

Psalm 118— 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 118

- Psalm 118 reiterates various themes from the preceding psalms in a skilfully composed, variegated mosaic of statements about YHWH's saving acts, his readiness to help, protect and rescue, and the praise and thanks due to him.
- The middle strophe of the psalm, vs. 15-16, is the rhetorical centre, which I regard as the meaningful centre. It is very similar to the rhetorical – and meaningful - centres of both Psalm 115 (vs. 9-11) and Psalm 135 (vs. 10-12). See below, Observation 1.
- As in Psalm 8, two identical 7-word verselines are used as a device for inclusion to delimit the psalm as a whole. This is reminiscent of Psalms 103 and 104. In addition, the first and last cantos constitute a framework around the central section, vs. 5-27. Psalm 118 shares this envelope technique with many of the preceding psalms.
- In an ingeniously subtle numerical fashion Psalm 118 preludes the alphabetic acrostic Psalm 119, which shows that it was purposefully composed to introduce it. Psalm 118 shares this feature with Psalm 33, which preludes the alphabetic acrostic Psalm 34.
- As I argued in the Introduction, Psalm 118 and 119 function as a bridge between the First Group of Eleven Psalms in Book V (107-117) and the Songs of Ascents (120-134).

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

- Van der Lugt: 1-2, 3-4 || 5, 6-7, 8-9, 10-12 || 13-14, 15-16, 17-18, 19-20 || 21, 22-23, 24-25, 26-28, 29 (4 cantos with 15 strophes, 29 verselines and 61 cola).
- Fokkelman: 1-4, 5-7 || 8-9, 10-12, 13-14 || 15-16, 17-18, 19-20 || 21-22, 23-24, 25 || 26-27, 28-29 (5 stanzas with 13 strophes, 29 verselines and 61 cola).
- Labuschagne: 1-2, 3-4 || 5-7, 8-9 | 10-12 || 13-14, 15-16 | 17-18, 19-20 || 21-24 | 25-26, 27 || 28-29 (5 cantos with 13 strophes, 29 verselines and 61 cola).

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words spoken about God; **d**: words addressed to God.
- The numbering of the verselines coincides with that of the Masoretic verses.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	הודו ליהוה כִּי־טוֹב־ ^א	4	4		4	
	See Observation 3 for חסד : כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסָדוֹ:	3		3	3	
	Device for inclusion Total, v. 1	7	= 4	+ 3	= 7	+ 0
2	יֹאמְרוּ־נָא יִשְׂרָאֵל־ ^א	3	3		3	
	כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסָדוֹ:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 2	6	= 3	+ 3	= 6	+ 0
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-2	13	= 7	+ 6	= 13	+ 0
3	יֹאמְרוּ־נָא בֵּית־אֱהֲרָן־ ^א	4	4		4	
	כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסָדוֹ:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 3	7	= 4	+ 3	= 7	+ 0
4	יֹאמְרוּ־נָא יְרֵאֵי יְהוָה־ ^א	4	4		4	
	כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסָדוֹ:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 4	7	= 4	+ 3	= 7	+ 0
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 3-4	14	= 8	+ 6	= 14	+ 0
	Canto I Total, v. 1-4	27	= 15	+ 12	= 27	+ 0

