

# Psalm 124— 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 feature of Psalm 124

- Psalm 124 is clearly a follow-up to Psalm 121. Note also the use of the statement from Ps. 121:2 in the coda of Psalm 124 (v.8). Its structure is rather similar to that of Psalm 121: both have 2 cantos with 4 strophes and **54** words, except that Psalm 124 has 9 verselines with 18 cola instead of the 8 verselines and 16 cola of Psalm 121. The reason behind the use of exactly **54** words is that they have a common theme: YHWH's guardianship. The number **54** represents the numerical value of the keyword in Psalm 121, שָׁמַר, 'keep, guard'.

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

- Van der Lugt: 1-2, 3-5, 6-7, 8 (4 strophes, 9 verselines and 18 cola).
- Fokkelman: similarly, except that he finds 2 stanzas: 1-2, 3-5 || 6-7, 8.
- Labuschagne: as Fokkelman, 1-2, 3-5 || 6-7, 8.

## Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words in the main body; **d**: words in the 'framework'.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת לְדָוִד	3	= 3	+ 0		
	לִי יְהוָה שְׁהִיָּה לְנוֹי	1	4	4		4
	יֹאמַר־נָא יִשְׂרָאֵל:	3		3		3
	Total, v. 1	7	= 4	+ 3	= 0	+ 7
2	לִי יְהוָה שְׁהִיָּה לְנוֹי	2	4	4		4
	בְּקוֹם עָלֵינוּ אָדָם:	3		3		3
	Total, v. 2	7	= 4	+ 3	= 0	+ 7
	<b>Strophe 1</b> Total, v. 1-2	14	= 8	+ 6	= 0	+ 14
3	אָזִי חַיִּים בְּלַעֲוֹנֵי	3	3		3	
	בַּחֲרוֹת אָפָם בָּנוּ:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 3	6	= 3	+ 3	= 6	+ 0
4	אָזִי הַמַּיִם שְׁטַפּוּנוּ	4	3		3	
	נִחַלָּה עָבַר עַל־נַפְשֵׁנוּ:	4		4	4	
	Total, v. 4	7	= 3	+ 4	= 7	+ 0
	Total, v. 1-4	27	= 14	+ 13	= 13	+ 14
5	אָזִי עָבַר עַל־נַפְשֵׁנוּ	5	4	4	4	
	הַמַּיִם הַיְיָרוּנוּם:	2		2	2	
	Total, v. 5	6	= 4	+ 2	= 6	+ 0
	<b>Strophe 2</b> Total, v. 3-5	19	= 10	+ 9	= 19	+ 0
	Total, v. 2-5	26	= 14	+ 12	= 19	+ 7
	<b>Canto I</b> Total, v. 1-5	33	= 18	+ 15	= 19	+ 14

6*	בְּרוּךְ, 'blessed', is the 1 <sup>st</sup> instance of בָּרַךְ in a series of <b>10</b> in the Songs of Ascents	6	2	2	2	2
	7	7	3	3	3	3
	8	8	2	2	2	2
	9	9	3	3	3	3
	10	10	4	4	4	4
	Total, v. 6-7	15	11	4	15	0
	Total, v. 3-7	34	21	13	34	0
	Total, v. 2-7	41	25	16	34	7
8	<b>Coda</b>	8	3	3	3	3
	9	9	3	3	3	3
	10	10	4	4	4	4
	Total, v. 8	6	3	3	0	6
	<b>Canto II</b> Total, v. 6-8	21	14	7	15	6
	Total, v. 5-8	27	18	9	21	6
	Total, v. 1-8	54	32	22	34	20
	שמר = 54	54	32	22	34	20
	With the heading, v. 1-8	57	35	22		

\* I see no cogent reason for ignoring or relocating the *atnach*. Incidentally, if the *atnach* would be relocated after the 4<sup>th</sup> word, the compositional formula would become 54 = 34 + 20, rendering it similar to the formula 54 = 34c + 20d – compare [Psalm 122](#)! However, this does not provide sufficient support to relocate the *atnach*.

## Observations

- The meaningful centre of the psalm is constituted by the middle verseline (9 = 4 + 1 + 4), v. 5, which coincides with the middle 2 cola (18 = 8 + 2 + 8):

אָזי עָבַר עַל־נַפְשֵׁנוּ ^ הַמַּיִם הַיַּרְדּוֹנִים:

Then over us would have swept // the raging waters.

