

# Psalm 54:1–9

## Translation, Logoprosodic Analysis, and Observations

### Individual Lament: “Save Me by Your Name”

Ps 54:1–9

#### A. *David’s Cry for Help: “O God, by Your Name Save Me!”* (54:1–3) [4.4]

54:1	For the music director with stringed instruments / a <i>Maskil</i> belonging to David //	10 1 _7 1_	2 2 0 <u>2 2 0</u>
		53:7–54:1	17 13 4
54:2	When the Ziphites came / and they said to Saul /  “Is not David / hiding among us?” //	19 2 _15 2_	4 4 0 <u>4 0 4</u>
		53:7–54:2	21 17 8
54:3	O God <sup>a</sup> by your name save me //  And by your might vindicate me //	17 1 _16 1	3 3 0 <u>2 0 2</u>
		53:4–54:3a	64 46 18
		54:1–3	17 11 6

#### B. *Hear My Prayer, O God, Give Ear to the Words of My Mouth* (54:4) [2.2]

54:4	O God / hear my prayer //  Give ear / to the words of my mouth //	13 2 _12 2	3 3 0 <u>3 0 3</u>
		53:7–54:4a	33 23 10
		54:1–4	23 14 9

#### C. *My Oppressors Have No Regard for God Who Sustains My Life* (54:5) [4.2.4]

54:5	For strangers / are risen up against me //  And oppressors / seek my life //  <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">They do not set</span> God / before them, <span style="background-color: #e0ffff;">Selah</span> //	13 2 _13 2_	4 4 0 <u>3 3 0</u>
		53:6–54:5a	55 38 17
		54:2–5b	26 17 9
		54:3–5	23 13 10
54:6	Behold! God, / is my helper //  The Lord / is among those who sustain my life //	14 2 _14 2_	4 4 0 <u>4 4 0</u>
		54:3–6a	27 17 10
		54:3–6	30 17 13

D. **Let Their Evil Plans Recoil on Them—Destroy Them!** (54:7–9) [2.2]

54:7	Let evil recoil / on those who slander me //	<u>  13  2  </u>	<u>  3  3  0  </u>
		54:4–7a	28 17 11
	In your faithfulness / destroy them //	<u>  10  2  </u>	<u>  2  0  2  </u>
		54:4–7	30 17 13

E. **I Will Offer Sacrifice & Praise Your Name in Triumph over My Foes** (54:7–9) [4.4]

54:8	With a freewill offering / <sup>a</sup> I will sacrifice to you /	<u>  11  2  </u>	<u>  3  3  0  </u>
		54:5–8a	27 17 10
	I will praise your name / O <b>YHWH</b> , for it is good //	<u>  13  2  </u>	<u>  5  0  5  </u>
		54:5–8	32 17 15
54:9	For from all my troubles / he delivers me //	<u>  16  2  </u>	<u>  4  4  0  </u>
		54:7–9a	17 10 7
	And on my enemies / my eyes look (in triumph) //	<u>  16  2  </u>	<u>  3  0  3  </u>
		54:3–9	50 27 23
		54:1–9	<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">62</span> 35 27

Scansion in SAS Units: (4.4).(2.2).(4.2.4).(2.2).(4.4) = 12 + 10 + 12 = **34**

Concentric Compositional Formula: 62 = 31 + 0 + 31 [word count—with heading]

**Notes:**

54:3<sup>a</sup> Reading *dehi* in BHS as conjunctive.

54:8<sup>a</sup> Reading *mērākā* here in BHS as disjunctive.

## Summary of the Logoprosodic Analysis

- Psalm 54 has five strophes, with the middle strophe in three distinct parts: 54:1–3, 4, 5–6, 7 and 8–9.

A	54:1–2a	balanced dyad:	[18 + 19]	=	36 + 15 + 33	morae
	54:2b–3	balanced triad:	[15 + 17 + 16]	=	15 + 17 + 16	morae
B	54:4	balanced dyad:	[13 + 12]	=	13 + 12	morae

X	54:5ab	balanced dyad:	[13 + 13]	=		morae
	54:5c	monad in the center:	[18]	=	26 + 18 + 28	morae
	54:6	balanced dyad:	[14 + 14]	=		morae

B'	54:7	balanced {?} dyad::	[13 + 10]	=	13 + 10	morae
A'	54:8	balanced dyad:	[11 + 13]	=	11 + 13	morae
	54:9	balanced dyad:	[16 + 16]	=	16 + 16	morae

