## Abstract

The four alphabetic acrostics in the first book of psalms (9/10, 25, 34, and 37) are all missing verses beginning with certain letters of the alphabet and have other anomalies as well. Most scholars attribute these problems to errors in transmission and try to solve them through textual emendation. We argue that these disruptions are an original feature of these psalms and are placed purposefully as part of a sophisticated literary structure.


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# Evil and the Disruption of Order:
# A Structural Analysis of the Acrostics in the First Book of Psalms[1]

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## 1. Introduction

The book of Psalms contains eight alphabetic acrostics, four in the book one and four in book five, creating symmetry over the entire book of Psalms. The role of these acrostics has been variously explained as an artistic device, a mnemonic tool, or a pattern which implies completeness.[2] This paper will argue that acrostics in Psalms are part of a sophisticated literary system which creates a series of signposts intended to guide the reader to each psalm's embedded message. A deliberate disruption in the alphabetic sequence at precise locations in the text and other more subtle anomalies in an otherwise very structured poem are examples of such signposts.

We expect these acrostics to be perfectly arranged according to a simple and predictable alphabetic pattern. Surprisingly, however, only three of the acrostics in Psalms have the complete alphabetic series א to ת. All the others are missing verses beginning with some letters. Ps 9/10 is missing seven of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Psalm 25 is missing a ו and a ק, while psalm 34 is missing only ק. Both 25 and 34 have an extra verse beginning with the letter פ added to the end. Psalm 37 is missing a verse for the letter ע. Three of the acrostics in book five are complete and only Ps 145 is missing a נ. See Table 1.

| Book | Psalm | Missing Letter(s) | Missing Letter Count | Letter Added To End | Total Letters |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 9/10 | ד, מ, נ, ס, ע, פ, צ | 7 | - | 15 |
| 1 | 25 | ו and ק | 2 | פ | 20+1=21 |
| 1 | 34 | ו | 1 | פ | 21+1=22 |
| 1 | 37 | ע | 1 | - | 21 |
| 5 | 111 | Complete | 0 | - | 22 |
| 5 | 112 | Complete | 0 | - | 22 |
| 5 | 119 | Complete | 0 | - | 22 |
| 5 | 145 | נ | 1 | - | 21 |

**Table 1**

These anomalies have been the subject of much discussion among commentators, both ancient and modern, usually focusing on the question of the reliability of the text. Most scholars believe that these acrostics were once complete and that in their pristine form they contained the entire alphabetic sequence, but have since been badly damaged in the course of transmission. However, we find it very unlikely that such glaring mistakes, which disrupt the simple alphabetic pattern for most of the acrostics, could possibly have slipped by the careful Biblical scribes.[3] This paper will attempt to show that the missing letters are in fact purposefully omitted, that their omission lies at the core of the psalms' meanings and that no emendations are necessary. Everybody knows the alphabet and the absence of a letter captures the reader's attention and prompts him to search for an explanation. This, we will argue, is a deliberate and sophisticated literary


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device intended to lead the reader to uncover the psalms' structures and facilitate transmittal of their messages.[4]

## 2.1 Psalms 9/10

Of the twenty two letters in the alphabet only fifteen are present in the acrostic of Pss 9 and 10, while seven – ד and מ,נ,ס,ע,פ,צ - are missing. The ד verse is completely lacking while the other six consecutive missing letters seem to be replaced by ten verses which lack any semblance of alphabetic sequence. The problem of the omission of seven letters is compounded by the inconsistent verse distribution for the fifteen recognizable letters. Based on the pattern set out in the first four verses and in the majority of this psalm, we expect each letter of the alphabet to span two verses: a primary verse which begins with that letter of the alphabet, and an attached verse which apparently can begin with any letter. This is similar to the structure of Ps 37 which also has a primary and attached verse for most letters of the alphabet.[5] The letter א has one primary verse (v 2) and one attached verse (v 3); ב also has one primary (v 4) and one attached (v 5). However, this pattern is not followed consistently. Five letters have only a primary verse and no attachment: ר ,ל[6] ,י ,ה ,ג. The ו has three attached verses (vv 9-11)[7] and the כ has two attached verses (vv 20-21). Thus, of the 15 letters present in the acrostic only eight – א, ב, ז, ח, ט, ק, שׁ, ת – comply with the standard pattern of one primary and one attached verse. Since most of the letters have one primary and one attached verse we can call that the norm and view the rest as deviations. See Table 2 for a summary of these deviations.

| | Letter | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Verse | Psalm |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superscription | | | | | | | | | | | | | לדוד | מזמור | לבן | עלמות | למנצח | 1 | |
| Normal | א | Primary | | | | | | | | | נפלאותיך | כל | אספרה | לבי | בכל | י-הוה | אודה | 2 | |
| | | Attached | | | | | | | | | | עליון | שמך | אזמרה | בך | ואעלצה | אשמחה | 3 | |
| Normal | ב | Primary | | | | | | | | | | מפניך | ויאבדו | יכשלו | אחור | אויבי | בשוב | 4 | |
| | | Attached | | | | | | | | צדק | שופט | לכסא | ישבת | ודיני | משפטי | עשית | כי | 5 | |
| Partial Disruption | ג | Primary | | | | | | | | ועד | לעולם | מחית | שמם | רשע | אבדת | גוים | גערת | 6 | |
| Total Disruption | ד | Missing | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Partial Disruption | ה | Primary | | | | | | | | המה | זכרם | אבד | נתשת | וערים | לנצח | חרבות | תמו | 7 | |
| Normal | ו | Primary | | | | | | | | | | | כסאו | למשפט | כונן | ישב | לעולם | וי-הוה | |
| | | Attached | | | | | | | | | | במישרים | ידין | לאמים | בצדק | תבל | ישפט | והוא | 8 |
| | | Extra | | | | | | | | | | לעתות | משגב | לדך | משגב | י-הוה | ויהי | 9 | |
| | | Extra | | | | | | | | י-הוה | דרשיך | עזבת | כי | לא | שמך | יודעי | וובטחו | 10 | |
| Normal | ז | Primary | | | | | | | | | | בעמים | עלילותיו | הגידו | ציון | לשב | זמרו | 11 | |
| | | Attached | | | | | | | | עניים | צעקת | שכח | לא | זכר | אותם | דמים | כי | 12 | |
| Normal | ח | Primary | | | | | | | | | אויבי | מרוממי | משערי | מושאי | עניי | ראה | חנני | 13 | |
| | | Attached | | | | | | | | בישועתך | אגילה | ציון | בת | בשיעריך | תהלתיך | כל | לשון | 14 | |
| Normal | ט | Primary | | | | | | | | | נלכדה | טבעו | זו | ברשת | עשו | בשחת | גוים | 15 | |
| | | Attached | | | | | | | | סלה | הגיון | רשע | נוקש | כפיו | בפעל | עשה | נודע | 16 | |
| Partial Disruption | י | Primary | | | | | | | | | | א-להים | שכחי | גוים | כל | לשאולה | רשעים | 17 | |
| Normal | כ | Primary | | | | | | | | לעד | תאבד | ענוים | תקות | אביון | ישכח | לנצח | כי | 18 | |
| | | Attached | | | | | | | | פניך | על | גוים | ישפטו | אנוש | יעז | אל | קומה | 19 | |
| | | Extra | | | | | | | | סלה | המה | אנוש | גוים | ידעו | להם | מורה | שיתה | 20 | |
| Partial Disruption | ל | Primary | | | | | | | | | | בצרה | לעתות | תעלים | ברחוק | תעמד | למה | 21 | |
| Total Disruption | מ נ ס ע פ צ | Missing | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 3 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 4 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 5 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 6 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 7 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 8 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 9 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 10 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 11 | |
| Normal | ק | Primary | | | | | | | | | עניים | תשכח | אל | ידך | נשא | א-ל | קומה | 12 | |
| | | Attached | | | | | | | | | לא | בלבו | אמר | א-להים | רשע | נאץ | מה | על | 13 |
| Partial Disruption | ר | Primary | | | | | | | | יעוב | עליך | בידך | לחת | חביט | וכעס | עמל | אתה | ראתה | 14 |
| Normal | ש | Primary | | | | | | | | | תמצא | בל | רשעו | ורע | תדרוש | ורע | רשע | שברי | 15 |
| | | Attached | | | | | | | | | | מארצו | גוים | אבדו | ועד | עולם | מלך | י-הוה | 16 |
| Normal | ת | Primary | | | | | | | | | אנוש | תקשיב | לבם | תכין | י-הוה | שמעת | עניים | תאות | 17 |
| | | Attached | | | | | | | | הארץ | מן | אנוש | לערץ | עוד | יוסיף | בל | ודך | יתום | לשפט | 18 |

**Table 2**[8]


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This first acrostic in Psalms is unique in that it spans two psalms. Ps 9 goes from א to כ (11 letters) and Ps 10 continues from ל to ת (11 letters) so that the alphabet is split evenly between the two, even though some of the letters are missing. Furthermore, there are 164 words in Ps 9 and 162 words in Ps 10 so that the total acrostic of 326 words is split almost exactly evenly between the two psalms. The last word of Ps 9, סלה, is not an integral part of the psalm but rather a marker indicating a pause or an interruption.[9] If we leave out this סלה from the word count as well as the סלה in 9:17, then Ps 9 also has 162 words.[10] The acrostic is split exactly in the middle both in its division of letters of the alphabet and in terms of word counts. It is statistically significant that the word count for Ps 9, which contains ten of the first eleven letters of the alphabet, should be exactly equal to the word count of Ps 10, which includes only five of the last eleven letters of the alphabet. This is a first indication that that no words have been deleted in MT, and that the aberrations in the acrostic structure may be intentional.

As a second indication that MT is reliable, we notice a few formal features of the acrostic. The ג verse (v 6) ends with the letter ד. This is the only verse in Psalms which begins with a ג and ends with a ד.[11] The letter ה verse (v 7) ends with the letter ה. The letter ו verse (v 8) also ends with the letter ו. This pattern, besides displaying subtle artistry, also drops a hint to the missing ד verse. Instead of ending the ג verse with a ג, as is done for ה and ו, the writer ends it with a ד as a small consolation for the missing verse and to hint that its absence is intended.

