

# Psalm 52:1–11

## Translation, Logoprosodic Analysis, and Observations

### Divine Judgment of a Mean and Powerful Person

Ps 52:1–11

#### A. *Setting: When Doeg the Edomite Came and Spoke to Saul* (52:1–2c) [3.2]

52:1	For the maestro / a <i>Maskil</i> belonging to David //	<u>13</u> 2_	<u>3</u> 3 0
		51:17–52:1	45 28 17
52:2	When Doeg the Edomite <sup>a</sup> went /	<u>14</u> 1_	<u>3</u> 3 0
		51:21–52:2a	17 12 5
	And he told Saul //	9 1	2 2 0
	and he said to him //	<u>6</u> 1	<u>2</u> 2 0
		51:18–52:2c	46 32 14

#### B. *Why Do You Boast of Malice—God’s Covenant-Love Is Eternal* (52:2d–3) [3.3]

	“David has gone / <u>to the house of Ahimelech</u> ” //	<u>14</u> 2_	<u>5</u> 0 5
		51:21–52:2	26 16 10
52:3	Why do you boast of malice /	<u>10</u> 1_	<u>3</u> 3 0
		51:20–52:3a	36 23 13
	O mighty man? //	4 1	1 1 0
	<u>God’s covenant-love</u> ( <i>hesed</i> ) / lasts forever //	<u>8</u> 2	<u>4</u> 0 4
		52:1–3	23 14 9

#### C. *Your Tongue Is Like a Sharpened Blade Working Perfidy* (52:4–5) [4.5]

52:4	<u>Destruction</u> ( <i>hawwôt</i> ) / your tongue plots //	11 2	3 3 0
	it is like a sharpened blade /	<u>7</u> 1_	<u>2</u> 0 2
		52:1–4b	28 17 9
	It works perfidy //	<u>9</u> 1_	<u>2</u> 0 2
		52:1–4	30 17 13
52:5	You love evil more <sup>a</sup> than good //	9 2	3 3 0
	a lie / more than speaking / the truth,” <b>Selah</b> //	<u>10</u> 3	<u>4</u> 0 4
		52:2–5	34 17 17

**D. Judgment Pronounced: God Will Destroy You Forever**(52:6–7) [4.4]

52:6	You love every harmful word / (and) a deceitful tongue //	<u>17</u> <u>2</u>	<u>6</u> <u>6</u> <u>0</u>
		52:1–6	<b>43 26 17</b>
52:7	Surely God <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">/</span> will destroy you forever //	<u>12</u> <u>2</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>0</u>
		52:5–7a	<b>17 13 4</b>
	He will snatch you up and tear you away / <sup>a</sup> from your tent //	14 2	3 3 0
	he will uproot you from the land / of the living, <span style="background-color: cyan;">Selah</span> //	<u>14</u> <u>2</u>	<u>4</u> <u>0</u> <u>4</u>
		52:6–7	<b>17 13 4</b>

**E. The Righteous Will See and Mock: He Sought Strength in Malice** (52:8–9) [5.4]

52:8	And the righteous will see / <sup>a</sup> and they will fear /	16 1	3 3 0
	[and] <sup>a</sup> at him they will laugh //	<u>9</u> <u>1</u>	<u>2</u> <u>2</u> <u>0</u>
		52:5–8	<b>31 23 8</b>
52:9	Look at the man /	6 1	2 2 0
	he did not make God / his fortress //	<u>17</u> <u>2</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>0</u>
		51:3–52:9b	<b>50 34 16</b>
	And he trusted / in the abundance of his riches //	<u>11</u> <u>2</u>	<u>3</u> <u>3</u> <u>0</u>
		51:21–52:9d	<b>79 53 26</b>
	He tried to be strong / by being <u>destructive</u> ( <i>bəhawwātō</i> ) //	<u>10</u> <u>2</u>	<u>2</u> <u>0</u> <u>2</u>
		52:2–9	<b>69 46 23</b>

**F. I am Like an Olive Tree Trusting in God's Covenant-Love Forever** (52:10) [3.3]

52:10	But I am / like a flourishing olive tree / <u>in the house of God</u> //	<u>19</u> <u>3</u>	<u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>0</u>
		52:7–10a	<b>32 26 6</b>
	I trust / in <u>God's covenant-love</u> ( <i>hesed</i> ) / forever and ever //	<u>20</u> <u>3</u>	<u>5</u> <u>0</u> <u>5</u>
		52:3–10	<b>67 44 23</b>