5	מִן־תִּמְצַר קָרָאתִי יְהוָה [^] עָנִי בְּמִרְחֵב יָהּ: Total, v. 5	4 4 4 3 3 3 7 = 4 + 3 = 7 + 0
6	יְהוָה לִי לֹא אִירָא [^] מִה־יַּעֲשֶׂה לִי אָדָם: Total, v. 6	4 4 4 4 4 4 8 = 4 + 4 = 8 + 0
7	יְהוָה לִי בְּעֶזְרִי [^] וְאֲנִי אֶרְאֶה בְּשִׁנְאִי: Total, v. 7	3 3 3 3 3 3 6 = 3 + 3 = 6 + 0
	Strophe 3 Total, v. 5-7 Total, v. 1-7	21 = 11 + 10 = 21 + 0 48 = 26 + 22 = 48 + 0
8	טוֹב לַחֲסוֹת בְּיְהוָה [^] מִבֶּטֶחַ בְּאָדָם: Total, v. 8	3 3 3 2 2 2 5 = 3 + 2 = 5 + 0
	Total, v. 5-8	26 = 14 + 12 = 26 + 0
9	טוֹב לַחֲסוֹת בְּיְהוָה [^] מִבֶּטֶחַ בְּגֵדִים: Total, v. 9	3 3 3 2 2 2 5 = 3 + 2 = 5 + 0
	Strophe 4 Total, v. 8-9 Canticle II.1 Total, v. 5-9 Total, v. 2-9 Total, v. 1-9	10 = 6 + 4 = 10 + 0 31 = 17 + 14 = 31 + 0 51 = 28 + 23 = 51 + 0 58 = 32 + 26 = 58 + 0
10	כָּל־גּוֹיִם סָבְבוּנִי [^] בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה כִּי אֲמִלֵּם: Total, v. 10	3 3 3 4 4 4 7 = 3 + 4 = 7 + 0
	Total, v. 8-10	17 = 9 + 8 = 17 + 0
11	סְבוּנִי גַם־סָבְבוּנִי [^] בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה כִּי אֲמִלֵּם: Total, v. 11	3 3 3 4 4 4 7 = 3 + 4 = 7 + 0
12	סְבוּנִי כְּדַבּוּרִים דַּעֲכוּ כְּאֵשׁ קוֹצִים [^] בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה כִּי אֲמִלֵּם: Total, v. 12	2 2 2 3 3 3 4 4 4 9 = 5 + 4 = 9 + 0
	Canticle II.2 Strophe 5 Total, v. 10-12 Canto II Total, v. 5-12	23 = 11 + 12 = 23 + 0 54 = 28 + 26 = 54 + 0
13a	דַּחַח דְּחִיתָנִי לְנַפְלִי [^]	3 3 3
13b	וַיְהוָה עֶזְרִי: Total, v. 13	2 2 2 5 = 3 + 2 = 2 + 3
14	עָזִי וְזַמְרַת יְהוָה [^] וַיְהִי־לִי לִישׁוּעָה: Total, v. 14	3 3 3 3 3 3 6 = 3 + 3 = 6 + 0
	Strophe 6 Total, v. 13-14 Total, v. 10-14 Total, v. 5-14	11 = 6 + 5 = 8 + 3 34 = 17 + 17 = 31 + 3 65 = 34 + 31 = 62 + 3