- The 1<sup>st</sup> strophe (54:1–3) has two parts with five subdivisions: 54:1, 2, 3, 4
  - 53:7–54:1      **17** words
  - 53:7–54:2      **17** words before *atnach*
  - 54:1–3          **17** words
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> strophe (54:4) is in a single part with two subdivisions: 54:4a and 4b.
  - 54:1–4          **23** words
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> strophe (54:5–6) has three parts with five subdivisions: 54:5a, 5b, 5c, 6a and 6b.
  - 54:3–5          **23** words
  - 54:2–5          **17** words before *atnach*
  - 54:2–5b        **26** words and **17** words before *atnach*
  - 54:3–6          **17** words before *atnach*
  - 54:2–6          **17** words after *atnach*
- The 4<sup>th</sup> strophe (54:7) is in a single part with two subdivisions: 54:7a and 7b
  - 54:4–7          **17** words before *atnach*
- The 5<sup>th</sup> strophe (54:8) has two parts with four subdivisions: 54:8a, 8b, 9a and 9b
  - 54:5–8          **32** words and **17** words before *atnach*
  - 54:3–9          **23** words after *atnach*

## Observations

1. The five strophes in Psalm 54 may be outlined in a menorah pattern, which is determined primarily on prosodic grounds, as follows:

A	David in hiding from Saul: “O God, by your name save me!”	[4.4]	54:1–3
B	Cry for help: “Hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth”	[2.2]	54:4
C	Opressors are risen and seek after my life (soul)	[2.2]	54:5ab
X	<b>They do not set God before them, <i>Selah!</i></b>	[2]	54:5c
C’	The Lord is the one who sustains my life (soul)	[2.2]	54:6
B’	Let their evil desires recoil on them—destroy them!	[2.2]	54:7
A’	I will offer sacrifice and praise your name in triumph over my foes	[4.4]	54:8–9

2. Though Terrien finds only two strophes in Psalm 54, he sees the concentric structure of the poem and the fact that the word *Selah* marks the middle. He outlines the “mirror-like” composition as follows:

A	God’s Name (v. 3)
B	The Enemies (v. 5a)
C	My Life (v. 5b)
X	<b>Selah</b>
C’	My Life (v. 6)
B’	The Enemies (v. 7)
A’	God’s Name (v. 8)

Terrien does not include the 12-word heading in vv. 1–2 and dismisses v. 9 as an “aside.” For him, “The two strophes of this psalm are regular in structure. Strophe I (vv. 3–5) is a cry for help; Strophe II (vv. 6–8) expresses thanksgiving and raise” (p. 418).

Though the word *Selah* is in the middle of Psalm 54, it is better to note that it appears at the end of a “monad” (mono-colon), which marks the structural center from a prosodic point of view: “They do not set God before them, *Selah.*” The **arithmological center** falls between the first two words of this “monad”, which is framed by two balanced dyads (see translation above).

3. In terms of the 62 words in Psalm 54, the **arithmological center** falls between the words **לֹא שָׂמוּ** (“they are not aware”) in the third brique of v. 5, with 31 words on either side. The initial **concentric compositional formula** is:

$$62 = 31 + 0 + 31 \quad [\text{word count—with headings in 54:1–2}]$$

A **meaningful center** is found by including three words on either side of the **arithmological center**, as follows:

בִּקְשׁוּ נַפְשִׁי      They seek after my soul;  
 לֹא שָׂמוּ      They are not aware of God before them.  
 אֱלֹהִים לִנְגָדָם

In this instance the **concentric compositional formula** is

$$62 = 28 + 6 + 28 \quad [\text{word count—with headings in 54:1–2}]$$

These words highlight the meaning of the psalm as a whole. As Marvin Tate notes, the words in 54:5c constitute “a key statement in the psalm: ‘those who have no regard for God.’ Yahweh does not have his proper place with these people. They arrogantly seek to ignore the will of the God who matters” (*Psalms 51–100*. WBC 20 [1990], p. 48).

4. The 24-word **meaningful framework**, with the 6-word framework highlighted in gray, reads as follows:

1	לְמַנְצַח בְּנִינֵת מִשְׁכִּיל	To the music director, with stringed instruments,
	לְדָוִד	belonging to David.
2	בְּבוֹא הַזִּיפִּים וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְשָׂאוּל	When the Ziphites came and they said to Saul:
	הֲלֹא דָוִד מִסְתַּתֵּר עִמָּנוּ	“Is not David hiding among us?”
	אוֹדָה שְׁמֶךָ יְהוָה כִּי־טוֹב	I will praise your name, O YHWH, for it is good.
9	כִּי מִכָּל־צָרָה הִצִּילָנִי	For from all my troubles he delivers me.
	וּבְאֵיבֵי רֵאתָה עֵינַי	And on my enemies my eyes look (in triumph).