**G. O God, I Praise You and Proclaim the Goodness of Your Name** (52:11) [2.3]

52:11	I will praise you forever / for what you have done //	<u>16</u> <u>2</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>0</u>
		52:8–11a	<b>30 23 7</b>
	And I will proclaim your name / <sup>a</sup> that is so good /	10 2	4 0 4
	before <u>your devoted ones</u> ( <i>hāsîdêka</i> ) //	<u>8</u> <u>1</u>	<u>2</u> <u>0</u> <u>2</u>
		52:7b–11	<b>43 26 17</b>
		52:1–11	<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">90</span> 56 34

Scansion in SAS Units: (3.2).(3.3).(4.5).(4.4).(5.4).(3.3).(2.3)  
 $(5 + 6 + 9) + 8 + (9 + 6 + 5) = 20 + 8 + 20 = 48$

Concentric Compositional Formula:  $90 = 45 + 0 + 45$  [word-count—with heading]

### Notes:

- 52:2<sup>a</sup> Reading *məhuppak ləḡarmēh* in BHS as conjunctive.
- 52:5<sup>a</sup> Reading the sequence of two consecutive occurrences of *munaḥ* in BHS as disjunctive.
- 52:7<sup>a</sup> Reading the sequence of *tarḥâ* followed by *munaḥ* here in BHS as disjunctive.
- 52:8<sup>a</sup> Reading the sequence of *tarḥâ* followed by *mērəkâ* here in BHS as disjunctive.
- 52:8<sup>b</sup> Removing the *wau*-conjunction here as dittography to improve the balance in mora-count.
- 52:9<sup>a</sup> Reading a disjunctive here; Letteris has *ga ʕa* (= *meteg*) in addition to *məhuppak* plus *merka*.
- 52:11<sup>a</sup> Reading the sequence of *tarḥâ* followed by *mērəkâ* here in BHS as disjunctive.

## Summary of the Logoprosodic Analysis

1. Psalm 52 has seven strophes: 52:1–2c, 2d–3, 4–5, 6–7, 8–9, 10, and 11:’

A	52:1–2c	balanced triad:	$[13 + 14 + (9 + 6)]$	=	$13 + 14 + 15$	morae
B	52:2d–3	balanced dyad + pivot:	$[14 + 10 + (4 + 8)]$	=	$14 + 10 + 12$	morae
C	52:4–5	balanced dyad + pivot:	$[11 + 7] + 9 + [9 + 10]$	=	$18 + 9 + 19$	morae
X	52:6–7	2 balanced dyads:	$[17 + 12] + [14 + 14]$	=	$29 + 28$	morae
C’	52:8–9b	2 balanced dyads:	$[16 + 9] + [6 + 17]$	=	$25 + 23$	morae
	52:9cd	balanced dyad:	$[11 + 10]$	=	$11 + 10$	morae
B’	52:10	balanced dyad:	$[19 + 20]$	=	$19 + 20$	morae
A’	52:11	balanced dyad:	$[16 + (10+8)]$	=	$16 + 18$	morae

2. The 1<sup>st</sup> strophe (52:1–2c) is a single part with three subdivisions: 52:1, 2a and 2bc.
  - 51:17–52:1      **17** words after *atnach*
  - 51:18–52:2c    **46** (= **23 x 2**) words and **32** words before *atnach*
3. The 2<sup>nd</sup> strophe (52:2d–3) is a single part with three subdivisions: 52:2d, 3a and 3bc.
  - 51:21–52:2      **26** words
  - 52:1–3          **23** words and **14** words before *atnach*, which may refer to David
4. The 3<sup>rd</sup> strophe (52:4–5) is a single part with three subdivisions: 52:4ab, 4c and 5
  - 52:1–4          **17** words before *atnach*
  - 52:2–5          **34 = 17 + 17**            [composition formula]
5. The 5<sup>th</sup> strophe (52:6–7) is a single part with three subdivisions: 52:6, 7a and 7bc.
  - 52:2–6          **40 = 23 + 17**            [compositional formula]
  - 52:1–6          **43 = 26 + 17**            [compositional formula]
  - 52:6–7          **17** words

6. The 5<sup>th</sup> strophe (52:8–9) has two parts with four subdivisions: 52:8, 9a 9b and 9c.
  - 52:5–8            **23** words before *atnach*
  - 52:2–9            **69 = 46 + 23**            [compositional formula]
  - 52:1–9            **23** words after *atnach*
7. The 6<sup>th</sup> strophe (52:10) is a single part with two subdivisions: 52:10a and 10b.
  - 52:3–10           **23** words after *atnach*
8. The 7<sup>th</sup> strophe (52:11) is a single part with two subdivisions: 52:11a and 11bc.
  - 52:3–10           **23** words after *atnach*
  - 52:7–11           **17** words after *atnach*