15	Middle verseline: 14+1+14	קוֹל רְנָה וַיִּשְׁעָה	3	3	3
	Middle cola: 61 = 29 + 3 + 29	בְּאֶהְלֵי צְדִיקִים	2	2	2
	Middle words: 97 + 4 + 97 :	יָמִין יְהוָה עָשָׂה חֵיל	4		4
16	Vs. 15-16 Middle Strophe, ^	יָמִין יְהוָה רוֹמְמָה	3	3	3
	meaningful centre of the : ^	יָמִין יְהוָה עָשָׂה חֵיל	4		4
	entire psalm: Strophe 7	Total, v. 15-16	16	= 8 + 8	= 16 + 0
	Canticle III.1	Total, v. 13-16	27	= 14 + 13	= 24 + 3
17		לֹא אֲמוֹת כִּי־אֶתְיָהֵא	4	4	4
		וְאֶסְפֹּר מַעֲשֵׂי יְהוָה :	3		3
		Total, v. 17	7	= 4 + 3	= 7 + 0
18		יִסַּר יִסְרֹנֵי יְהוָה	3	3	3
		וְלִמּוֹת לֹא נִתְנַגְּנִי :	3		3
		Total, v. 18	6	= 3 + 3	= 6 + 0
		Strophe 8	13	= 7 + 6	= 13 + 0
19		פִּתְחוּ־לִי שַׁעֲרֵי־צְדִקָּה	4	4	4
		אֲבֹא־בָם אוֹדֶה יְהוָה :	4		4
		Total, v. 19	8	= 4 + 4	= 8 + 0
20		זֶה־הַשַּׁעַר לִיהוָה	3	3	3
		צְדִיקִים יָבֹאוּ בּוֹ :	3		3
		Total, v. 20	6	= 3 + 3	= 6 + 0
		Strophe 9	14	= 7 + 7	= 14 + 0
		Canticle III.2	27	= 14 + 13	= 27 + 0
		Total, v. 16-20	34	= 17 + 17	= 34 + 0
		Canto III	54	= 28 + 26	= 51 + 3
21		אוֹדֶה כִּי עֲנִיתִנִּי	3	3	3
		וַתְּהִי־לִי לִישׁוּעָה :	3		3
		Total, v. 21	6	= 3 + 3	= 0 + 6
		Total, v. 18-21	26	= 13 + 13	= 20 + 6
22		אֲבֹן מְאֹסוֹ הַבּוֹנִים	3	3	3
		הַיְתֵתָה לְרֹאשׁ פְּנֵה :	3		3
		Total, v. 22	6	= 3 + 3	= 6 + 0
		Total, v. 19-22	26	= 13 + 13	= 20 + 6
23		מֵאֵת יְהוָה הַיְתֵתָה זֹאת	4	4	4
		הִיא נִפְלְאת בְּעֵינֵינוּ :	3		3
		Total, v. 23	7	= 4 + 3	= 7 + 0
		Total, v. 21-23	19	= 10 + 9	= 13 + 6
24		זֶה־הַיּוֹם עָשָׂה יְהוָה	4	4	4
		נִגְיָלָה וְנִשְׁמְחָה בּוֹ :	3		3
		Total, v. 24	7	= 4 + 3	= 7 + 0
		Canticle IV.1	26	= 14 + 12	= 20 + 6
		Strophe 10			
		v. 21-24			

25		אָנָּא יְהוָה הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא	4	4	4
		אָנָּא יְהוָה הַצְּלִיחָה נָּא:	4	4	4
		Total, v. 25	8	= 4 + 4	= 0 + 8
		Total, v. 21-25	34	= 18 + 16	= 20 + 14
26		בְּרוּךְ הַבָּא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה	4	4	4
		בִּרְכוּנֵיכֶם מִבֵּית יְהוָה:	3	3	3
		Total, v. 26	7	= 4 + 3	= 7 + 0
		Strophe 11 Total, v. 25-26	15	= 8 + 7	= 7 + 8
		Total, v. 19-26	55	= 29 + 26	= 41 + 14
27		אֵל יְהוָה וַיָּאֵר לְנוּ	4	4	4
		אֶסְרוּחַג בְּעַבְתֵּימֶֿם	3	3	3
		עַד־קִרְנוֹת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ:	3	3	3
		Strophe 12 Total, v. 27	10	= 7 + 3	= 10 + 0
		Total, v. 26-27	17	= 11 + 6	= 17 + 0
		Canticle IV.2 Total, v. 25-27	25	= 15 + 10	= 17 + 8
		Canto IV Total, v. 21-27	51	= 29 + 22	= 37 + 14
		Cantos II-IV Total, v. 5-27	159	= 85 + 74	= 142 + 17
28		אֱלֹהֵי אֲתָהּ וְאוֹדֶךָ	3	3	3
		אֱלֹהֵי אֲרוֹמְךָ:	2	2	2
		Total, v. 28	5	= 3 + 2	= 0 + 5
29	Coda	הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה כִּי־טוֹב	4	4	4
		כִּי לְעוֹלָם תִּסְדֹּד:	3	3	3
		Device for inclusion Total, v. 29	7	= 4 + 3	= 7 + 0
		Canto V Strophe 13 Total, v. 28-29	12	= 7 + 5	= 7 + 5
		Total, v. 24-29	44	= 26 + 18	= 31 + 13
		Total, v. 1-29	198	= 107 + 91	= 176 + 22

Observations

- In terms of the 198 words of the psalm, the 4 words in v. 15c constitute its logotechnical centre (198 = 97 + 4 + 97):

יְמִין יְהוָה עֲשָׂה חֵיל The right hand of YHWH acts with power.