Being the apogee of the three images of impending destruction introduced by the conjunction אָזי, 'then' (vs. 3a, 4a and 5a), this statement is a most appropriate meaningful centre.

- My canto division is based on the clear break in the text between vs. 5 and 6, in terms of content and form, and on the fact that vs. 1-5 and vs. 6-8 are distinct, well-defined units:

Canto I vs. 1-5 Had it not been for YHWH, we would have perished!

Canto II vs. 6-8 Blessed is YHWH for having rescued us!

**Canto I** is characterized by the repetition of the initial words of the 5 verselines: , לֹוֹלִי, לֹוֹלִי, אָזִי, אָזִי, אָזִי, 'had it not been..., had it not been..., then..., then..., then...'

Strophe 1, vs. 1-2, is very reminiscent of the beginning of Psalms 118 and 129. It is also worth noting that the words Israel is invited to speak, amount to exactly **26** (vs. 2-5).

**Canto II** is a self-contained unit, containing the praise to YHWH, who rescued Israel (vs. 6-7), and the concluding statement, the coda (v. 8). For the coda, see the [General Introduction](#), "The use of a coda as a device for conclusion".

- In terms of content Psalm 124 is clearly a follow-up to Psalm 121, of which the leading theme, YHWH's guardianship, is elaborated here. The two psalms are similar in form, made up of **54** words divided into two cantos and 4 strophes. My suggestion in the Analysis of [Psalm 121](#), that the numerical value of the keyword שְׁמַר, 'keep, guard' (54) determines the number of words, applies also here.

4. Unlike the situation in the preceding psalms, in Psalm 124 the author may have intentionally woven divine name numbers into the fabric of the text:

vs. 2-5           **26** words in total  
vs. 3-7           **34** (2 x **17**) words in total.

Given the numerical structure of the poetical body of the psalms as it stands, the inclusion of the 3-word heading in the word-count gives the following picture:

vs. 1-2           14 words in total: + 3 in the heading = **17** words  
vs. 1-4           14 words before atnach: + 3 in the heading = **17** words  
vs. 1-7           48 words in total: + 3 in the heading = **51** (3 x **17**) words.

I think it likely that the editors of the Psalter consciously contrived a 3-word heading – by adding לְדָוִד, ‘for David’, to the standard 2-word heading – in order to achieve these extra divine name numbers. It was at the editorial stage of the formation of the Psalter that the editors composed - or rewrote the headings if they were already present - and incorporated them into the individual poems. There is ample evidence showing that the number of words in the headings was carefully contrived to generate extra divine name numbers. For my view of the relation between the headings and the poetical bodies of the psalms, please consult Observation 1 in my Analysis of [Psalm 3](#).

In light of the great similarity between Psalm 121 and 124, it is indeed strange to find that *only* Psalm 124 was attributed to David. Both stem evidently from the same hand, which of course holds true for all Psalms of Ascents. However, the reason given above for the anomaly explains the addition of לְדָוִד.

5. As in many psalms, a framework (word-count in Column d) surrounding a central section (Column c) has been used to weave an extra divine name number into the fabric of the text: 54 = 14 + 34 + 6.
6. The word בְּרִיךְ, ‘blessed’, which occurs here for the first time in the Songs of Ascents (in v. 6a), introduces the series of 10 occurrences of בָּרַךְ, ‘to bless’, which culminate in Psalm 134 at the end of the corpus: 124:6, 128:4,5, 129:8 (2x), 132:15 (2x), 134:1, 2, 3. See the Introduction to Book V, p. 4 and Observation 2 in my Analysis of [Psalm 134](#).
7. The name יְהוָה occurs 4 times (vs. 1a, 2a, 6a and 8a). There are altogether 51 (3 x 17) occurrences of the divine name in the Songs of Ascents. Their distribution is most significant and therefore clearly deliberately designed:
- 16 occurrences in 120-124 (5 psalms)
  - 17 occurrences in 125-129 (5 psalms)
  - 18 occurrences in 130-134 (5 psalms).

This underscores Van der Lugt’s division of this corpus into three sub-groups of 5 psalms (private communication). For particulars, see the Introduction to [Book V](#).

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