## Observations

1. The seven strophes of Psalm 52 may be outlined in a menorah pattern, which is determined primarily on prosodic grounds, as follows:

A	Setting: when Doeg the Edomite came and spoke to Saul	[3.2] 52:1–2c
B	Why do you boast of malice—God’s covenant-love is eternal	[3.3] 52:2d–3
C	Your tongue is like a sharpened blade working perfidy	[4.5] 52:4–5
X	<b>Judgment pronounced: God will destroy you forever</b>	[4.4] 52:6–7
C’	The righteous will see and mock: he sought strength in malice	[5.4] 52:8–9
B’	I am like an olive tree trusting in God’s covenant-love forever	[3.3] 52:10
A’	O God, I praise you and proclaim the goodness of your name	[2.3] 52:11

2. Counting from the beginning of Psalm 52 (including the 15-word double heading and two occurrences of the word *Selah* in verses 5 and 7) we find the following list of compositional numbers:

52:1–3	<b>23</b> words
52:1–4	<b>17</b> words before <i>atnach</i>
52:1–5	<b>17</b> words after <i>atnach</i>
52:1–6	<b>43 = 26 + 17</b> [word-count]
52:1–9	<b>23</b> words after <i>atnach</i>
52:1–10	<b>80</b> (= <b>40</b> x 2) words and <b>52</b> (= <b>26</b> x 2) words before <i>atnach</i>
52:1–11	<b>34</b> (= <b>17</b> x 2) words after <i>atnach</i>

It is not possible to utilize any of the four compositional numbers (**17**, **23**, **26** and **32**) until the end of v. 3, which leaves 9 possible boundaries to work with. In 7 out of 9 of these boundaries (or 77.8% of the time) a multiple of one or more of these numbers is present.

To claim, as Labuschagne does, that the double heading in 52:1–2 “was composed in such a way as to achieve a specific overall compositional formula” is an understatement. The numerical composition proceeds verse-by-verse from the outset with a significant “stopping point” at the end of v. 6, immediately before the 4-word **meaningful center** [see Observation 3 below], where we find the compositional formula **43 = 26a + 17b** (word-

count). On the other side of this 4-word **meaningful center**, we find an identical situation, with the compositional formula  $43 = 26a + 17b$  (word-count).

3. In terms of the 90 words in Psalm 52, the **arithmological center** falls between the two words אֱלֹהֵי יִתְצַק ("God will destroy you") in verse 7, with the initial *Concentric Compositional Formula* of:

$$90 = 45 + 0 + 45 \quad [\text{word count—with headings in 52:1–2}]$$

The **meaningful center** is found by including one word on either side of the **arithmological center**, as follows:

אֱלֹהֵי יִתְצַק God will destroy you.

In this instance, the *Concentric Compositional Formula* becomes:

$$90 = 44 + 2 + 44 \quad [\text{word count—with headings in 52:1–2}]$$

The **meaningful center** may be extended by including two words on either side of the **arithmological center**, as follows:

גַּם אֱלֹהֵי יִתְצַק לְנֶצַח Surely God will destroy you forever;

These words highlight the meaning of the psalm as a whole. As Marvin Tate puts it, "The prediction of judgment is expressed in severe but simple words: the boaster's present security, built on self-glorification, lying, and destructiveness, will be swept away with terrible finality; ruined (or demolished) like a house that is wrecked; snatched up like the quick moving fire from a hearth (cf. Isa 30:14); and torn away from the tent" (*Psalms 51–100*. WBC [1990], p. 37).

In this instance the **concentric compositional formula** becomes:

$$90 = 43 + 4 + 43 \quad [\text{word count—with headings in 52:1–2}]$$

This **meaningful center** is carefully contrived so that the compositional formula on either side is  $43 = 26 + 17$  (word-count)—including the double heading and two occurrences of the word *selah*.

4. The 38-word nested **meaningful framework** (with the 12-word framework highlighted in gray, the 20-word framework highlighted in yellow, and the 30-word framework highlighted in pink) reads:

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | לְמַנְצַח מִשְׁכִּיל לְדָוִד   | For the music director, a <i>maskil</i> of David.   |
| 2 | בָּבֹא דֹעַג הָאֶדְמוּי  | When Doeg the Edomite came.   |
| 3 | וַיִּגַּד לְשָׂאוּל וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ<br>בֵּא דָוִד אֶל־בֵּית אַחִימֵלֵךְ<br>מִהֲדַתְהַלֵּל בְּרַעַה הַגְּבוּר | And he told Saul, ,and he said to him:<br>David has come to the house of Ahimelech<br>Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man? |

10	כזית רענן בבית אלהים בשחתי בחסד־אלהים עולם ועד	Like a flourishing olive tree in the house of God. I trust in God's covenant-love forever and ever.
11	אודה לעולם כי עשית ואקוה שמך כי־טוב נגד חסידך	I will praise you forever for what you have done And I will proclaim your name that is so good before your devoted ones.

