 + 4 = 0 + 8	
7		כָּמוֹ פֶלֶחַ וּבִקְעַת בְּאֶרֶץ	9	4	4	4
		נִפְזְרוּ עֲצָמֵינוּ לְפִי שְׂאוּל:		4	4	4
		Total, v. 7		8	= 4 + 4 = 0 + 8	
	Strophe 4	Total, v. 6-7		16	= 8 + 8 = 0 + 16	
	Canto II	Total, v. 5-7		29	= 17 + 12 = 0 + 29	
		Total, v. 3-7		52	= 33 + 19 = 23 + 29	
		Total, v. 1-7		68	= 41 + 27 = 39 + 29	
8		כִּי אֶלֶיךָ יְהוָה אֲדַבֵּר עֵינָי	10	5	5	5
		בְּכֶה חֲסִיתִי אֶל־תֵּעַר נַפְשִׁי:		5	5	5
		Total, v. 8		10	= 5 + 5 = 10 + 0	
		Total, v. 4-8		54	= 34 + 20 = 25 + 29	
9		שְׁמַרְנֵי מִיְדֵי פֶחַ וְקִשׁוּ לִי	11	5	5	5
		וּמִקְשׁוֹת פִּעְלֵי אֶן:		3	3	3
		Total, v. 9		8	= 5 + 3 = 8 + 0	
10		יִפְלוּ בְּמִכְמָרְיוֹ רְשָׁעִים	12	3	3	3
		יִחַד אֲנֹכִי עַד־אֶעְבֹּר:		4	4	4
		Total, v. 10		7	= 3 + 4 = 7 + 0	
	Canto III Strophe 5	Total, v. 8-10		25	= 13 + 12 = 25 + 0	
		Total, v. 6-10		41	= 21 + 20 = 25 + 16	
		Total, v. 5-10		54	= 30 + 24 = 25 + 29	
		Total, v. 2-10		85	= 50 + 35 = 56 + 29	
		Total, v. 1-10		93	= 54 + 39 = 64 + 29	
		With the heading, v. 1-10		95	= 56 + 39	

Observations

- The logotechnical centre is constituted by the 3 words in v. 5c (93 = 45 + 3 + 45):
אֶל־יְנִי רֹאשִׁי, 'may my head not disallow it', which is not particularly meaningful. The real meaningful centre is to be found in v. 5, the 13-word middle strophe (as in Psalm 140), which coincides with the 2 middle verselines and the 4 middle cola. If my colometric division of this rather obscure verse is correct - unlike Van der Lugt and Fokkelman, I take the atnach in v. 5c into account - there is an enjambment in the second verseline:

יְהַלְמִנִּי צַדִּיק חֶסֶד וְיֹכִיחֵנִי שְׁמֹן רֹאשׁ^{5a-b}
אֶל־יְנִי רֹאשִׁי ^ כִּי־עוֹד וּתְפַלְתִּי בְרַעוּתֵיהֶם: ^{5b-c}

May a just person strike me: a favour // and may he chastise me: oil for the head;
may my head not disallow it // as long as I live, but my prayer is against their evil deeds.

In terms of words, the middle strophe is slightly off-centre: 93 = 39 + 13 + 41, but including the 2-word heading it is in balance, flanked by 41 words: 95 = 41 + 13 + 41. This means that a 2-word heading was deliberately chosen to achieve the balance. For a similar case, see Observation 1 in my Analysis of [Psalm 138](#).

The meaningful centre forms the first part of the self-reflection of the speaker in vs. 5-7, but in a way, the entire passage, Canto II, may be regarded as a meaningful centre.

- The canto-structure presented here is determined by differentiating between the words specifically addressed to God (vs. 1-4 and 8-10, Column c) and the words devoted to the self-reflection of the speaker (vs. 5-7, Column d). This means that there are hard caesurae between vs. 4 || 5 and 7 || 8, and not between 2 || 3 and 5 || 6.

Canto I	vs. 1-4	First part of the prayer	5 verselines	10 cola	39 w.
Canto II	vs. 5-7	The self-reflection	4 verselines	8 cola	29 w.
Canto III	vs. 8-10	Second part of the prayer	3 verselines	6 cola	25 w.

The self-reflection of the speaker is to be regarded as an interior monologue uttered in the presence of God: he no longer addresses God directly, neither does he explicitly speak *about* him. Compare Ps. 140:7a and 10-13, and 142:4c-5 – see Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 140](#), and Observation 4 in that of [Psalm 142](#).

- The author did his best to weave the divine name numbers into the fabric of his text, but did not endeavour to let them support his poetic structure. This applies to the two *kabod* numbers too, which appear in the **23** words in vs. 3-4 and the **64** (2 x **32**) words of the prayer. The numbers **17** and **26** feature in the following way:

vs. 1-5	52 (2 x 26) words
vs. 5-7	17 words before atnach
vs. 3-7	52 (2 x 26) words in total
vs. 1-7	68 (4 x 17) words in total
vs. 4-8	34 (2 x 17) words before atnach
vs. 2-10	85 (5 x 17) words in total.

- The name יהוה appears 3 times: vs. 1a, 3a, and 8a, in the latter case, together with אדני, 'Lord', as in Ps. 140:8.

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