

Psalm 142— 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 142

- Psalm 142 is the follow-up to Psalms 140 and 141, being a prayer of an individual for deliverance from a troublesome situation: in this case, a dead-end path with no way to escape and no one to help.
- The psalm has a lucid structure: 3 cantos and 5 strophes (like Psalm 141), 11 verselines (10 are bicolic) and **23** cola; v. 6, the middle strophe, is the only tricolonic verseline. As a numerical composition, the psalm stands out for its ingenious use of symbolic numbers.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 2-4b, 4c-5 || 6, 7, 8 (2 cantos, 5 strophes, 11 verselines and 23 cola).
- Fokkelman: 2-4a, 4b-5, 6-7, 8 (4 strophes with 10 verselines and 23 cola, taking vs. 3-4 as two tricola instead of three bicola).
- Labuschagne: 2-3 || 4-5 || 6, 7, 8 (3 cantos, 5 strophes, 11 verselines and 23 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 spoken about God.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	מִשְׁכִּיל לְדָוִד בְּהִיּוֹתוֹ בַּמְעָרָה תְּפִלָּה:	5 = 2 + 3				
	Heading, v. 1	5 = 2 + 3				
2	קוּלִי אֶל־יְהוָה אֲזַעֲקֶךָ	1 4	4			4
	קוּלִי אֶל־יְהוָה אֶתְחַנֵּן:	4		4		4
	Total, v. 2	8 = 4 + 4			0	8
3	אֲשַׁפֵּד לְפָנָיו שִׁיחִי	2 3	3			3
	צָרָתִי לְפָנָיו אֲגִיד:	3		3		3
	(18 + 20 + 22 + 10 = 70) Total, v. 3	6 = 3 + 3			0	6
	Canto I Strophe 1 Total, v. 2-3	14 = 7 + 7			0	14
4	בְּהִתְעַטֵּף עָלַי רוּחִי	3 3	3			3
	וְאִתָּה יָדַעַתְּ נִתִּיבֹתִי	3 3	3			3
	בְּאַרְחֻזֵי אֶהְלֶךְ	4 3	3			3
	טָמְנִי כַח לֵי:	3 3		3		3
	Total, v. 4	12 = 9 + 3			12	0
	Total, v. 2-4	26 = 16 + 10			12	14
5	הַבֵּיט יָמִין וּרְאֵה	5 3	3			3
	וְאִין־לִי מִכִּיר	3 3	3			3
	Middle verseline: 11 = 5 + 1 + 5	6 3	3			3
	Middle words: 70 = 32 + 6 + 32	3 3		3		3
	Total, v. 5	12 = 9 + 3			12	0
	Total, v. 4c-5	18 = 12 + 6			18	0
	Canto II Strophe 2 Total, v. 4-5	24 = 18 + 6			24	0

6	זַעֲקֵתִי אֵלֶיךָ יְהוָה	7	3	3	3
	אָמַרְתִּי אֶתְּהָ מַחֲסֵי		3	3	3
	חֶלְקִי בְּאֶרֶץ חַחִיִּים:		3	3	3
	Strophe 3 Total, v. 6		9	= 6 + 3	= 9 + 0
7	הִקְשִׁיבָה אֶל־רִנָּתִי	8	3	3	3
	כִּי־דִלּוֹתִי מָאֵד		3	3	3
	הֲצִילֵנִי מִרֶדְפָּי	9	2	2	2
	כִּי אָמַצוּ מִמְּנִי:		3	3	3
	Strophe 4 Total, v. 7		11	= 8 + 3	= 11 + 0
	Total, v. 6-7		20	= 14 + 6	= 20 + 0
	Total, v. 5-7		32	= 23 + 9	= 32 + 0
8	הוֹצִיאָה מִמִּסְגַּר נַפְשִׁי	10	3	3	3
	לְהוֹדוֹת אֶת־שִׁמְךָ		3	3	3
	כִּי יִכְתְּרוּ צַדִּיקִים	11	3	3	3
	כִּי תִגְמַל עָלַי:		3	3	3
	Strophe 5 Total, v. 8		12	= 9 + 3	= 12 + 0
	Total, v. 7-8		23	= 17 + 6	= 23 + 0
	Canto III Total, v. 6-8		32	= 23 + 9	= 32 + 0
	Total, v. 2-8		70	= 48 + 22	= 56 + 14
	With the heading, v. 1-8		75	= 50 + 25	

Observations

- The 6 middle words of the psalm, v. 5cd (70 = 32 + 6 + 32) fall precisely within the middle verseline (5 + 1 + 5), which is undoubtedly the meaningful centre:

אָבֵד מָנוֹס מִמְּנִי ^ אֵין דּוֹרֵשׁ לְנַפְשִׁי:

Flight has fled from me // no one cares for me.

It is a description of the hopeless situation in which the speaker finds himself: on a dead-end path with no way to escape and no one to help. Therefore, it is not surprising that the editors of the Psalter linked this psalm – which is attributed to David – with an episode in his life, ‘when he was in the cave’. The cave, which is here presumed to be a Cave of no Escape, may be located near Adullam (1 Sam 22:1), in the neighbourhood of the Rock of Escape (1 Sam. 23:28 - 24:3; cf. 2 Sam 23:13ff.).

- The 70 words of the psalm may not be a matter of coincidence, since 70 represents the numerical value of צָרָתִי, ‘my trouble’ (18 + 20 + 22 + 10 = 70), symbolically expressing the ‘narrow’ situation in which the speaker finds himself (the noun is derived from the verb צָרַר, ‘to be cramped’). The meaningful centre was obviously phrased in such a way that it consists of 6 words, in order to have it flanked by 32 words on either side - the *kabod* number, which symbolizes God’s presence despite the troublesome situation.
- The symbolic significance of the *kabod* number is confirmed and supported by the divine name numbers and the other *kabod* number, 23, woven into the text:

vs. 2-4	26 words in total
vs. 5-7	32 words in total, with 23 words before atnach
vs. 7-8	23 words in total, with 17 words before atnach
vs. 6-8	32 words in total, with 23 words before atnach
vs. 2-8	23 cola altogether.

4. The change from words spoken about God (14 words in vs. 2-3, Column d) to words directly addressed to him (56 words in vs. 4-8, Column c) does not only serve to demarcate Canto I, but also to refer symbolically to the name David, whose numerical value is 14 (4 + 6 + 4 = 14). While I am fully aware that not every number 14 in a psalm text refers to David, I am sure that in this case, given the association with David, it does. Please consult Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 3](#), the first Davidic psalm.

The 18 words in vs. 4c-5 (marked in violet in Column c) falling within the address to God, may be regarded as an interior monologue belonging to the self-reflection of the speaker about his troublesome situation. For clear examples of the self-reflection, compare Ps. 140:7a and 10-13, and Ps. 141:5-7 – see Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 140](#), and Observation 2 in that of [Psalm 141](#).

From this viewpoint, we get the following picture:

vs. 2-3	Words spoken about God in his presence	14
v. 4ab	Words explicitly addressed to God	6
vs. 4c-5	Words uttered as a self-reflection in God's presence	18
vs. 6-8	Words explicitly addressed to God	32
vs. 2-8	Altogether 70 words	38
		32

5. The name יהוה appears 3 times: twice in Canto I (vs. 2a and 2b) and once at the beginning of Canto III (v. 6a) – compare [Psalm 141](#) for a similar situation.

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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