The text here illustrates well how carefully the two-part (10-word) heading is integrated into the fabric of Psalm 52 in matters of numerical composition. It is also composed in such a fashion as to tie together the beginning of Psalm 52 with the ending of Psalm 51, and the end of Psalm 52 with the beginning of Psalm 53 in the numerical composition of the completed Psalter as we now have it.

5. Summary of the concentric compositional formulae:

$$90 = 44 + 2 + 44 \quad \text{word-count}$$

$$90 = 43 + 4 + 43$$

{with others in between}

$$90 = 10 + 70 + 10$$

$$90 = 6 + 78 + 6$$

$$48 = 20 + 8 + 20 \quad \text{SAS units}$$

$$28 = 11 + 6 + 11 \quad \text{briques (primary SAS units)}$$

6. In the prosodic structure of Psalm 51, the basic building blocks (**briques**) in each poetic **verset** are the **primary (SAS) syntactic accentual stress units**. These sub-units are delineated by the Masoretes, who marked most of the boundaries with one of the following:

- **Soph Pasuq** A large colon following a word signifies the end of a verse, which does not always coincide with the end of a sentence.
- **Atnach** A small caret-like mark (like ^) beneath the consonantal text, pointing upward, is used to divide most verses. Its primary importance for our purposes concerns its use in the matter of numerical composition—i.e., the total word-count in each line is divided into the number of words before and after *atnach*.
- **Oleh weyored** A combination of two accentual signs: a caret-like mark above the consonantal text, pointing to the left, used together with the accent *merka* (an upright line beneath the consonantal text slanting to the right). These two marks usually appear on the same word, but when that word is monosyllabic the *merka* falls on the following word. This major divider is usually considered to be a stronger disjunctive accent than *atnach*.

In the prosodic analysis presented with the translation (above), the presence of these three primary disjunctive markers is indicated with a double slash (//). Psalm 52 has 30 **briques**,

22 of which are marked: by *soph pasuq* (11 times, at the end of each verse), *atnach* (8 times, in each verse, except vv. 1, 6 and 8), and *oleh weyored* (3 times, in vv. 2, 7 and 9). The boundaries of the remaining eight **briques** are marked by *rəḥîa*<sup>c</sup> (v. 1, 8, ), *rəḥîa*<sup>c</sup> *muḡraš* (v. 4), *šinnôr* (2 times, vv. 6 and 19), and *dəḥî* (v. 21).

7. The prosodic structure of Psalm 52, in terms of its **briques** (primary SAS units), may be displayed as follows: ^ represents *atnach*; : represents *soph pasuq*; † represents *oleh weyored*; and † represents all other accent markers.

- I A <sup>1</sup> *lamnašēaḥ maškîl ləḏāwîd* :  
<sup>2</sup> *bəḥôṽ dōʾēḡ hāʾăḏômî wayyaggēḏ ləšāʾûl* † *wayyôʾmer lô* ^
- B *bāʾ ḏāwîḏ ʾel bêṯ ʾăḥîmeleḵ* :  
<sup>3</sup> *mah tiḥallēl bəraʿāh haggiḇôr* ^ *ḥesed ʾel kol hayyôm* :
- C <sup>4</sup> *hawwôṯ taḥšōḇ ləšōneḵa* ^ *kəṯaʿar məluṯṯāš* † *ʿōšēh rəməyāh* :  
<sup>5</sup> *ʾahaḇta rāʿ miṯṯôḇ* ^ *šeḡer middabbēr šeḏeq* **selah** :

II	X	<sup>6</sup> <i>ʾahaḇta kol diḇrē ḥāla</i> <sup>c</sup>	<i>ləšôn mirmāh</i> :
		<sup>7</sup> <i>gam ʾel</i> <b>yittāšəḵa</b> <i>lānešaḥ</i> †	
		<i>yaḥtəḵa wəyissāḥəḵa mēʾōhel</i> ^	<i>wəšerešəḵa mēʾereš ḥayyîm</i> <b>selah</b> :