The phrase is the first of three more or less stereotyped triumphant cries about *YHWH's right hand* appearing in vs. 15c, 16a and 16b (in box).

Compare the similarly enjambed threefold statement in the meaningful centre of Psalm 115 (vs. 9-11) – see Observation 1 in my Analysis of [Psalm 115](#). Compare also the meaningful centre of [Psalm 135](#) (the middle strophe in vs. 10-12, dealing with the defeat of Sichon and Og). The three psalms exhibit similar traits in terms of form and content!

The four middle words are undoubtedly meaningful, and so is the middle verseline, v. 15, but the best candidate for meaningful centre is the middle strophe, vs. 15-16, which is, in terms of words, a slightly off-centre pivot (198 = 92 + 16 + 90):

קוֹל רִנָּה וַיִּשׁוּעָה בְּאֵתְלֵי צַדִּיקִים ¹⁵ יְמִין יְהוָה עֲשָׂה חֵיל

יְמִין יְהוָה רוֹמְמָה ¹⁶ יְמִין יְהוָה עֲשָׂה חֵיל:

- A cry of triumph and salvation in the tents of the righteous! //

[The right hand of YHWH acts with power!]

- [The right hand of YHWH is exalted!] // [The right hand of YHWH acts with power!]

The fact that the middle words, the middle verseline, the middle cola, as well as the threefold triumphant cry, all fall within the central strophe, highlights and buttresses it as the consciously designed meaningful centre.

2. A closer examination of the significant three triumphant cries about YHWH's right hand in [vs. 15c-16](#) brings to light that they are positioned precisely in the arithmetic middle of the 49 cola of the central section, vs. 5-27 ($49 = 23 + 3 + 23$). I consider this as strong evidence of the structural unity of the central section, Cantos II-IV, in the division of the text proposed in the next Observation.*
3. The numerical value of the key-word אָהַבָה, 'love' ($8+15+4=27$) plays an important part in the psalm. It occurs no less than 5x (1b, 2b, 3b, and 4b, and in the coda, 29b). Vs. 1-4 have **27** words; vs. 5-12 have **54** (2×27); vs. 13-16 have **27** and 17-20 have **27**.

The psalm is a mosaic of statements about YHWH's steadfast love, the helper in times of distress, the powerful saviour, who deserves praise and thanks. It lacks a strong leading theme and a logical flow of thought, which makes it difficult to determine its compositional structure in terms of content. However, there are two evident criteria enabling us to detect the caesurae in the text and to identify its canto-structure accordingly. First, a number of significant compositional formulae, and second, the striking use of words directly addressed to God (Column d) in a poem almost entirely composed of words spoken about him. On the basis of these criteria, I identified six breaks in the text, between vs. 4||5, 12||13, 16||17, 20||21, 24||25, and 27||28, which divide the psalm into the following cantos and Canticles:

Canto I vs. 1-4 **27 words in total: 13 in Strophe 1 and 14 in Strophe 2**

Canticle II.1 vs. 5-9 **31 words in total**

Canticle II.2 vs. 10-12 **23 words in total**

Canto II vs. 5-12	54 (2×27) words: 28 before and 26 after atnach
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Canticle III.1 vs. 13-16 **27 words: 14 before and 13 after atnach**

Canticle III.2 vs. 17-20 **27 words: 14 before and 13 after atnach**

Canto III vs. 13-20	54 (2×27) words: 28 before and 26 after atnach
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Canticle IV.1 vs. 21-24 **26 words in total**

Canticle IV.2 vs. 25-27 **25 words in total**

Canto IV vs. 21-27	51 (3×17) words in total
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Canto V vs. 28-29 **12 words in total.**

Note the *tricollic verseline* in v. 12 (at the end of Canto II), and the *tricollic verseline* in v. 27 (at the end of Canto IV), both of which have an evident delimiting function. It is also interesting to note that **Canto I** and **Canto V** stand out as the two parts of the **framework** to the central section. It is made up of **39** words ($27 + 12$) divided into 22 before and **17** after atnach. Moreover, in terms of the direction of address, **34** (2×17) words are used to speak about God (Column c) and **5** to address him directly (Column d):

Canto I vs. 1-4 $27 = 15a + 12b = 27c + 0d$

Canto V vs. 28-29 $12 = 7a + 5b = 7c + 5d$

Total: Cantos I and V	$39 = 22a + 17b = 34c + 5d.$
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This strongly suggests that the two parts were composed as a coherent literary unity.

