

# Psalm 41— Logotechnical Analysis

## Guidelines

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

## Specific features of Psalm 41

- The last psalm of Book I is a real showpiece of numerical composition. Both formally and in terms of content, it shares several traits with Psalm 1. In both psalms the numerical value of the initial word אֲשֶׁרִי, 'happy' (52), is used to structure the text. See Observation 2 below.
- As in the other books, the doxology (v. 14) at the end of Psalm 41 is not integral to the psalm proper. However, this does not imply that it should be regarded as an unconnected epilogue. On the contrary, it is part of the *numerical* body of Psalm 41, bringing the total number of words in the entire text to **119** (7 x 17). Including the doxology, which is in fact the coda to the entire corpus of Book I, the total number of *verselines* amount to exactly **676** (26 x 26).

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

- Van der Lugt: 2-4, 5-7 || 8-10, 11-13 (2 cantos with 4 strophes, 12 verselines and **26** cola, leaving the doxology (v. 14) out of consideration).
- Fokkelman: similarly, except that he finds 5 strophes, 13 verselines and 29 cola, regarding the doxology (excluding the *amens*) as integral to the psalm and taking v. 3 as a tricolon).
- Labuschagne: 2-4 || 5-7 | 8-10 || 11-13 (3 cantos with 4 strophes, 12 verselines and **26** cola, regarding the doxology (13th verseline) and the *amens* not as part of the body of the psalm, but only integral to its **119**-word *numerical* body).
- For an overview of other divisions of the text, see Van der Lugt, CAS, Psalm 42, § 6.

## Logotechnical analysis

- Column **a**: words before atnach; **b**: words after the atnach.
- Column **c**: the speaker's words in the framework; **d**: his private reflections in the core.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	לְמִנְצַח מְזִמּוֹר לְדָוִד: Heading, v. 1	3	3			
2	אֲשֶׁרִי = 52 אֲשֶׁרִי מִשְׁכִּיל אֶל־דָּלֵא 1	4	4		4	
	בְּיוֹם רָעָה יִמְלִטָהּוּ יְהוָה: (1+21+20+10 = 52)	4		4	4	
3	יְהוָה יִשְׁמְרֵהוּ וַיְתִיבֵהוּ וְאֲשֶׁר בְּאָרְצָא 2	5	5		5	
	וְאֶל־תִּתְּנֵהוּ בְּנַפְשׁ אִיְבּוֹ:	4		4	4	
	Total, v. 2-3	17	= 9	+ 8	= 17	+ 0
4	יְהוָה יִסְעָרְנוּ עַל־עַרְשׂ דָּוִד 3	5	5		5	
	כָּל־מִשְׁכָּבוֹ תִפְכַּת בְּחַלְיוֹ:	4		4	4	
	Total, v. 4	9	= 5	+ 4	= 9	+ 0
	<b>Canto I Strophe 1 Total, v. 2-4</b>	<b>26</b>	= 14	+ 12	= 26	+ 0