7. Summary of the concentric compositional formulae:

$$62 = 28 + 6 + 28 \quad \text{word-count}$$

$$62 = 23 + 16 + 23$$

{with others in between}

$$62 = 12 + 38 + 12$$

$$62 = 3 + 56 + 3$$

$$34 = 12 + 10 + 12 \quad \text{SAS units}$$

$$19 = 7 + 5 + 7 \quad \text{briques (primary SAS units)}$$

8. In the prosodic structure of Psalm 54, 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 54 has 19 **briques**, 17 of which are marked: by *soph pasuq* (9 times, at the end of each verse) and *atnach* (8 times, in each verse, except v. 1). The boundary of the remaining two **briques** are marked by *rəḥîa<sup>c</sup>* (v. 5) and *rəḥîa<sup>c</sup> muḡraš<sup>ç</sup>* (v. 9).

9. The prosodic structure of Psalm 54, 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.

A <sup>1</sup> *lamnaṣṣēah bingînōt maškîl ləḏāwîd :*  
<sup>2</sup> *ḇəḥô<sup>ç</sup> hazzîpîm wayyô<sup>ç</sup>məru<sup>ç</sup> ləšā<sup>ç</sup>ûl ^* *hălô<sup>ç</sup> dāwîd mistattēr ‘immānû:*  
<sup>3</sup> *ḡlôhîm bəšimkā hōšî<sup>c</sup>ēnî ^* *ûḇiaḡḇûrātəkā təḏînenî :*

B <sup>4</sup> *ḡlôhîm šəma<sup>c</sup> təpîllāṭî ^* *ha<sup>ç</sup>āzînāh lə<sup>ç</sup>imrê<sup>c</sup>-pî :*

X <sup>5</sup> <i>kî zārîm qāmû ‘ālay †</i>	<i>wə<sup>c</sup>ārîšîm biqšû napšî ^</i>
<i>lô<sup>ç</sup> šāmû</i> ḡlôhîm ləneḡdām selāh :	
<sup>6</sup> <i>hinnēh ḡlôhîm ‘özēr lî ^</i>	<i>ûḇiaḡḇûrātəkā təḏînenî :</i>

B' <sup>7</sup> *yāšôḇ hāra<sup>c</sup> ləšōrərāy ^* *ba<sup>ç</sup>āmittəkā hašmîṭēm :*

A' <sup>8</sup> *bindāḇāh ḡzbəḥāh-lāk ^* *ḡḏeh šimkā yhwḥ kî-tôḇ :*  
<sup>9</sup> *kî mikkol-šārāh hiššîlānî ^* *ûḇə<sup>ç</sup>ōyəḇay †* *rā<sup>ç</sup>ātāh ‘ēnî :*

10. The 20 **briques** are distributed in 5 strophes in Psalm 54 as follows:

$$(5 + 2) + 5 + (2 + 5) = 7 + 5 + 7 = 19$$

The **arithmological center** of Psalm 54 falls between the words *lô<sup>ç</sup> šāmû* (“they do not put/set”) in 54:5a, with 27 words on either side. Psalm 54 has 34 SAS units, 19 **briques** (primary SAS), 8 versets and 5 strophes. The **arithmological center** is in the middle strophe, the middle two versets, the middle **brique**, and the middle two SAS units.

11. Terrien finds 2 strophes in Psalm 54 (*The Psalms* [2003], pp. 417–18), but see the discussion above in Observation 2. Van der Lugt and Labuschagne find 4 strophes. Fokkelman has 3 strophes. The logoprosodic analysis indicates that there are five strophes in Psalm 54, which may be outlined in a 7-part menorah pattern (see Observations 1 and 2).

Christensen	Terrien	Van der Lugt & Labuschagne	Fokkelman
A 54:1–3	Heading (vv. 1–2) 1 54:3–5	Heading (vv. 1–2) I 1 54:3–4	Heading (vv. 1–2) 1 54:3–5
B 54:4		2 54:5	
X 54:5–6	2 54:6–8	II 3 54:6–7	2 54:6–7
B' 54:7			
A' 54:8–9	“Aside” (v. 9)	4 54:8–9	3 54:8–9

12. The following is a list of compositional numbers that appear at the boundaries of the verses counting from the beginning:

54:1–3      **17** words  
 54:1–4      **23** words  
 54:1–6      **17** words after *atnach*

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 7 possible boundaries to work with. In 3 out of 7 of these boundaries (or 42.9% of the time) a multiple of one of these four compositional numbers is present.

13. Determining the details of the musical and literary structures of Psalm 54 as a whole calls for input on the part of others in the BIBAL Forum, as we consider the rhetorical features in greater depth and further information contained in the *te'amim* of this particular text.

14. Bibliography: [see the file for Psalm 14]

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