6:9 גערת גוים אבדת רשׁע שׁמם מחית לעולם ועד׃
7:9 האויב תמו חרבות לנצח וערים נתשׁת אבד זכרם המה׃
8:9 ויהוה לעולם ישׁב כונן למשׁפט כסאו׃

A third proof that MT is not missing any words is the realization that word counts are an essential part of the structure of this acrostic. Analyzing word counts of four successive primary verses, we see that the ו verse (v 8) has 6 words, the ז verse (v 12) has 7 words, the ח verse (v 14) has 8 words, and the ט verse (v 16) has 9 words. Each of these verses contains the same number of words as the numerical value of the letter of the acrostic which begins that verse.[12] Furthermore if we take v 11 as the attached verse for the ו letter, then the attached verses for each of these letters all have 9 words.[13] See Table 3.

| | Attached Verse Count | Primary Verse Count | | | | | | | | | | | Ps 9, verse # |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | כסאו | למשׁפט | כונן | ישׁב | לעולם | ו*הוה | 8 |
| | 7 | | | | | במישׁרים | לאמים | ידין | בצדק | תבל | ישׁפט | והוא | 9 |
| ו | 7 | | | | | בצרה | לעתות | משׂגב | לדד | משׂגב | יהוה-י | ויהי | 10 |
| | 9 | | | יהוה-י | דרשׁיך | עזבת | לא | כי | שׁמך | יודעי | בך | ויבטחו | 11 |
| ז | | 7 | | | | עלילותיו | בעמים | הגידו | ציון | ישׁב | ליהוה-י | זמרו | 12 |
| | 9 | | | ענים | צעקת | שׁכח | לא | זכר | אותם | דמים | דרשׁ | כי | 13 |
| ח | | 8 | | | מות | משׁערי | מרוממי | משׂנאי | עניי | ראה | יהוה-י | חנני | 14 |
| | 9 | | | בישׁועתך | אגילה | ציון | בת | בשׁערי | תהלתיך | כל | אספרה | למען | 15 |
| ט | | 9 | | רגלם | נלכדה | טמנו | זו | ברשׁת | עשׂו | בשׁחת | גוים | טבעו | 16 |
| | 9 | | סלה | הגיון | רשׁע | נוקשׁ | כפיו | בפעל | עשׂה | משׁפט | יהוה-י | נודע | 17 |

**Table 3**


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These indications that the text is not corrupt make us wonder why the acrostic is disrupted. Instead of continuing the methodology of modern critical scholars who resort to conjectural emendations to force the text into preconceived molds of what the poem should look like,[14] let us read the text as it is - as a literary creation. Robert Alter writes:

> The process of literary creation…is an unceasing dialectic between the necessity to use established forms in order to be able to communicate coherently and the necessity to break and remake those forms because they are arbitrary restrictions and because what is merely repeated automatically no longer conveys a message.[15]

Anomalies in the acrostic are breaks in established forms designed to convey a message. Reading the text is like driving down a street filled with pot-holes. At first, we are in a state of confusion as to why the simple acrostic pattern is broken. The very process of trying to figure out why the acrostic is imperfect leads us towards the insight that the writer wants to communicate.

## 2.2 The Principle Behind the Purposeful Disruptions

To understand why the acrostic is broken precisely at certain letters, we must first review the contents and themes running through it. Generally, the psalm moves between praise of God for past vindications (9:2-13, 16-19, 10:16-18) and request for God to take action, destroy the wicked, and help the lowly and afflicted (9:14-15, 20-21, 10:1, 12-15). The situation is one in which the wicked are in power oppressing the afflicted. The writer is confident that God will help His faithful and remain true to the covenant, and so he urgently requests that God act. One lengthy section that does not fit neatly into the two categories of praise or request is 10:2-11 which goes into the inner thinking of the wicked person and analyzes how he justifies his actions. This reflection is intended to call God's attention to the wicked person's evildoing in order to provoke His mercy upon the oppressed. The wicked person thinks that God is not mindful of the world – שכח א-ל (10:11). The next verse (10:12) calls on God to rise up and remember the lowly – אל תשכח ענוים.[16]

It is noteworthy that this lengthy meditation on the warped logic of the wicked falls exactly at the place where six consecutive letters are omitted. This correlation leads us to suggest that the structure of the psalm reflects its message. The alphabetic acrostic represents proper order – the way the world should be when God is present. Mention and discussion of the wicked, who represent a breakdown in appropriate divine order, come at precisely the point where there is a breakdown in the acrostic sequence. In this ten verse long section which delves into the inner thoughts of the wicked, the acrostic breaks down completely and six letters go missing. The acrostic only gets back on track with the call for God to act and punish the wicked - קומה ה' (10:12).

The other deviations from the normal pattern in this acrostic also result from application of this same principle. The first two letters of the acrostic (א-ב, vv 2-5) are complete with one primary and attached verse each. These four verses praise God and remember past vindications. The third letter (ג, v 6) continues to recall past vindications but here we have the first occurrence of the word רשע – "wicked." Immediately, there is a disruption: there is no attached verse for ג, no verses at all for ד, and no attached verse for ה. Here, apparently, the mere mention of the wicked in v 6, even within a description of his destruction, also disrupts the acrostic sequence. Proper order is not restored until the letter ו which begins וי-הוה לעולם ישב; a proclamation of God's everlasting sitting in judgment brings the acrostic back to proper format. God's name is a keyword in the four


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verses of the letter ו. YHVH is the first, last, and middle[17] word of vv 8-11. Not only do we find complete primary and attached verses for the next three letters, ו even has two extra attached verses perhaps to compensate for the missing ג and ה attached verses.[18] God's judgment restores the partial havoc caused by the wicked.

However, the missing ד verse is not replaced. This missing letter is of a different nature than the other six missing letters discussed earlier. The latter at least have ten verses in their place, even though those verses do not begin with the correct letters. The ד verse is completely lacking. This may connect to the verses immediately before and after the spot where it should be located. Both say that the name of the wicked was wiped out - שמם מחית לעולם ועד (v 6, ג) and אבד זכרם המה (v 7, ה). The first phrase describes the erasing of the wicked, and the following phrase states that their memory has perished. These are the only two verses in the psalm which state this idea in the past tense and not as a prayer that God should destroy the wicked. We would argue that the phrases שמם מחית and אבד זכרם are to be understood with a double meaning, the second meaning being an allusion to the absence of a ד verse. The absence of the ד verse symbolically represents the literal meaning of the erasing of evil and its memory.

Order is restored throughout the letters ז, ח, and ט (vv. 12-17) – six verses that follow the normal pattern of two verses per acrostic letter. But then there is another disruption – the omission of an attached verse for י and the addition of a second attached verse for כ. At the end of v 17 is the second mention of רשע. This is followed almost immediately by yet another occurrence of רשעים at the beginning of v 18. We suggest that the mention of the "wicked" again causes a disruption of the pattern – the skipping of the yod's attached verse. The first attached verse to כ, v 20, invokes YHVH with קומה ה' (the same phrase restores order in 10:12) and this is echoed in the second attached verse by another lengthened imperative of a hollow verb – שיתה ה'. The two attached verses are clearly intended as a pair. This double invocation restores order from the chaos caused by the double mention of רשע. The second attached verse for כ (v 21) serves as a replacement for the missing attached verse for י.

The acrostic continues with a primary ל verse but is abruptly interrupted by three occurrences of the word רשע in 10:2, 3, and 4 and the word רע in v 6. This meditation on evil continues for ten verses during which YHVH only appears once as the object of the wicked man's scorn (v 3). As mentioned above, six letters of the acrostic – מ,נ,ס,ע,פ,צ - become garbled by this extended deliberation on the thought process of the wicked. Order is not restored until YHVH is once again invoked with the words קומה ה' in 10:12.

ק has both a primary and an attached verse, as expected. But the word רשע appears in the ק attached verse (13). This causes ר to lose its attached verse.[19] We then proceed to ש (v 15) which contains רשע twice and the word רע once. But this conglomeration of evil words is immediately stopped by the declaration in ש's attached verse (v 16) – ה' מלך עולם ועד. Mention of God's kingship is able to restrain the effects caused by evil. There are no further ramifications of the evil words in v 15. This is in fact hinted to in the words of v 15, תדרש רשעו בל תמצא. If we take this phrase as being a self-referential comment about the structure of this acrostic, then we can translate as, "You will look for [the disruption caused by] רשע but you will not find it" because by the end of the psalm, God's presence is very near and does not allow the wicked to cause harm. From v 15 until the end of the psalm there are no further disruptions.[20]


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The very form of the acrostic reflects its central message. The message is that evil disrupts the natural order of the world and the ramifications of evil are far reaching. However, evil can only exist when God allows this to happen. This is poetically represented in the structure of the acrostic where any occurrence of the word רשע disrupts either the acrostic or the primary-attached verse pattern. However, an invocation of God to act – קומה ה' - or a description of God in His active role as king puts the acrostic back on track. See Table 4.

| | Letter | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Verse | Psalm |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superscription | | | | | | | | | | | | | לדוד | מזמור | לבן | עלמות | למנצח | 1 | 9 |
| Normal | א | Primary | | | | | | | | | נפלאותיך | כל | אספרה | לבי | בכל | י-הוה | אודה | 2 | |
| | | Attached | | | | | | | | | | עליון | שמך | אזמרה | בך | ואעלצה | אשמחה | 3 | |
| Normal | ב | Primary | | | | | | | | | | מפניך | ויאבדו | יכשלו | אחור | אויבי | בשוב | 4 | |
| | | Attached | | | | | | | | צדק | שופט | לכסא | ישבת | ודיני | משפטי | עשית | כי | 5 | |
| Partial Disruption | ג | Primary | | | | | | | | ועד | לעולם | מחית | שמם | רשע | אבדת | גוים | גערת | 6 | |
| Total Disruption | ד | Missing | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Partial Disruption | ה | Primary | | | | | | | | זכרם | המה | אבד | נתשת | וערים | לנצח | חרבות | תמו | אויב | 7 | |
| Normal | ו | Primary | | | | | | | | | | כסאו | למשפט | כונן | ישב | לעולם | וי-הוה | 8 | |
| | | Attached | | | | | | | | | | במישרים | ידין | לאמים | בצדק | תבל | ישפט | והוא | 9 | |
| Restoring Verses | | Extra | | | | | | | | | | בצרה | לעתות | משגב | לדך | משגב | י-הוה | ויהי | 10 | |
| | | Extra | | | | | | | | | י-הוה | דרשיך | עזבת | לא | כי | שמך | יודעי | ויבטחו | 11 | |
| Normal | ז | Primary | | | | | | | | | | עלילותיו | בעמים | הגידו | ציון | ישב | לי-הוה | זמרו | 12 | |
| | | Attached | | | | | | | | צעקת | עניים | שכח | לא | זכר | אותם | דמים | כי דרש | 13 | |
| Normal | ח | Primary | | | | | | | | מות | | משערי | מרוממי | משנאי | עניי | ראה | י-הוה | חנני | 14 | |
| | | Attached | | | | | | | | אגילה | ביְשׁועתך | ציון | בת | בשערי | תהלתיך | כל | אספרה | למען | 15 | |
| Normal | ט | Primary | | | | | | | | נלכדה | רגלם | טמנו | זו | ברשת | עשו | בשחת | גוים | טבעו | 16 | |
| | | Attached | | | | | | | סלה | רשע | הגיון | נוקש | כפיו | בפעל | עשה | משפט | י-הוה | נודע | 17 | |
| Partial Disruption | י | Primary | | | | | | | | | | א-להים | שכחי | גוים | כל | לשאולה | רשעים | יָשׁובו | 18 | |
| Normal | כ | Primary | | | | | | | | תאבד | לעד | ענוים | תקות | אביון | ישכח | לנצח | לא | כי | 19 | |
| | | Attached | | | | | | | | על | פניך | גוים | ישפטו | אנוש | יעז | אל | י-הוה | קומה | 20 | |
| Restoring Verse | | Extra | | | | | | | | המה | סלה | אנוש | גוים | ידעו | להם | מורה | י-הוה | שיתה | 21 | |
| | ל | Primary | | | | | | | | | | בצרה | לעתות | תעלים | ברחוק | תעמד | י-הוה | למה | 1 | 10 |
| Total Disruption | מ נ ס ע פ צ ק | Missing | | | | | | | | חשבו | זו | במזמות | יתפשו | עני | ידלק | רשע | בגאות | 2 | | |
| | | | | | | | | | י-הוה | נאץ | ברך | ובצע | נפשו | תאות | על | רשע | כי הלל | 3 | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | מזמותיו | כל | א-להים | אין | ידרש | בל | אפו | כגבה | רשע | 4 | |
| | | | | | | | | בהם | יפיח | צורריו | כל | מנגדו | משפטיך | מרום | עת | בכל | דרכו | יחילו | 5 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | ברע | לא | אשר | ודר | לדר | אמוט | בל | בלבו | אמר | 6 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | ואון | עמל | לשונו | תחת | ותך | ומרמות | מלא | פיהו | אלה | 7 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | יצפני | לחלכה | עיניו | נקי | יהרג | במסתרים | חצרים | במארב | ישב | 8 | |
| | | | | | | | | ברשתו | במשכו | עני | יחטף | עני | לחטוף | יארב | בסכה | כאריה | במסתר | יארב | 9 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | חלכאים | בעצומיו | נפל | ישח | ודכה | 10 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | לנצח | ראה | בל | פניו | הסתיר | א-ל | שכח | בלבו | אמר | 11 | |
| Normal | ק | Primary | | | | | | | | עניים | תשכח | אל | ידך | נשא | א-ל | א-ל | קומה | 12 | | |
| | | Attached | | | | | | | | תדרש | לא | בלבו | אמר | א-להים | רשע | נאץ | מה | על | 13 | |
| Partial Disruption | ר | Primary | עזר | היית | אתה | יתום | חלכה | יעזב | עליך | בידך | לתת | תביט | וכעס | עמל | אתה | כי | ראתה | 14 | | |
| Normal | ש | Primary | | | | | | | | תמצא | בל | רשעו | תדרוש | ורע | רשע | זרוע | שברי | 15 | | |
| | | Attached | | | | | | | | | | מארצו | גוים | אבדו | ועד | עולם | מלך | י-הוה | 16 | |
| Normal | ת | Primary | | | | | | | | אזנך | תקשיב | לבם | תכין | י-הוה | שמעת | ענוים | תאות | 17 | | |
| | | Attached | | | | | | הארץ | מן | אנוש | לערץ | עוד | יוסיף | בל | ודך | יתום | לשפט | 18 | | |