4. A special feature of Psalm 118 is that it has a stereotyped 7-word device for inclusion (vs. 1 and 29), similarly as in [Psalm 8](#) and reminiscent of Psalms [103](#) and [104](#). The device in v. 1 is, however, fully integrated into vs. 2-4, closely linked to the phrase כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ, 'for your love endures for ever', in vs. 2b, 3b and 4b. This particular phrase reverberates exactly **26** times in Psalm 136 – see Observation 4 in my Analyses of [Psalm 135](#) and [Psalm 136](#).

* I am indebted to Herman Lamberts - who follows my analyses with keen interest - for drawing my attention to the significant structure of the central section and its framework.

In v. 29 the direction of address changes from 3rd to 2nd person, which shows that it is a coda. The coda usually stands apart *within* the concluding strophe or canto. For the coda, see the [General Introduction](#), “The use of a coda as a device for conclusion”.

5. The divine name numbers are woven into the text in the following way:

- vs. 1-7 **26** words before atnach
- vs. 5-8 **26** words in total
- vs. 5-9 **17** words before atnach
- vs. 2-9 **51** (3 x **17**) words in total
- vs. 1-9 **58** words, **32** before and **26** after atnach: the *kebod* YHWH formula
- vs. 8-10 **17** words in total
- vs. 5-12 **26** words after atnach
- vs. 10-14 **34** words in total, **17** before and **17** after atnach
- vs. 16-20 **34** words in total, **17** before and **17** after atnach
- vs. 13-20 **26** words after atnach and **51** (3 x **17**) words spoken about God
- vs. 18-21 **26** words in total, **13** before and **13** after atnach
- vs. 19-22 **26** words in total, **13** before and **13** after atnach
- vs. 21-24 **26** words in total
- vs. 21-25 **34** (2 x **17**) words in total
- vs. 19-26 **26** words after atnach
- vs. 26-27 **17** words in total
- vs. 5-27 **85** (5 x **17**) words before atnach
- vs. 24-29 **26** words before atnach.

6. Throughout the psalm, the poet speaks *about* God (Column c), but in four short verses (13a, 21, 25 and 28) he addresses God directly (Column d). The change in the direction of address has clearly a structural and attention drawing function, as we have seen above. In addition to this, the division of the 198 words into **176c** + **22d** seems to have been deliberately devised to prelude the **176** verselines and the **22** cantos of [Psalm 119](#). For a similar device, compare the 22 verselines of Psalm 33, which prelude the 22-verseline alphabetic acrostic, Psalm 34 – see Observation 2 in my Analysis of [Psalm 33](#).

7. The name יהוה occurs **22** times (vs. 1a, 4a, 6a, 7a, 8a, 9a, 10b, 11b, 12b, 13b, 15c, 16 (2x), 20a, 23a, 24a, 25 (2x), 26 (2x), 27a and 29a), strikingly corresponding with the **22** words addressed to YHWH (Column d).

The shorter form of the divine name, יה, YH, appears 6x (vs. 5 (2x), 14a, 17b, 18a and 19b); אֱלֹהִים occurs 2x (vs. 27a and 28a) and אֱלֹהֵי 1x (v. 28b).

In Psalm 118, the divine name occurs altogether 28 times (22x YHWH and 6x YH), to my knowledge, statistically the highest density in the Psalter.

Psalms 118 (with 28) and Psalm 119 (with 24) have altogether **52** (2 x **26**) occurrences.

It is intriguing to note that Psalms 120-134 contain **51** (3 x **17**) occurrences of YHWH.

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