5	7-word prayer cited	אֲנִי־אֶמְרָתִי יְהוָה חֲנֻנִי	4	4	4	4
		רַפְּאֵה נַפְשִׁי כִּי־חָטָאתִי לָךְ :		5	5	5
6		אוֹיְבֵי יֶאֱמְרוּ רַע לִי	5	4	4	4
		מִתִּי יָמוּת וְאָבַד שְׁמוֹ :		4	4	4
		Total, v. 5-6		17	= 8 + 9 = 0 + 17	
7		וְאִם־בָּא לְרֵאוֹת שְׂוֹא יְדַבֵּר	6	5	5	5
		לְבוֹ יִקְבֹּץ־אֲנִי לִי		4	4	4
		יֵצֵא לַחוּץ יְדַבֵּר :		3	3	3
	Middle words:	107=52+3+52		12	= 9 + 3 = 0 + 12	
	Meaningful centre of the psalm	Total, v. 7		29	= 17 + 12 = 0 + 29	
	<b>Canticle II.1 Strophe 2</b>	<b>Total, v. 5-7</b>		55	= 31 + 24 = 26 + 29	
		Total, v. 2-7				
8		יַחַד עָלַי יִתְלַחֲשׁוּ כָּל־שֹׁנְאָי	7	5	5	5
		עָלַי יִחְשְׁבוּ רָעָה לִי :		4	4	4
9		דַּבֵּר־בְּלִיעַל יִצּוֹק בּוֹ	8	4	4	4
		וְאֲשֶׁר שָׁכַב לֹא־יוֹסִיף לְקוֹם :		5	5	5
10		גַּם־אִישׁ שְׁלוֹמִי	9	3	3	3
		אֲשֶׁר־בָּטַחְתִּי בּוֹ אוֹכַל לְחַמֵּי		5	5	5
		הַגְּדִיל עָלַי עֵקֶב :		3	3	3
	<b>Canticle II.2 Strophe 3</b>	<b>v. 8-10</b>		29	= 17 + 12 = 0 + 29	
	<b>Canto II</b>	<b>Total, v. 5-10</b>		58	= 34 + 24 = 0 + 58	
11		וְאַתָּה יְהוָה חֲנֻנִי וְהַקִּימוּנִי	10	4	4	4
		וְאֲשַׁלְּמָה לָהֶם :		2	2	2
12		בְּזֹאת יִדְעֵתִי כִּי־חָפְצָת בֵּי	11	5	5	5
		כִּי לֹא־יָרִיעַ אֹיְבֵי עָלַי :		5	5	5
13		וְאֲנִי בְּחַמִּי תִמְכַּת בֵּי	12	4	4	4
		וּתְצַיְבֵנִי לְפָנֶיךָ לְעוֹלָם :		3	3	3
		Total, v. 12-13		17	= 9 + 8 = 17 + 0	
	<b>Strophe 4</b>	<b>Total, v. 11-13</b>		23	= 13 + 10 = 23 + 0	
	<b>Canto III</b>	<b>Total, v. 8-13</b>		52	= 30 + 22 = 23 + 29	
		Psalm proper, v. 2-13		107	= 61 + 46 = 49 + 58	
		With the heading, v. 1-13		110	= 64 + 46	
14	<b>Doxology</b>	בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	13	4	4	4
	<b>Coda concluding Book I</b>	מִהַעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם		3	3	3
		אָמֵן וְאָמֵן :		2	2	2
		Total, v. 14		9	= 9 + 0 = 9 + 0	
		Total, v. 12-14		26	= 14 + 12 = 26 + 0	
		Total, v. 11-14		32	= 22 + 10 = 32 + 0	
		Including the doxology, Total, v. 2-14		116	= 70 + 46 = 58 + 58	
		Including also the heading, Total, v. 1-14		119	= 73 + 46	

## Observations

1. In terms of its 107 words, the arithmetic centre of the psalm proper is constituted by [v. 7c](#) (**52 + 3 + 52**), which may be regarded as its consciously designed meaningful centre:

**יֵצֵא לְחוּץ יְדַבֵּר** 'he goes out and tells it abroad'.

It is significantly flanked by **52** (2 x **26**) words on either side, closely resembling the positioning of the meaningful centre of Psalm 92 (**52 + 4 + 52**). More importantly, it also bears a close resemblance to Psalm 1, in which the meaningful centre is *surrounded* by **52** words (**26 + 15 + 26**) - compare also the situation in Psalm 23 (**26 + 3 + 26**).