**Table 4**[21]

## 2.3 Coordinated Word Counts

Now that we have seen the principle which causes disruptions in the acrostic, we can appreciate the role of word counts within each section before and after the missing letters.[22] The first section of successive letters begins at v 1 and extends to v 6. The missing ד verse ends this section of normalcy. This first section contains 40 words.


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The next section extends from v 7 until the סלה breaking point at v 17. In this instance, it is not an acrostic disruption but rather the placement of the סלה which marks the end of the section. This section contains exactly 90 words.

The third section goes from v 18 until 10:1, just before the section of missing letters. The סלה of v 21 does not serve as a breaking point but rather as a connector indicating that these two psalms should be read as one. Like the first section, this section contains 40 words, excluding the סלה of 9:21.[23] This section also contains a chiasmus in verse word counts. The three כ verses (9:19-21) are each nine words long.[24] the preceding י verse (9:18) as well as the following ל verse (10:1) are each seven words long. This creates a 7-9-9-9-7 chiasmus which holds this section together and is further proof that סלה (v 21) does not break it apart. This five verse chiasmus stands right at the center of the acrostic in terms of verses. The י verse (9:18) is the eighteenth verse from the beginning, and the ל verse (10:1) is the eighteenth verse from the end. Thus there are 18 (=9+9) verses before כ, 18 (=9+9) verses after the כ and the כ letter itself has one primary and two attached verses which are all nine words long. The number nine begins to emerge as a key number in the structure of this acrostic.

The fourth section comprises the ten verses of total disruption (10:2-11) which come in place of six letters of the acrostic. Like section two, this section is 90 words long.[25] So far, these four sections form an alternating pattern: 40, 90, 40, 90.

The last section makes up the rest of the psalm (10:12-18). This section is 65 words long. The first two sections added together make 130 words. Similarly the third and fourth sections together have 130 words.[26] The last single section is then half of 130. See Table 5.


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| | Total | Word Count | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Letter | Verse | Psalm |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 130 Words | | 5 | | | | | | | | | | לדוד | מזמור | לבן | עלמות | למנצח | | 1 | 9 |
| | | 7 | | | | | | | | נפלאותיך | כל | אספרה | לבי | בכל | י-הוה | אודה | א | 2 | |
| | | 6 | | | | | | | | | עליון | שמך | אזמרה | בך | ואעלצה | אשמחה | | 3 | |
| | | 6 | | | | | | | | | מפניך | ויאבדו | יכשלו | אחור | אויבי | בשוב | ב | 4 | |
| | | 8 | | | | | | | צדק | שופט | לכסא | ישבת | ודיני | משפטי | עשית | כי | | 5 | |
| | 40 | 8 | | | | | | | ועד | לעולם | מחית | שמם | רשע | אבדת | גוים | געלרת | ג | 6 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ד | | |
| | | 9 | | | | | | המה | זכרם | אבד | נתשת | וערים | לנצח | חרבות | תמו | האויב | ה | 7 | |
| | | 6 | | | | | | | | | כסאו | למשפט | כונן | ישב | לעולם | וי-הוה | | 8 | |
| | | 7 | | | | | | | | במישרים | לאמים | ידין | בצדק | תבל | ישפט | והוא | ו | 9 | |
| | | 7 | | | | | | | | בצרה | לעתות | משגב | לדך | משגב | י-הוה | ויהי | | 10 | |
| | | 9 | | | | | | י-הוה | דרשיך | עזבת | לא | כי | שמך | יודעי | בך | ויבטחו | | 11 | |
| | | 7 | | | | | | | | עלילותיו | בעמים | הגידו | ציון | ישב | לי-הוה | זמרו | ז | 12 | |
| | | 9 | | | | | | עניים | צעקת | שכח | לא | זכר | אותם | דמים | דרש | כי | | 13 | |
| | | 8 | | | | | | | מות | משערי | מרוממי | משנאי | עניי | ראה | י-הוה | חנני | ח | 14 | |
| | | 9 | | | | | | בישועתך | אגילה | ציון | בת | בשערי | תהלתיך | כל | אספרה | למען | | 15 | |
| | | 9 | | | | | | רגלם | נלכדה | טמנו | זו | ברשת | עשו | בשחת | גוים | טבעו | ט | 16 | |
| | 90 | 10 | | | | | סלה | הגיון | רשע | נוקש | כפיו | בפעל | עשה | משפט | י-הוה | נודע | | 17 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 130 Words | | 7 | | | | | | | | א-להים | שכחי | גוים | כל | לשאולה | רשעים | ישובו | י | 18 | |
| | | 9 | | | | | | לעד | תאבד | ענוים | תקות | אביון | ישכח | לנצח | לא | כי | | 19 | |
| | | 9 | | | | | | פניך | על | גוים | ישפטו | אנוש | יעז | אל | י-הוה | קומה | כ | 20 | |
| | | 9 | | | | | סלה | | המה | אנוש | גוים | ידעו | להם | מורה | י-הוה | שיתה | | 21 | |
| | 40 | 7 | | | | | | | | בצרה | לעתות | תעלים | ברחוק | תעמד | י-הוה | למה | ל | 1 | 10 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | 8 | | | | | | | חשבו | זו | במזמות | יתפשו | עני | ידלק | רשע | בגאות | | 2 | |
| | | 10 | | | | | | י-הוה | נאץ | ברך | ובצע | נפשו | תאות | על | רשע | כי | | 3 | |
| | | 9 | | | | | | | מזמותיו | כל | א-להים | אין | ידרש | בל | אפו | רשע | ג | 4 | |
| | | 11 | | | | | בהם | יפיח | צורריו | כל | מנגדו | משפטיך | מרום | עת | בכל | יחילו | ר | 5 | |
| | | 9 | | | | | | | ברע | לא | אשר | ודר | לדר | אמוט | בל | אמר | ס | 6 | |
| | | 9 | | | | | | | ואון | עמל | לשונו | תחת | ותך | ומרמות | מלא | אלה | ע | 7 | |
| | | 9 | | | | | | | יצפנו | לחלכה | עיניו | נקי | יהרג | במסתרים | חצרים | ישב | פ | 8 | |
| | | 11 | | | ברשתו | במשכו | | עני | יחטף | עני | לחטוף | יארב | בסכה | כאריה | במסתר | יארב | צ | 9 | |
| | | 5 | | | | | | | | | | חלכאים | בעצומיו | ונפל | ישח | ודכה | | 10 | |
| | 90 | 9 | | | | | | לנצח | ראה | בל | פניו | הסתיר | א-ל | שכח | בלבו | אמר | | 11 | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 65 Words (=130/2) | | 8 | | | | | | | | ענים | תשכח | אל | ידך | נשא | א-ל | י-הוה | ק | 12 | |
| | | 9 | | | | | | תדרש | לא | בלבו | אמר | א-להים | רשע | נאץ | מה | על | | 13 | |
| | | 15 | עוזר | היית | אתה | יתום | חלכה | יעזב | עליך | בידך | לתת | תביט | וכעס | עמל | אתה | כי | ר | 14 | |
| | | 8 | | | | | | | תמצא | בל | רשעו | תדרוש | ורע | רשע | זרוע | שבר | ש | 15 | |
| | | 7 | | | | | | | | מארצו | גוים | אבדו | ועד | עולם | מלך | י-הוה | | 16 | |
| | | 8 | | | | | | | אזנך | תקשיב | לבם | תכין | י-הוה | שמעת | ענוים | תאות | ת | 17 | |
| | 65 | 10 | | | | | הארץ | מן | אנוש | לערץ | עוד | יוסיף | בל | ודך | יתום | לשפט | | 18 | |

**Table 5**

The seven letters that are missing from this acrostic – ד,מ,נ,ס,ע,פ,צ – are significant when analyzing the occurrence of these letters within words. The first two sections (9:1-17) contain 90 words which include at least one of these missing letters. This leaves 40 words that are not constituted with any of these letters. Therefore, the first two sections which comprise a total of 130 words can be broken down into 90 and 40 sections in two distinct manners. The sections before and after the missing ד verse are 40 and 90 words respectively. The number of words containing any of the seven letters missing in the acrostic adds up to 90, leaving 40 words which contain none of these seven letters. See Table 6.


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| Words without ד,מ,נ,ס,ע,פ,צ | Words with ד,מ,נ,ס,ע,פ,צ | | | | | | | | | | | Letter | Psalm 9 Verse |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 5 | | | | | | לדוד | מזמור | לבן | עלמות | למנצח | | 1 |
| 4 | 3 | | | | נפלאותיך | כל | אספרה | לבי | בכל | י-הוה | אודה | א | 2 |
| 1 | 5 | | | | | עליון | שמך | אזמרה | בך | ואעלצה | אשמחה | | 3 |
| 4 | 2 | | | | | מפניך | ויאבדו | יכשלו | אחור | אויבי | בשוב | ב | 4 |
| 2 | 6 | | | צדק | שופט | לכסא | ישבת | ודיני | משפטי | עשית | כי | | 5 |
| 0 | 8 | | | ועד | לעולם | מחית | שמם | רשע | אבדת | גוים | גערת | ג | 6 |
| 2 | 7 | | המה | זכרם | אבד | נתשת | וערים | לנצח | חרבות | תמו | האויב | ה | 7 |
| 2 | 4 | | | | | כסאו | למשפט | כונן | ישב | לעולם | וי-הוה | | 8 |
| 2 | 5 | | | | במישרים | לאמים | ידין | בצדק | תבל | ישפט | והוא | ו | 9 |
| 2 | 5 | | | | בצרה | לעתות | משגב | לדך | משגב | י-הוה | ויהי | | 10 |
| 5 | 4 | | י-הוה | דרשיך | עזבת | לא | כי | שמך | יודעי | בך | ויבטחו | | 11 |
| 2 | 5 | | | | עלילותיו | בעמים | הגידו | ציון | ישב | לי-הוה | זמרו | ז | 12 |
| 4 | 5 | | עניים | צעקת | שכח | לא | זכר | אותם | דמים | דרש | כי | | 13 |
| 2 | 6 | | | מות | משערי | מרוממי | משנאי | עניי | ראה | י-הוה | חנני | ח | 14 |
| 4 | 5 | | בישועתך | אגילה | ציון | בת | בשערי | תהלתיך | כל | אספרה | למען | | 15 |
| 3 | 6 | | רגלם | נלכדה | טמנו | זו | ברשת | עשו | בשחת | גוים | טבעו | ט | 16 |
| 1 | 9 | סלה | הגיון | רשע | נוקש | כפיו | בפעל | עשה | משפט | י-הוה | נודע | | 17 |
| 40 | 90 | Total | | | | | | | | | | | |

**Table 6**[27]

All seven missing letters are found together in the same verse only in 9:5 and 10:18. 9:5 marks the end of the first section and 10:18 marks the end of the last section. This signifies that before the first רשע, there is a complete state of order with nothing missing. This only happens again after God restores order for the last time. The acrostic begins and ends with completion.[28]

The number of words in all primary verses from 9:2 until 10:1, which make up the first three sections, is 83 and the number of words in all secondary verses within that same range is also 83. This once again shows that verse counts are significant since it is highly unlikely that the eleven primary verse should by chance have exactly the same number of words as the ten secondary verses. See Table 7.