- III C' <sup>8</sup> *wəyirʾû šadîqîm wəyîrāû* † *wəʿalāyw yišḥāqû* :  
<sup>9</sup> *hinnēh haggeḇer lôʾ yāsîm ʾēlōhîm māʿūzzô* †  
*wayyibṯaḥ bəroḇ ʿāšəro* ^ *yāʿōz bəhawwāṯô* :
- B' <sup>10</sup> *waʾānî kəzayîṯ raʿānān bəḇêṯ ʾēlōhîm* ^  
*bāṯaḥṯî ḥəḥesed ʾēlōhîm* † *ʿôlām wāʿed* :
- A' <sup>11</sup> *ʾôḏəḵa ləʿôlām kî ʿāsîṯa* ^  
*waʾəqawweh šimḵa kî ṯôḇ* *neḡed ḥāsîḏəḵa* :

8. The 24 **briques** are distributed within 11 strophes in Psalm 52 as follows:

$$28 = (3 + 3 + 5) + 6 + (5 + 3 + 3) = 11 + 6 + 11$$

The **arithmological center** of Psalm 51 falls between the words **ʾel yittāšəḵā** (“God will destroy you”) in the first half of verse 7, with 45 words on either side. Psalm 52 has 48 SAS units, 24 **briques**, 13 versets, 7 strophes, and 3 cantos. The **arithmological center** in v. 7 is in the middle canto, the middle strophe, the middle verset, the middle two **briques**, and the middle SAS units.

9. The two occurrences of *selah* (at the end of vv. 5 and 7) may be calling attention to unusual features in the numerical composition of Psalm 52. At the end of v. 5, the total word count in 52:2–5 is **17** words both before and after *atnach*. Moreover, in these first five verses both divine-name numbers and the *kabod*-number **23** are woven into the fabric of the text within a total of only 37 words! The second occurrence of *selah* at the end of v. 7 coincides with another remarkable achievement in numerical composition. On one side of the **meaningful center** we find the compositional formula **43 = 26 + 17** (vv. 1–6). The second *selah* is the 17<sup>th</sup> word after the first *selah*. After the 4-word **meaningful center** at the beginning of v. 7, the compositional formula is once again **43 = 26 + 17** (vv. 7b–11).
10. Terrien finds 3 strophes [= cantos] plus the heading (vv. 1–2) in Psalm 52 (*The Psalms* [2003], pp. 386–87). Van der Lugt finds 7 strophes while Fokkelman and Labuschagne have 5 strophes. The logoprosodic analysis indicates that there are seven strophes, in which the heading plays a significant role (arranged in three cantos: vv. 1–3, 4–9 and 10–11).

Christensen	Terrien	Van der Lugt	Fokkelman & Labuschagne
I A 52:1–2c	Heading (vv. 1–2)	Heading (vv. 1–2)	Heading (vv. 1–2)
B 52:2d–3	I 1 52:3–6	I 1 52:3–4	1 52:3–4
II C 52:4–5		2 52:5–6	2 52:5–7
X 52:6–7	II 2 52:7	3 52:7	
C' 52:8–9	3 52:8–9	II.1 4 52:8	3 52:8–9
		5 52:9	
III B' 52:10	III 4 52:10–11	6 52:10	4 52:10
A' 52:11		II.2 7 52:11	5 52:11

11. Determining the details of the larger musical and literary structure(s) of Psalm 52 as a whole calls for input on the part of the BIBAL Forum, as we consider further information contained in the *te'amim* and the rhetorical features of the text.

## 12. Bibliography:

- Aletti, J.-N. and J. Trublet, *Approche poétique et théologique des Psaumes* (Paris, 1983) 53.”
- Auffret, P. *Voyez de vos yeux*. VTSup 48 (Leiden, 1993) 1–12.
- Beyerlin, W. *Der 52. Psalm: Studien zu seiner Einordnung*. BWANT 6 (Stuttgart, 1980).
- Childs, B. S. “Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis.” *JSS* 16 (1971) 145.
- Goulder, M. D. *The Prayers of David (Psalms 51–72): Studies in the Psalter*, II. JSOTSup 102 (Sheffield, 1990) 71–83.
- Jeremias, J. *Kultprophetie*. WMANT 35 (Neukirchen, 1970)120.
- Scharf, A. “Quaedam Commentationes in Ps. 52, 7.” *VD* 38 (1960) 213–22.
- Schedl, C. “*hesed* ‘ed in Psalm 52 (51).” *BZ*, n.f. xx (1961) 259–60.
- Slomovic, E. “Toward an Understanding of the Formation of Historical Titles in the Book of Psalms.” *ZAW* 41 (1979) 371.

© 2005  
 Dr. D.L. Christensen Professor of Old Testament  
 845 Bodega Way Languages and Literature (retired),  
 Rodeo, California 94572 Graduate Theological Union  
 +1 510 799 0858 Berkeley, California  
 dlc @ bibal.net