2. There is no doubt in my mind that the author of Psalms 1 and 41 deliberately used the number **52** because it represents the numerical value of a keyword of paramount importance: **אֲשֵׁרִי**, 'happy', which is the *initial word* in both psalms (1 + 21 + 20 + 10).<sup>1</sup>

In this respect, the two psalms function as a device for *inclusion* to demarcate the psalms in Book I of the Psalter. This strongly suggests that Psalm 41 was specifically composed to round off Book I. The keyword seems to have been chosen here particularly to stress the relationship between the 'happy' person of Psalm 1, whose delight is in the law of YHWH, and the 'happy' person of Psalm 41, as one who has a concern for the helpless. The keeping of YHWH's law and concern for the helpless are the true principles for life, applicable not only in the good times, but also in hard times. The message of Book I appears to be that God gives those who keep his law a prosperous and fruitful life, and protects those who have a genuine concern for the helpless. In time of trouble, he gives them life and security in their land. In this respect, the king (David!) has a key role.

The five occurrences of **אֲשֵׁרִי**, 'happy', in Ps. 32:1a and 2a, as well as in Psalms 33:12, 34:9b and 40:5, apparently prelude the initial word of Psalm 41. See Observation 1 in my Analyses of [Psalm 32](#) and [33](#), as well as Observation 5 in that of [Psalm 40](#), and especially Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 1](#).

3. The tripartite canto structure of the psalm is based on formal numerical considerations:

Canto I	vs. 2-4	Public statement	<b>26</b> words
Canticle II.1	vs. 5-7	Private reflections	<b>29</b> words
Canticle II.2	vs. 8-10	Private reflections	<b>29</b> words
Canto III	vs. 11-13	Prayer for deliverance	<b>23</b> words.

The psalm opens with a **26**-word *public statement*, in which the speaker also addresses God directly (vs. 3b and 4b). The **58**-word central core, [Canto II](#), contains the speaker's *private reflections*, in which there is a **7**-word *prayer* introduced by **אֲנִי-אָמַרְתִּי**, 'As for me, I said', (v. 5). Note that the prayer is not directly addressed to God, but is *cited* by the speaker, which means that these 7 words fall in Column **d**. Compare Pss. 32:5c and 35:10 – see the note in Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 35](#).

Significantly, Canto II divides into two equal Canticles having identical compositional formulae: **29 = 17a + 12b**.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Please consult Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 1](#)!

4. The divine name numbers **17** and **26** are woven into the text throughout the poem (the *kabod* numbers **23** and **32** and their multiples are in bold face in the chart):
- vs. 2-3           **17** words in total
  - vs. 2-4           **26** words in total
  - vs. 2-13          **26** cola in the 12 verselines of the psalm
  - vs. 5-6           **17** words in total
  - vs. 5-7           **17** words before atnach
  - vs. 5-13          **34** words after atnach
  - vs. 8-10          **17** words before atnach
  - vs. 12-13         **17** words in total
  - vs. 8-13          **52** (2 x **26**) words in total.
5. The *kebod*-YHWH formula **58** = **26** + **32** is made explicit in the number of words including the doxology: the **58** words divide into **26** in vs. 2-4, and **32** in vs. 11-14. Moreover, the **116** words of the psalm including the doxology divide into **58** words spoken publicly (Column **c**), and **58** words in the speaker's private reflections (Column **d**).
6. Including the heading as well, the text is made up of exactly **119** words (7 x **17**). This is important evidence showing that the doxology and the heading were not loosely added to the psalm, but numerically fused with it to form a logotechnical unity.
7. The name יהוה occurs 5x in the psalm (vs. 2, 3, 4, 5 and 11) and 1x in the doxology. This brings the total number of occurrences in Book I to exactly **272** (16 x **17**) - see the General Introduction, "The name YHWH woven into the fabric of the text", and Table I (with Observations) in the Introduction to Book I. The word אֱלֹהִים, 'God', occurs only in the doxology.

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<sup>2</sup> In my judgement, the explicit use twice of **29** words in **Canto II** is deliberate in order to bring to mind the keyword **כָּלוּ**, 'they vanish', in the meaningful centre of Psalm 37 (v. 20) – see Observations 1 and 2 in my Analysis of Psalm 37.