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| Secondary Verse Counts | Primary Verse Counts | | | | | | | | | | | Letter | Verse | Psalm |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | לדוד | מזמור | לבן | עלמות | למנצח | | 1 | 9 |
| | 7 | | | | נפלאותיך | כל | אספרה | לבי | בכל | י-הוה | אודה | א | 2 | |
| 6 | | | | | | עליון | שמך | אזמרה | בך | ואעלצה | אשמחה | | 3 | |
| | 6 | | | | | מפניך | ויאבדו | יכשלו | אחור | אויבי | בשוב | ב | 4 | |
| 8 | | | | צדק | שופט | לכסא | ישבת | ודיני | משפטי | עשית | כי | | 5 | |
| | 8 | | | ועד | לעולם | מחית | שמם | רשע | אבדת | גוים | געלת | ג | 6 | |
| | 9 | | המה | זכרם | אבד | נתשת | וערים | לנצח | חרבות | תמו | האויב | ה | 7 | |
| | 6 | | | | | כסאו | למשפט | כונן | ישב | לעולם | וי-הוה | | 8 | |
| 7 | | | | | במישרים | לאמים | ידין | בצדק | תבל | ישפט | והוא | ו | 9 | |
| 7 | | | | | בצרה | לעתות | משגב | לדך | משגב | י-הוה | ויהי | | 10 | |
| 9 | | | י-הוה | דרשיך | עזבת | לא | כי | שמך | יודעי | בך | ויבטחו | | 11 | |
| | 7 | | | | עלילותיו | בעמים | הגידו | ציון | ישב | לי-הוה | זמרו | ז | 12 | |
| 9 | | | עניים | צעקת | שכח | לא | זכר | אותם | דמים | דרש | כי | | 13 | |
| | 8 | | | מות | משערי | מרוממי | משנאי | עניי | ראה | י-הוה | חנני | ח | 14 | |
| 9 | | | בישועתך | אגילה | ציון | בת | בשערי | תהלתיך | כל | אספרה | למען | | 15 | |
| | 9 | | רגלם | נלכדה | טמנו | זו | ברשת | עשו | בשחת | גוים | טבעו | ט | 16 | |
| 10 | | סלה | הגיון | רשע | נוקש | כפיו | בפעל | עשה | משפט | י-הוה | נודע | | 17 | |
| | 7 | | | | א-להים | שכחי | גוים | כל | לשאולה | רשעים | ישובו | י | 18 | |
| | 9 | | לעד | תאבד | ענוים | תקות | אביון | ישכח | לנצח | לא | כי | | 19 | |
| 9 | | | פניך | על | גוים | ישפטו | אנוש | יעז | אל | י-הוה | קומה | כ | 20 | |
| 9 | | | סלה | המה | אנוש | גוים | ידעו | להם | מורה | י-הוה | שיתה | | 21 | |
| | 7 | | | | בצרה | לעתות | תעלים | ברחוק | תעמד | י-הוה | למה | ל | 22 | 10 |
| 83 | 83 | Total | | | | | | | | | | | | |

**Table 7**

To summarize, the numbers 4 and 9 are the key numbers in this acrostic. The first and third sections are 40 words and the second and fourth sections are 90 words. Within the first two sections, 90 words contain the seven missing letters and 40 words lack them. The first missing letter, ד, is the fourth letter of the alphabet. The next missing letter, מ, is nine letters after that. The cluster of missing letters goes form מ = 40 to צ = 90. All of this structural information, word counts, and number symbolisms, point to the integrity of the text and adds support to the view that any anomalies in the acrostic are intentional.[29]

## 3. Psalm 25

The anomalies in Pss 9/10 also relate to the anomalies in the next acrostic at Ps 25. However, understanding the anomalies in this psalm first requires an overview of its contents. The psalmist is being persecuted by numerous enemies and at the same time feels guilty for his own sins. He therefore prays to be delivered from his enemies (vv 2-3, 15, and especially 19) and forgiven for his sins (vv 6-8, 11). The prayer formulas used here share much vocabulary with the prayer of Moses in Ex 33. דְּרָכֶיךָ ה׳ הוֹדִיעֵנִי in 25:4 remind us immediately of Moses' prayer - הוֹדִעֵנִי נָא אֶת דְּרָכֶךָ in Ex 33:13.[30] The words חטא (Ps 25:7,8,18), פשע (v 7), and עון (v 11) are all found together in Ex 34:7, and חטא is


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repeated by itself in Ex 32:21,30-34. These correspondences indicate that this psalm is a reaction to the sin of the golden calf or some similar sin.

This psalm also has close ties with Jeremiah 14. Besides the words חטא (Jer 14:7,20) and עון (v 7) which are commonly occurring, there are many rare phrases in these two contexts. The imagery in Jer 14:3 of lads returning without water, with only empty vessels - כְּלֵיהֶם רֵיקָם, embarrassed, and heads low - בֹּ֥שׁוּ וְהָכְלְמוּ וְחָפוּ רֹאשָׁם, is repeated word for word at Ps 25:2-3 in a prayer that those who trust in God not be embarrassed – לֹא יבשו – but instead the faithless should be embarrassed and empty-handed – ריקם הבוגדים יבשו. Lifting of the soul in 25:1 – נפשי אשא - reverses the imagery of the lowered head in Jer 14:3. Jeremiah prays that God not break the covenant - אַל תָּפֵר בְּרִיתְךָ אִתָּנוּ (Jer 14:21)– because of God's name - לְמַעַן שִׁמְךָ (v 7,21). Similarly, the psalmist emphasizes the covenant (v 10,14) and prays that God forgive his sins because of His name (v 11) and because of God's goodness (v 7). The root קוה is repeated three times in both Jer 14 (8, 19,22) and Ps 25 (3, 5, 21). Other words common to both are צרה (Jer 14:8 and Ps 25:17,22), טוב (Jer 14:19 and Ps 25:8), and זכר (Jer 14:10 and Ps 25:6).

Ps 25 picks up on words and imagery from these two contexts of the golden calf in Ex 33 and the great drought in Jer 14 because these two events have a common theme of hopelessness. The threat of God destroying Israel because of the sin of the golden calf and the dejection felt by Judah on account of the severe drought leave both supplicants with a feeling of deep depression, having nowhere to turn, feeling guilty for their own wrongdoings, and asking God to have mercy for His own name. Ps 25 distills these feelings leaving out the particular historical contexts but keeping the same state of mind common to them. This background will now help us understand the structural features of this acrostic.

Psalm 25 is missing a ו and a ק from its acrostic.[31] These two letters were also significant in the structure of Ps 9/10 as letters which restore order. As we saw above, the letter ו restores order after the missing ד. It even has two extra attached verses which make up for the missing single verses beforehand. Then, after the long section of missing letters in 10:2-11, the first letter to reclaim order is the ק of 10:12.[32] The very two letters which bring back order in 9/10 are the letters which are omitted in 25. This shows that the missing letters of 25 are once again intentional and are part of the same symbolic system as 9/10.

But, if they are part of the same symbolic structure, then why should these two letters function in opposite ways - in 9/10 they mark the places of return to order, while in 25 they are missing thus representing the lack of order? We can explain this reversal by comparing the contents of each psalm. 9/10 is a statement about how God's presence restores order. Ps 25 is all about having hope when the situation is bleak. As noted, the word קוה, meaning hope, occurs three times in this psalm at vv 3, 5,and 21. The letters ק and ו are also adjacent in the word ממצוקותי of v 17. This word which means distress contains within it the word for hope – ממצוקותי.[33] The letters ו and ק are the two main letters in the word for hope – קוה. How ironic that in a psalm whose theme is hope, the letters that spell hope should be missing! It is furthermore interesting that קויתי occurs in v 5, right before the missing letter ו,[34] and ממצוקותי occurs in v 17, right before the missing ק. Ps 25 is missing these two letters because it describes a hopeless situation – similar to the situations of the golden calf and the great drought. The order that was restored in 9/10 by these letters is absent in this psalm. But Ps 25's primary message is to


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have hope in God, even when it looks like all is lost. ממצוקותי, a word which has hope embedded within distress, sums up the entire message of this acrostic.

The contrasting messages of these two acrostics is also apparent when comparing parallel words. The second verse of the first acrostic (Ps 9:3) announces "I will rejoice and exult in You" – אשמחה ואעלצה בך. The second verse of Ps 25 turns around and uses the same root, עלצ, in a prayer, "May my enemies not exult over me" – אל יעלצו איבי לי.[35] That such a rare word[36] should occur right at the opening of the first two acrostics shows that these two are working off each other. The use of the same word to express opposite feelings - the first time exulting in God and the second time a prayer that enemies should not exult over me - brings the opposition into greater contrast. The different usages in each of these acrostics goes hand in hand with the primary messages of each as delineated above. Psalm 9/10, a statement about God restoring order, uses the word to express thanks, while psalm 25, a prayer in a time of distress, uses the word as part of a request.

Other word parallels are even more striking. The word רשת appears twice in the first acrostic: first in 9:16 where the nations get caught in their own trap, and again in 10:9 where the wicked person waits to traps the lowly. רשת next occurs in 25:15 where God saves the psalmist from the net. The latter two occurrences are closely connected to each other once we compare nearby repeated words and their placement in each acrostic. 10:8 states that the eyes of the wicked person spy out the hapless – עיניו לחלכה יצפנו. In contrast, 25:15 begins עיני תמיד אל ה' – my eyes are ever toward YHVH. In 10:9 the victim in called עני. Ps 15:16 identifies this lowly person as the author himself – עני אני. In fact, the alliteration of these two words – עני אני - parallels the repetition of עני in 10:9 – לחטוף עני יחטף עני.

(י׃ח) יֵשֵׁב בְּמַאְרַב חֲצֵרִים בַּמִּסְתָּרִים יַהֲרֹג נָקִי עֵינָיו לְחֵלְכָה יִצְפֹּנוּ׃
(י׃ט) יֶאֱרֹב בַּמִּסְתָּר כְּאַרְיֵה בְסֻכֹּה יֶאֱרֹב לַחֲטוֹף עָנִי יַחְטֹף עָנִי בְּמָשְׁכוֹ בְרִשְׁתּוֹ׃

(כה׃טו) עֵינַי תָּמִיד אֶל יְדֹוָד כִּי הוּא יוֹצִיא מֵרֶשֶׁת רַגְלָי׃
(כה׃טז) פְּנֵה אֵלַי וְחָנֵּנִי כִּי יָחִיד וְעָנִי אָנִי׃

This concentration of related terms calls the reader to compare them. Ps 10, as part of its lengthy excurses on the thoughts of the evil person, describes the wicked person spying out the lowly with his eyes in order to catch him in his net. In contrast, Ps 25 includes the prayer of the self-identified lowly person whose eyes are set upon God to help rescue him from the net. This fits with the general theme of Ps 25 which is a prayer from the depths of despair. In Ps 25, vv 15-16 continue the acrostic with the letters ע and פ. In Ps 10, vv 8-9 are towards the end of the section of missing letters. If we were to assign approximately 1.5 verses for each missing letter from מ to צ (10 verses for 6 letters), then ע and פ would fall out between vv 7-10. In other words, these parallel sections are placed in the same area of the acrostic in each psalm – at the ע and פ of Ps 25 and at the place where we would expect to find ע and פ, if they existed, in Ps 10. These word parallels show how the contents of these two acrostics work together by contrasting each other. This in turn strengthens the idea that the missing letters in each are also part of the same symbolic system whose purpose is to represent those contrasts of meaning within the formal structure of each acrostic.


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## 4. Psalm 34

Pss 25 and 34 form a unit within the larger unit of the four acrostics of book one.[37] They have much shared language and common phrases. But more important than the shared language is the way Ps 34 builds upon the words of Ps 25 and responds to its statements. The מ verse at 25:12 – מי זה האיש ירא ה' - and the מ verse of 34:13 – מי האיש החפץ חיים - are parallel questions.[38] The question of 25:12, however, is not answered in the ensuing verses of that psalm. The continuation describes the benefits of being God-fearing, but not the qualifications. The answer must wait until 34:12 where the Psalmist states, "Come, my sons, listen to me; I will teach (אלמדכם) you what it is to fear the Lord."[39] The theme of teaching picks up on the key words of Ps 25, למד or יורה in vv 4, 5, 8, 9, 12.[40] The phrase יראת ה' אלמדכם at 34:11, the words right before מי האיש, picks up on ירא ה' יורנו, the words right after מי זה האיש in 25:12. After quoting the question of 25:12, Ps 34 continues to answer the question and lists the qualifications of the God-fearing person in vv 13-14. The connection between these two psalms is strengthened by analyzing the occurrences of the word טוב in each psalm. טוב appears in both ט verses (25:8, 34:9) and will also begin the ט verse in Ps 37:16.[41] In fact, טוב is a key word in Ps 34 and appears four times within a short space in vv 9, 11, 13, and 15. The importance of this word is based on its use in Ps 25:13 as one of the benefits of the one who is ירא ה'. 34:12 repeats טוב in its inquiry – who is that person, referred to in 25:13 who lives a happy life – מי האיש החפץ חיים אהב ימים לראות טוב? The repetition of טוב in Ps 34 emphasize that it is an answer to the question presented in Ps 25.

Ps 25 includes many prayers for help but does not include any responses. Although the Psalmist has confidence that God will respond, this Psalm does not indicate anything about God's reaction. Ps 34 quotes the words of those prayers and declares that God indeed does respond. This pattern repeats throughout both psalms. The ע verse in Ps 25 (v 15) says, "My eyes are ever toward the Lord." The ע verse of Ps 34 (v 16) responds, "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous." The words עיני, אל, and ה' are repeated but subject and object are switched. The psalmist's eyes looking to God are replaced with God's eyes looking towards the psalmist.[42] The פ verse of Ps 25 (v 16) says, "Turn (פנה) to me, have mercy on me." The פ verse of Ps 34 (v 17) responds, "The face of (פני) the Lord is set against evildoers." 25:16 prays that God should turn to him to save him from his enemies and the prayer is fulfilled in 34:17. The צ verse of Ps 25 (v 17) states, "My deep distress (צרות) increases." The צ verse of Ps 34 (v 18) replies, "The Lord hears, and saves them from all their troubles (צרותם)." The second ר verse of Ps 25 (v 19) asks God to "See how numerous (כי רבו) my enemies are." The ר verse of Ps 34 (v 20) acknowledges that the enemies are numerous, "Though the misfortunes of the righteous be many (רבות)," and continues, "the Lord will save him from them all." The ש verse of Ps 25 (v 21) calls on God to "Protect (שמרה) me and save me." Sure enough, God comes through in the ש verse of Ps 34 (v 21), "Keeping (שמר) all his bones intact."[43] The final פ verse of Ps 25 (v 22) calls out, "O God, redeem (פדה) Israel." The final פ verse of Ps 34 (v 23) states, "The Lord redeems (פודה) the life of His servants. And the last words of Ps 34 – כל החסים בו – hark back to Ps 25:20 – כי חסיתי בך.

The acrostic of Ps 34 is missing a ו just like Ps 25 but does have a ק verse. Why does the ק come back? The answer to this question becomes clear upon understanding the theme of this psalm. This psalm has a repeating refrain in vv 5, 7, 18.


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(ה) דָּרַשְׁתִּי אֶת יְדֹוָד וְעָנָנִי וּמִכָּל מְגוּרוֹתַי הִצִּילָנִי׃
(ז) זֶה עָנִי קָרָא וַידֹוָד שָׁמֵעַ וּמִכָּל צָרוֹתָיו הוֹשִׁיעוֹ׃
(יח) צָעֲקוּ וַידֹוָד שָׁמֵעַ וּמִכָּל צָרוֹתָם הִצִּילָם׃

These verses form a progression. First "I turned to the Lord" (v 5), then "Here was a lowly man who called" (v 7), and finally, "They cry out" (v 18). The calls go from first person, I, to a third person singular and finally to the third person plural. In each case, the call is answered. The central message of this psalm, then, is that God answers prayer as demonstrated in past experiences. This psalm presents a more hopeful situation, going beyond the message of Ps 25. Ps 25 also had calls for prayer, but we don't yet know if those prayers will be answered. The calls in Ps 25 are based on a pure leap of faith, strong but still untested. Ps 34 responds to the dire circumstances of Ps 25 with a confident and positive message. Ps 34 states that God will respond to the very prayers presented in Ps 25. God has answered prayers before, He has helped the needy, and He will do so again. This is precisely summed up in the ק verse (34:19), קרוב ה' לנשברי לב ואת דכאי רוח יושיע – "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; those crushed in spirit He delivers." ק represents the knowledge that God answers prayer. The missing ק verse in Ps 25, where the Psalmist must rely on simple faith alone, may poetically represent the lack of past evidence for God's intervention. Ps 34 responds to the hopeless predicament of Ps 25 with a confident announcement that God has and will again answer the prayer of the downtrodden. This is poetically represented by the return of the ק verse.

Both psalms lack a ו verse. This is because ו represents God's presence, as seen in the ו verse of Ps 9, וה' לעולם ישב כונן למשפט כסאו – "But the Lord abides forever; He has set up His throne for judgment." This verse is the first of the strategically located invocations of God in that acrostic which serve to bring back order. When God is invoked and comes onto the scene, the wicked and their effects are no longer. While the acrostic of Pss 9/10 was a meditation on the effects of evil, Pss 25 and 34 bring us into the real world where the wicked prosper, and the downtrodden have nowhere to turn. In this world, God is not yet present. Ps 25 encourages prayer,[44] even though it seems hopeless. Ps 34 backs up that encouragement with historical instances where prayer was effective.

The word צדיק appears for the first time in any of the acrostics in Ps 34:22. The words רשע and רע were frequent in Ps 9/10 but are absent in Ps 25 and only reappear towards the end of Ps 34 (vv 17, 20, 22). The conglomeration of the words צדיק and רשע at the end of Ps 34 sets us up for the theme of Ps 37.

## 5. Psalm 37

Psalm 37 presents a masterful statement about the persistence of evil in the world and the confidence that justice will prevail. The psalm does not address the problem of the theodicy from a philosophical perspective but rather offers practical advice to the righteous person about how to cope with injustice. The main themes are that one should have patience and trust in God always keeping in mind that the wicked - even if they are now rife and successful - will perish, and the righteous - who are now few and threatened - will prevail and inherit the land.

The most blatant anomaly in this acrostic is the missing verse for the letter ע. This problem is usually solved by emending the text of v 28c, following the Septuagint, to read עולים נשמדו and the verse is separated into two thus recovering the missing ע verse.[45] We will argue that, like the missing verses of the previous acrostics, the omission of the ע verse here ties into and guides the reader towards this psalm's essential message.


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The acrostic of Psalm 37 is problematic in yet another aspect. This acrostic, like Psalms 9/10, only utilizes the first letter of every other verse. In other words, for each letter of the alphabet we find a primary verse, which begins with that letter, followed by a second attached verse which can begin with any letter. Curiously, however, the letters ד, כ, and ק each have only one primary verse and are lacking any attached verses. Even more curious is v 29 which follows the primary and attached verses for the letter ס. This verse is out of place, not connected to any letter of the alphabet, but at the same time just happens to occur right where we expect the ע verse. It seems that this verse is a kind of substitute for the primary ע verse even though it begins with the wrong letter. For convenience, we shall refer to verse 29 as the ע verse.

As a first hint to the deliberate nature of the omission of ע, one notices that the ע verse, which should have begun with the letter ע, instead concludes with a word that begins with the letter ע - עליה. In itself, this would not be very significant since ע is quite common in this psalm (as we will soon demonstrate). More significantly, though, the two words that immediately follow עליה at the beginning of the next verse (v 30) are פי צדיק. The initial letters of these three words form an alphabetic sequence עליה **פי צדיק** mimicking the acrostic structure of the psalm. This is the only case in Psalms where three successive words begin with the alphabetic sequence עפצ.[46] An alphabetic sequence of words that begins with ע appears only here, right at the end of a verse we expect to begin with ע. Furthermore, the word that appears at the beginning of v 29, צדיקים, also ends the alphabetic sequence in the singular form, צדיק. The word צדיק occurs ten times in this psalm and is clearly an important part of this psalm's message.

The hypothesis that the ע is purposely skipped only raises more questions. Why omit specifically that letter? Why is it replaced by the word צדיקים? Is it coincidental that the word צדיק also closes the עפצ sequence

In order to provide answers to these questions it is first necessary to point out some of the obvious structural aspects of the Psalm. The three letters with no attached verses, ד, כ, and ק, are placed at strategic points: ד is the fourth letter from the beginning and ק is the fourth letter from the end.[47] כ is the eleventh letter of the alphabet and, since the ע is missing, it is now the center of the remaining twenty-one letters.[48] If we take these verses as section breaks then the psalm can be broken into symmetrical parts. The first three letters א, ב, and ג correspond to the last three, ר, ש, and ת. The anomalous breaking verse ד parallels the anomalous ק. And the letters between ד and ק are split in half by כ leaving six letters on each side. We thus find a chiastic structure based on the number of acrostic letters in each section: 3-1-6-1-6-1-3.

| | |
|---|---|
| A – אבג | (two verses per letter) |
| B – ד | (one verse) |
| C – הוזחטי | (two verses per letter) |
| D – כ | (one verse) |
| C' – למנספצ | (two verses per letter) |
| B' – ק | (one verse) |
| A' – רשת | (two verses per letter) |

Analyzing word counts reveals another layer of the chiasm. The first and third single verse letters, ד and ק, have the same number of words. In other words, B and B' of the chiasmus contain 11 words each. This prompts us to analyze whether we also find equivalences in word counts of other parallel sections. Section A contains 42 words[49]


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while A’ contains 41 words. While these are not exactly equal they still create a clear balance. C contains 88 words. C’ contains 94 words; but, if we omit the anomalous ע verse, so that C and C' both contain 6 primary and attached verses, the total number of words in C’ becomes 88 words as well.

A – 42 words for 3 letters
B – 11 words for 1 letter
C – 88 words for 6 letters
D – 10 words for 1 letter
C’ – 88 words for 6 letters
B’ – 11 words for 1 letter
A’ – 41 words for 3 letters

The fact that the word counts line up so well without the ע verse indicates that this verse is simply out of place. Further proof that the six words of the ע verse should be excluded from the word count of C’ comes with the realization that the number 88 appears again when counting the words of the primary and attached verses of C and C’ separately. The word counts of the primary verses of C (8-8-6-11-6-7) adds up to 46. The word counts of the primary verses of C’ (7-6-11-6-7-5) adds up to 42. Together, all of the primary verses in C and C’ contain 88 words. Similarly, as it must work out, the word counts of the attached verses of C (8+7+8+5+7+7 = 42) and C’ (6+8+6+13+6+7 = 46) also add up to 88. See Table 8.


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| | Attached Word Count | Primary Word Count | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Letter | Verse |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A 42 Words | | 7 | | | | | | | עולה | בעשי | תקנא | אל | במרעים | תתחר | אל | א | 1 |
| | 7 | | | | | | | | יבולון | דשא | וכירק | ימלו | מהרה | כחציר | כי | | 2 |
| | | 8 | | | | | | אמונה | ורעה | ארץ | שכן | טוב | ועשה | ב*הוה | בטח | ב | 3 |
| | 7 | | | | | | | | לבך | משאלת | לך | ויתן | *הוה | על | והתענג | | 4 |
| | | 8 | | | | | | | יעשה | והוא | עליו | ודרכך | *הוה | על | גול | ג | 5 |
| | 5 | | | | | | | | | | כצהרים | ומשפטך | צדקך | כאור | והוציא | | 6 |
| Total | 19 | 23 | 42 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| B | 11 Words | | | | מזמות | עשה | באיש | דרכו | במצליח | תתחר | אל | לו | והתחולל | ל*הוה | דום | ד | 7 |
| C 88 Words | | 8 | | | | | | להרע | אך | תתחר | אל | חמה | ועזב | מאף | הרף | ה | 8 |
| | 8 | | | | | | | ארץ | יירשו | המה | *הוה | וקוי | יכרתון | מרעים | כי | | 9 |
| | | 8 | | | | | | ואיננו | מקומו | על | והתבוננת | רשע | ואין | מעט | ועוד | ו | 10 |
| | 7 | | | | | | | | שלום | רב | על | והתענגו | ארץ | יירשו | וענוים | | 11 |
| | | 6 | | | | | | | | שניו | עליו | וחרק | לצדיק | רשע | זמם | ז | 12 |
| | 8 | | | | | | | יומו | יבא | כי | ראה | כי | לו | ישחק | *דני | | 13 |
| | | 11 | | | דרך | ישרי | לטבוח | ואביון | עני | להפיל | קשתם | ודרכו | רשעים | פתחו | חרב | ח | 14 |
| | 5 | | | | | | | | | | תשברנה | וקשתותם | בלבם | תבוא | חרבם | | 15 |
| | | 6 | | | | | | | | רבים | רשעים | מהמון | לצדיק | מעט | טוב | ט | 16 |
| | 7 | | | | | | | | *הוה | צדיקים | תשברנה | וסומך | רשעים | זרועות | כי | | 17 |
| | | 7 | | | | | | | תהיה | לעולם | ונחלתם | תמימם | ימי | *הוה | יודע | י | 18 |
| | 7 | | | | | | | | ישבעו | רעבון | ובימי | רעה | בעת | יבשו | לא | | 19 |
| Sub Total | 42 | + 46 | = 88 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| D | 10 Words | | | | | כלו | בעשן | כלו | כרים | כיקר | *הוה | ואיבי | יאבדו | רשעים | כי | כ | 20 |
| C' 88 Words (+6 in y verse) | | 7 | | | | | | | ונותן | חונן | וצדיק | ישלם | ולא | רשע | לוה | ל | 21 |
| | 6 | | | | | | | | | יכרתו | ומקלליו | ארץ | יירשו | מברכיו | כי | | 22 |
| | | 6 | | | | | | | | יחפץ | כוננו | ודרכו | גבר | מצעדי | מ*הוה | מ | 23 |
| | 8 | | | | | | | ידו | סומך | *הוה | כי | יוטל | לא | יפל | כי | | 24 |
| | | 11 | | | לחם | מבקש | וזרעו | נעזב | צדיק | ראיתי | ולא | זקנתי | גם | הייתי | נער | נ | 25 |
| | 6 | | | | | | | | | לברכה | וזרעו | ומלוה | חונן | היום | כל | | 26 |
| | | 6 | | | | | | | | לעולם | ושכן | טוב | ועשה | מרע | סור | ס | 27 |
| | 13 | | נכרת | רשעים | וזרע | נשמרו | לעולם | חסידיו | את | יעזב | ולא | משפט | אהב | *הוה | כי | | 28 |
| | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | | עליה | לעד | וישכנו | ארץ | יירשו | צדיקים | ע | 29 |
| | | 7 | | | | | | | משפט | תדבר | ולשונו | חכמה | יהגה | צדיק | פי | פ | 30 |
| | 6 | | | | | | | | | אשריו | תמעד | לא | בלבו | אלה*ו | תורת | | 31 |
| | | 5 | | | | | | | | | להמיתו | ומבקש | לצדיק | רשע | צופה | צ | 32 |
| | 7 | | | | | | | | בהשפטו | ירשיענו | ולא | בידו | יעזבנו | לא | *הוה | | 33 |
| Sub Total | 46 | + 42 | = 88 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Grand Total | 88 | 88 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| B' | 11 Words | | | | תראה | רשעים | בהכרת | ארץ | לרשת | וירוממך | דרכו | ושמר | *הוה | אל | קוה | ק | 34 |
| A' 41 Words | | 6 | | | | | | | | רענן | כאזרח | ומתערה | עריץ | רשע | ראיתי | ר | 35 |
| | 6 | | | | | | | | | נמצא | ולא | ואבקשהו | איננו | והנה | ויעבר | | 36 |
| | | 8 | | | | | | שלום | לאיש | אחרית | כי | ישר | וראה | תם | שמר | ש | 37 |
| | 6 | | | | | | | | | נכרתה | רשעים | אחרית | יחדו | נשמדו | ופשעים | | 38 |
| | | 6 | | | | | | | | צרה | בעת | מעוז | מ*הוה | צדיקים | ותשועת | ת | 39 |
| | 9 | | | | | | בו | חסו | כי | ויושיעם | מרשעים | יפלטם | ויפלטם | *הוה | ויעזרם | | 40 |
| Total | 21 | 20 | 41 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

**Table 8 – Structure Based on 8[50]**

The most dominant number in the above structure is the number 8 since 88, a doubled and amplified version of 8, appears four times within the word counts of C and C'. Closer analysis of the word counts reveals an overlapping chiasmus on top of the one just presented but this time revolving around the number 7. The primary verse word counts of the last four of the six letters in section C are 6-11-6-7; and the primary verse word counts of the first four of the six letters in section C' are 7-6-11-6. In other words, the word counts of the primary verses from the letters ז to ס form an inclusio around the


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letter כ verse: 6-11-6-7 –10- 7-6-11-6. The word count of this primary verse inclusio, counting only primary verses from ז to ס is 70. See Table 9.

| | Word Count | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Letter | Verse |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | 6 | | | | | | | | שניו | עליו | וחרק | לצדיק | רשע | זמם | ז | 12 |
| B | 11 | | | דרך | ישרי | לטבוח | ואביון | עני | להפיל | קשתם | ודרכו | רשעים | פתחו | חרב | ח | 14 |
| C | 6 | | | | | | | | רבים | רשעים | מהמון | לצדיק | מעט | טוב | ט | 16 |
| D | 7 | | | | | | | תהיה | לעולם | ונחלתם | תמימם | ימי | *הוה | יודע | י | 18 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| E | 10 | | | | כלו | בעשן | כלו | כרים | כיקר | *הוה | ואיבי | יאבדו | רשעים | כי | כ | 20 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| D | 7 | | | | | | | ונותן | חונן | וצדיק | ישלם | ולא | רשע | לוה | ל | 21 |
| C | 6 | | | | | | | | יחפץ | ודרכו | כוננו | גבר | מצעדי | מ*הוה | מ | 23 |
| B | 11 | | | לחם | מבקש | וזרעו | נעזב | צדיק | ראיתי | ולא | זקנתי | גם | הייתי | נער | נ | 25 |
| A | 6 | | | | | | | | לעולם | ושכן | טוב | ועשה | מרע | סור | ס | 27 |
| | 70 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

**Table 9**

If we then count all of the words in the attached verses for letters ז to ס, including v 20 since כ has no other attached verse, we also get 70. See Table 10. Note once again that this count excludes the ע verse proving that it is not a second auxiliary verse for ס but rather its own entity.

| Word Count | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Letter | Verse |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | | | | | | יומו | יבא | כי | ראה | כי | לו | ישחק | *דני | | 13 |
| 5 | | | | | | | | | תשברנה | וקשתותם | בלבם | תבוא | חרבם | | 15 |
| 7 | | | | | | | *הוה | צדיקים | וסומך | תשברנה | רשעים | זרועות | כי | | 17 |
| 7 | | | | | | | ישבעו | רשעון | ובימי | רעה | בעת | יבשו | לא | | 19 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 | | | | כלו | בעשן | כלו | כרים | כיקר | *הוה | ואיבי | יאבדו | רשעים | כי | כ | 20 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | | | | | | | | יכרתו | ומקלליו | ארץ | יירשו | מברכיו | כי | | 22 |
| 8 | | | | | | | ידו | סומך | *הוה | כי | יוטל | לא | יפל | כי | | 24 |
| 6 | | | | | | | | | לברכה | וזרעו | ומלוה | חונן | היום | כל | | 26 |
| 13 | נכרת | רשעים | וזרע | נשמרו | לעולם | חסידיו | את | יעזב | ולא | משפט | אהב | *הוה | כי | | 28 |
| 70 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

**Table 10**

Verses 11 and 29, the two verses immediately surrounding the primary verse inclusio, share the same key phrase יירשו ארץ and ענוים/צדיקים and therefore form literary bookends to the overlapping chiasmus. This phrase summarizes the main point of the entire psalm that righteousness will eventually prevail over evil. Even though the words יירשו ארץ appear three other times - in vv 9, 22, and the infinitive form in v 34 - in those cases the phrase does not begin the verse. Those verses have a common phrase – evil will be cut off - not found in verses 11 and 29 which both continue with "and delight in abundant well-being" or "and abide forever in it." Furthermore, the words ענוים and צדיקים are more similar to each other in meaning than to קוי ה' or מברכיו. More importantly, the


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placement of verses 11 and 29 directly on each side of the chiasmus indicates that they are also part of and extend the chiasmus.

These two verses, the attached ו verse and the ע verse, complement each other in yet another way. Verse 11 begins with the letter ו (as does its primary verse 10). After the initial ו, the second letter of v. 11 - the literary counterpart of the ע verse – is an ע (ועונים). The fact that an initial ו can sometimes be ignored may be seen from v 39, where the text reads ותשועת instead of the expected תשועת.[51]

To extend this overlapping number 7 chiasm to cover the entire psalm, we notice that the number of words before and after the literary bookends is the same. The word count of verses 1 to 10, excluding the superscripture, is 77. The word count of the verses after verse 29 is also 77. See Table 11.

| Cumulative Count | Attached Count | Primary Count | Word Count | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Letter | Verse |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | לדוד | | |
| 7 | | | 7 | | | | | | | עולה | בעשי | תקנא | אל | במרעים | תתחר | אל | | א | 1 |
| 14 | | | 7 | | | | | | | יבולון | דשא | וכירק | ימלו | מהרה | כחציר | כי | | | 2 |
| 22 | | | 8 | | | | | | אמונה | ורעה | ארץ | שכן | טוב | ועשה | ב*הוה | בטח | | ב | 3 |
| 29 | | | 7 | | | | | | | לבד | משאלת | לך | ויתן | *הוה | על | והתענג | | | 4 |
| 37 | | | 8 | | | | | | יעשה | והוא | עליו | ובטח | דרכך | *הוה | על | גול | | ג | 5 |
| 42 | | | 5 | | | | | | | | | כצהרים | ומשפטך | צדקך | כאור | והוציא | | | 6 |
| 53 | | | 11 | | | מזמות | עשה | באיש | דרכו | במצליח | תתחר | אל | לו | והתחולל | ל*הוה | דום | | ד | 7 |
| 61 | | | 8 | | | | | | להרע | אך | תתחר | אל | חמה | ועזב | מאף | הרף | | ה | 8 |
| 69 | | | 8 | | | | | | ארץ | יירשו | המה | *הוה | וקוי | יכרתון | מרעים | כי | | | 9 |
| 77 | | | 8 | | | | | | ואינגו | מקומו | על | והתבוננת | רשע | ואין | מעט | ועוד | | ו | 10 |
| | | | | | | | | | | שלום | רב | על | והתענגו | ארץ | יירשו | וענוים | | | 11 |
| | | 6 | 6 | | | | | | | | שניו | עליו | וחרק | לצדיק | רשע | זמם | | ז | 12 |
| | 8 | | 8 | | | | | | יומו | יבא | כי | ראה | כי | לו | ישחק | *יני | | | 13 |
| | | 11 | 11 | | | דרך | ישרי | לטבוח | ואביון | עני | להפיל | קשתם | ודרכו | רשעים | פתחו | חרב | | ח | 14 |
| | 5 | | 5 | | | | | | | | | תשברנה | וקשתותם | בלבם | תבוא | חרבם | | | 15 |
| | | 6 | 6 | | | | | | | | רבים | רשעים | מהמון | לצדיק | מעט | טוב | | ט | 16 |
| | 7 | | 7 | | | | | | | | צדיקים | וסומך | תשברנה | רשעים | זרועות | כי | | | 17 |
| | | 7 | 7 | | | | | | | | לעולם | תמימם | ונחלתם | ימי | *הוה | יודע | | י | 18 |
| | 7 | | 7 | | | | | | | | רעבון | ובימי | רעה | בעת | יבשו | לא | | | 19 |
| | 10 | 10 | 10 | | | | כלו | בעשן | כלו | כרים | כיקר | *הוה | ואיבי | יאבדו | רשעים | כי | | כ | 20 |
| | | 7 | 7 | | | | | | | ונותן | חונן | וצדיק | ישלם | ולא | רשע | לוה | | ל | 21 |
| | 6 | | 6 | | | | | | | | יכרתו | ומקלליו | ארץ | יירשו | מברכיו | כי | | | 22 |
| | | 6 | 6 | | | | | | | | יחפץ | ודרכו | כוננו | גבר | מצעדי | מ*הוה | | מ | 23 |
| | 8 | | 8 | | | | | | ידו | סומך | *הוה | כי | יוטל | לא | יפל | כי | | | 24 |
| | | 11 | 11 | | | לחם | מבקש | וזרעו | נעזב | צדיק | ראיתי | ולא | זקנתי | גם | הייתי | נער | | נ | 25 |
| | 6 | | 6 | | | | | | | | לברכה | וזרעו | ומלוה | חונן | היום | כל | | | 26 |
| | | 6 | 6 | | | | | | | | לעולם | ושכן | טוב | ועשה | מרע | סור | | ס | 27 |
| | 13 | | 13 | נכרת | רשעים | וזרע | נשמרו | לעולם | חסידיו | את | יעזב | ולא | משפט | אהב | *הוה | כי | | | 28 |
| | 70 | 70 | | | | | | | | | עליה | לעד | וישכנו | ארץ | יירשו | צדיקים | | ע | 29 |
| 77 | | | 7 | | | | | | | משפט | תדבר | ולשונו | חכמה | יהגה | צדיק | פי | | פ | 30 |
| 70 | | | 6 | | | | | | | | אשריו | תמעד | לא | בלבו | אלה*ו | תורת | | | 31 |
| 64 | | | 5 | | | | | | | | | להמיתו | ומבקש | לצדיק | רשע | צופה | | צ | 32 |
| 59 | | | 7 | | | | | | | בהשפטו | ירשיענו | ולא | בידו | יעזבנו | לא | *הוה | | | 33 |
| 52 | | | 11 | | | תראה | רשעים | בהכרת | ארץ | לרשת | וירוממך | דרכו | ושמר | *הוה | אל | קוה | | ק | 34 |
| 41 | | | 6 | | | | | | | | רענן | כאזרח | ומתערה | עריץ | רשע | ראיתי | | ר | 35 |
| 35 | | | 6 | | | | | | | | נמצא | ולא | ואבקשהו | אינגו | והנה | ויעבר | | | 36 |
| 29 | | | 8 | | | | | | שלום | לאיש | אחרית | כי | ישר | וראה | תם | שמר | | ש | 37 |
| 21 | | | 6 | | | | | | | | נכרתה | רשעים | אחרית | יחדו | נשמדו | ופשעים | | | 38 |
| 15 | | | 6 | | | | | | | | צרה | בעת | מעוזם | מ*הוה | צדיקים | ותשועת | | ת | 39 |
| 9 | | | 9 | | | | | בו | חסו | כי | ויושיעם | מרשעים | יפלטם | ויפלטם | *הוה | ויעזרם | | | 40 |

**Table 11 – Structure Based on 7**

To review, we find that the psalm can be broken down in two different ways. If we focus on the three letters which have only a single verse and count the words between


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those verses we come up with a structure based on the number eight. If, however, we focus on the number of words in each primary verse surrounding the center verse we find a chiasm which extends four letters in each direction. By taking the two verses immediately surrounding this chiasm as break points, we come up with another structure where the word counts in each section converge on the number seven.

Having broken down the structure of the psalm and found its mathematical qualities, we must now search for the significance of this data. While the number 7 is an important number in the ancient Near East generally, and in the Bible particularly, it seems to have special significance in this psalm considering that the missing letter ע is numerically equivalent to 70. Furthermore, the letter ע within any word appears more frequently in this psalm than is statistically expected when compared to the rest of Psalms or the entire Tanakh.[52] Most strikingly, the letter ע is not only ubiquitous but it actually appears precisely seventy times in this Psalm.[53] The fact that the letter ע and the multiples of seven in the structure are so prominent in this psalm makes it all the more ironic that the ע verse should be missing. While many scholars have written that the missing ע is a mistake and have even attempted to find the lost verse, the exact count of the letter ע in this psalm shows that any anomaly with the letter ע must be intentional. If indeed the ע verse is missing purposefully, we wonder what its significance is. What does ע represent?

We notice that that v 29 which should have begun with the letter ע does not; instead we find the word צדיקים. If we formulate this as a logical equation "not ע = צדיק" then perhaps we can derive from its negation that "ע = רשע." In other words, in the spot where ע=רשע is missing we find righteousness. Keeping in mind that word counts are very significant in this psalm, we further notice that the word רשע appears fourteen times – a multiple of seven.[54] Seven and the letter ע seem to represent evil.

The picture comes together by understanding v 10 as a self-reflective statement about the text of this psalm itself. On its surface this verse is part of the wisdom narrative: "soon, the wicked will be no more." But on a deeper level, it provides an instruction as to how to read the continuation of the psalm. "And in a little while there will be no wicked person, you will analyze (והתבוננת) his place (מקומו) but he will not be there (ואיננו)." Anyone who has reviewed this acrostic, looked for the ע verse, analyzed where it belongs and noticed that it is missing will immediately sympathize with v 10.[55] ע is the place where we expect to find evil but the ע verse is missing.

The prominence of ע and seven throughout the psalm reflects the current, but temporary, state of affairs when the wicked abound – הֲמוֹן רְשָׁעִים רַבִּים.[56] But God knows, and the prophet promises that soon enough they will perish.[57] Not only won't they thrive, but even if you look for them (והתבוננת) where they live and where you would expect to find them (מקומו), they won't be there (ואיננו). The missing ע verse represents the future reality, which includes no safe haven for evil.

Vv 35 and 36, which occur a little after the ע verse, turn from current to retrospective views:

> [35]I saw a wicked man, powerful, well-rooted like a robust native tree.
>
> [36]Suddenly he vanished and was gone; I sought him, but he was not to be found.[58]

Notice how the word רע, backwards or forwards is embedded within almost every word of v 35, not to mention the word רשע itself: רָאִיתִי רָשָׁע עָרִיץ וּמִתְעָרֶה כְּאֶזְרָח רַעֲנָן.[59] The


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wording of this verse poetically echoes its meaning. The letters representing evil – ר, ש, and especially ע - are indeed well-rooted within this verse. If we substitute ע for רשע, we can understand these verses too as self-reflective statements about the entire psalm: "I found ע everywhere deeply entrenched in every word and in the very structure of the Psalm. Then I passed by the ע verse and it was no more – I sought it and it was not to be found." The root כרת is a key word in this psalm occurring in vv 9, 22, 28, 34, and 38.[60] נכרת is the final word of v 28 which is significant because is immediately precedes the ע verse. בהכרת רשעים תראה at the end of v 34 immediately precedes the ר verse.[61] "You will see" in v 34 leads into ראיתי in v 35. Now that the psalmist has seen the wicked disappear, he can testify that he remembers how numerous they once were.

The wicked have been replaced by the צדיקים who will inherit the earth and dwell on it forever (v 29). The ע verse encapsulates the central and most often repeated message of the psalm. The phrase צדיקים יירשו ארץ found in v 29a is paraphrased in verses 9, 11, 22, and 34.[62] Additionally, the words שכן and נחלה in verses 3, 18, and 27 echo v 29b – וישכנו לעד עליה - which functions as a semantic parallel to יירשו ארץ.

29 צדיקים יירשו ארץ **וישכנו לעד עליה**:
9 כי מרעים יכרתון וקוי י-הוה המה יירשו ארץ:
11 וענוים יירשו ארץ והתענגו על רב שלום:
22 כי מברכיו יירשו ארץ ומקלליו יכרתו:
34 קוה אל י-הוה ושמר דרכו וירוממך לרשת ארץ בהכרת רשעים תראה:
3 בטח בי-הוה ועשה טוב **שכן ארץ** ורעה אמונה:
18 יודע י-הוה ימי תמימם **ונחלתם לעולם תהיה**:
27 סור מרע ועשה טוב **ושכן לעולם**:

The ע verse, where we expected a statement about the wicked, instead summarizes the theme of hope. The reader is left in a state of optimism, expecting that soon the righteous will inherit the land forever.

The structure based on seven that covers the psalm represents evil widespread throughout the world. Eight, on the other hand, must represent something different. Eight is found throughout the Bible as the symbolic number representing God's covenant with Israel. Most obviously, circumcision is performed on the eighth day. Other examples of such use of symbolism within ages, population counts, and word counts, have been compiled by Rabbi Moshe Shamah based on the previous research of Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon.[63] The structure based on eight can be understood as the vision of a future world where adherence to the covenant permeates. Only in such a world will God remove the wicked and allow the righteous to inherit the land.[64] The symbolism embedded within the psalm's poetic technique goes hand in hand with its content. The missing letter, the single verses, the word counts, and all the numeric symbols serve to reinforce the central thrust of the substance and meaning of the Psalm.

## 6. Conclusion

Now that we have analyzed each of the four acrostics in book one and seen how they all fit into a single unified system, we can look for parallels across the acrostics. סור מרע ועשה טוב is the ס verse for both Pss 34:15 and 37:27. There are also many connections unique to 9/10 and 37. The letter ד which is missing in Ps 9 is lacking an attached verse in Ps 37. The phrase עת צרה or its plural עתות בצרה occurs only in 9:10, 10:1, 37:39, and nowhere else in Psalms. ולא נמצא in 37:36 fulfills the prediction at 10:15, בל תמצא – "you


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will not find it." This set of four acrostics opens with שמם מחית and אבד זכרם (Ps 9:6-7) and closes on the same theme with the words אחרית רשעים נכרתה (Ps 37:38) thus forming an envelope around the entire structure. The very last words of Ps 37, כי חסו בו connect back to the last words of Ps 34, כל החוסים בו, which in turn relate to Ps 25:20, כי חסיתי בך. Seeking refuge in God is indeed an important theme of the entire acrostic collection.

There are indications from the number counts of and within each Psalm that they are all part of the same structure. The sections defined by the major anomalies of each acrostic are all almost the same size. There are 90 words in the section of seven consecutive missing letters of Ps 10:2-11. There are 89 words in Ps 25:7-17 (the ז verse to the צ verse), which is the section between the missing ו and ק verses. There are 88 words in the corresponding section at Ps 34:7-18 (again the ז verse to the צ verse), even though there is a ק verse in Ps 34. Ps 37 has 88 words in vv 8-19, the section between the first two single verses, and another 88 words in vv 21-33 (excluding v 29), the section between the last two single verses. Therefore, the word counts of the corresponding middle sections of each of the four acrostics form a pattern of 90, 89, 88, 88.[65] We have seen that 90 represents evil in 9/10 and 88 represents the covenant. 89 is not a significant number in itself but may be simply a transition from 90 to 88.

This set of acrostics moves from a state of experiencing the ramifications of evil (9/10), through a process of repentance, learning, and prayer (25), to a state of trust and fear of God (34), and finally ending in vindication that God is true to His covenant (37). The intervening psalms fill in the transition from one state to the next. An understanding of the placement of each of the acrostics in book one of Psalms has lead us to discovery of the system that governs the placement and flow of all of the psalms in book one, the subject of future articles.

The use of acrostics in the first book of Psalms are not simply a memory tool or cute poetic device. Nor has textual corruption damaged the integrity of the psalms' structures. Generations of Massorites have faithfully transmitted a text which they trusted, even if they could not explain it. Thanks to their efforts, we can still recover some of the artistic designs in these acrostics even while we wonder what other aspects we have missed. The acrostics utilize sophisticated literary techniques unparalleled in the ancient Near East[66] and perhaps in any non-prophetic literature. The interpretive strategy presented here, as an alternative to impulsive textual emendations, has helped in explaining the other anomalous acrostics and has shed much light on other psalms which employ word counts and other intricate literary techniques. This article is the first in a series that will attempt to explicate all the acrostics in Psalms and Lamentations. The missing Nun in Ps 145, the reversal of the letters ע and פ in Lam 2, 3, and 4, and the twenty two letters of Lam 5 are all explained as literary techniques using the same system we set out in this paper.

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[1] This work is based on the fundamental principles I learned from my mentor Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon z.l. in our classes and discussions from 1968 to 1985.

[2] See P. C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (WBC 19; Waco: Word Books, 1983), 129.

[3] The Soferim, the forerunners of the Massoretes, were responsible for establishing and transmitting the exact text of the Bible. The Babylonian Talmud explains that they were called Soferim (literally "counters") "because they would count all the letters in the Torah" and other books of the Bible (B.T. Kiddushin 30a). This preoccupation with counting letters, words and verses, which is also found in the Massora, may be part of a forgotten aspect of the Biblical text. This paper will analyze word counts in the


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acrostics in order to show how they fit into their literary structures. This in turn suggests that the efforts of the Scribes and Massoretes succeeded in preserving a complete text.

[4] F. Delitzsch, *Psalms* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1883), I, 222 n. 1, commenting on the apparent omission of letters in the acrostics of Ps 9-10, draws attention to ostensibly incomplete Syriac acrostic hymns. Even though those acrostics are irregular, "both external and internal reasons leave no doubt that we still possess this poem exactly in the form in which it proceeded from Ephraim's pen." Gary Rendsburg, "Confused Language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative" Journal of Hebrew Scriptures, Vol. 2 Article 6 (1999), finds insightful examples of irregular syntax or unclear language used deliberately as a literary device to reflect the mood of the passage. Similarly, we argue that irregularities in the acrostics of Psalms are a literary technique meant to help the reader focus on the messages of these psalms. John F. Brug, "Biblical Acrostics and their Relationship to Other Ancient Near Eastern Acrostics," in *The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature* (1990), 283-304, explains that the retention of the twenty two line form in Lam 5 which has no acrostic "may be a subtle way of stating that the intensity of the poet's grief has exhausted his poetic powers." Brug's attempts to explain some of the anomalies in Psalms acrostics are mostly feeble but he does sense that they are purposeful.

[5] Pss 25, 34, and 145 have only one verse for each letter. Ps 119 has 8 verses for each letter. 111 and 112 have two or three letters represented within each verse.

[6] We do not consider 10:2-11 to be attached verses for ל but rather a substitution of sorts for the six consecutive missing letters from מ to צ since they are located exactly where those missing letters belong and, based on content, they form a unit discussing the thinking of the wicked person. More on this below.

[7] See note 16.

[8] Yellow highlight indicates a primary verse, gray highlight indicates an attached verse. Black highlight indicates letters which are missing (total disruption) or places where an attached verse is lacking (partial disruption).

[9] See H. J. Kraus, *Psalms 1-59* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 29 and P. C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 76-77. The word is multi-functional. When it occurs within a psalm, it acts as a section break. However, when it occurs at the end of a psalm it indicates that the psalm before and after it are connected and should be read together. The word selah ends only three other psalms 3, 24, 46. The סלה at the end of Ps 24 connects it with Ps 25, another acrostic, thus two out of the four Selahs which end a psalm are connected to an acrostic. Pss 24 and 25 are also linked in content since the recurring word שאו of Ps 24:4, 5, 7, 9 occurs in the opening verse of Ps 25 thus continuing the same imagery. Further connections between 24 and 25 and use of סלה are outside the scope of this paper.

[10] חלכאים is counted as one word following the *ketiv*. All hyphenated words count as two such as על-מות in 9:1.

[11] Two more verses in the Bible begin with ג and end with ד: Jer 2:16 and Prov 29:23.

[12] The numerical value of letters does not depend on any external system or *gematria*. Rather, because this is an acrostic and we see the order of the letters, we need only assign a numerical value to each letter based on its placement. The full *gematria* system as used by later Rabbis may not have been in place yet but the coincidence of verse lengths with the alphabetic order of letters beginning the verses shows that the writer is aware of some system of numerical values for letters.

It should be clear that these word counts and those in the continuation of this article are simply one aspect of a sophisticated literary system and have nothing to do with bibliomantic practices of using equidistant letter sequences to predict future events. Such theories have been adequately disproven by Jeffrey Tigay, "The Bible 'Codes': A Textual Perspective," available at http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~jtigay/codetext.html. He correctly argues that there are many differences in word spellings even within MT variants and so any letter counts can not be reliable. This article, however, utilizes only word counts which are much more consistent across MT witnesses. Furthermore, these counts do not say anything about unrelated or future events but rather are shown to be an integral part of the message of the text itself.

[13] This also excludes the final סלה of v 17 which, as we have mentioned above, we take to be nothing more than a section-break marker. As we will argue below, vv. 9-10 makeup for the missing attached verses of the letters ג and ה.

[14] Craige, *Psalms 1-50*, 121-122, attempts to find most of the missing letters by redividing verses and by adding words. Besides being unconvincing, with all that, he is still not successful at finding a מ verse.

[15] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 62.


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[16] The word א-ל in v 12 is a phonetic play on the word אל in v 11. The former comes before the verb saying God forgot, the latter comes after the verb calling on God not to forget.
[17] The YHVH in v 10 is the fourteenth word from the first YHVH in v 8 and also the fourteenth word from the last YHVH in v 11.
[18] Since vv 8-11 all begin with the letter ו, one could break them up differently by assigning v 8 to be the attached verse for ה, v 9 to be an extra verse to make up for the missing ג attachment, v 10 as the primary ו verse, and v 11 as the attached ו verse. However, the very fact that each of these verses begins with the same letter implies that they should be taken together as a unit. Furthermore, as mentioned in the previous note, once we take these four verses as a unit, we find that YHVH is the first, last, and exact middle word of this unit. Rather, we take v 8 to be the primary ו verse, v 9 to be the makeup for the missing ג attachment, v 10 to be the makeup for the missing ה attachment, and v 11 to be the attached ו verse. This breakdown also allows for the 6-9, 7-9, 8-9 pattern described above relating the primary and secondary verses of the letters ו, ז, and ח.
[19] This missing attachment is not restored in this acrostic like the other missing attached verse for ג, ה, and י are. However, Ps 25 has an anomalous two verses for the letter ר. The extra verse there may be making up for the missing verse here.
[20] There is a chiasm over the first five and last five verses of the acrostic. Ps 9 begins with two letters (א, ב) with primary and attached verses followed by one letter (ג) with only a primary verse. Ps 10 ends with one letter (ר) with only a primary verse followed by two letters (ש, ת) with primary and attached.
[21] Black highlight again represents disruption caused by the word רשע. Blue highlight indicates the return of the normal pattern by an invocation of God's name.
[22] Casper Labuschagne, "On the Structural Use of Numbers as a Composition Technique." JNSL 12 (1984), 87-99, argues for the significance of word counts in the Bible. He defines a "numerical composition" as "a literary composition of which the structure is fundamentally governed by certain numbers" (p. 87 and see further literature in n. 1). While he is correct to point out the significance of word counts in general, much of his methodology is flawed. See criticism of Davies and Gunn, "Pentateuchal Patterns: An Examination of C.J. Labushagne's Theory," Vetus Testamentum 34,4 (1984), 399-413. Jacob Bazak, *Numeric Structures in the Psalms* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1999), also finds many examples of significant word counts in Psalms, some of which are valid.
[23] The סלה word may be counted or excluded depending on the context. It is part of the verse and so is included in the verse counts to form the 7-9-9-9-7 chiasm. However, when it comes to counting the section, this סלה is left out because it is only a connecting word. This is unlike the first סלה in 9:17 which was counted. The first סלה occurs in the middle of a psalm and is therefore a separation word used to mark the end of a section. The second סלה occurs at the end of a psalm and is therefore a connecting word used to mark continuation from this psalm to the next, as it is used in other placed in Psalms. This explains why the first סלה ends a section while the second one doesn't and why the first is counted and the second isn't.
[24] This count includes the סלה of 9:21.
[25] This section also contains a five verse chiasm from vv 5 to 9. The two outer verses (5 and 9) contain eleven words each and the middle verses (6-8) contain nine words each.
[26] 130 is a significant symbolic number throughout the bible (see note 63) but is usually broken into 8 + 5. For example, the census of 2 Sam 24:9 counts 800,000 men in Israel and 500,000 men in Judah. Perhaps breaking down 13 in a non-standard way, 9+4, is yet another consequence of evil disrupting the usual pattern.
[27] Gray background indicates words containing one of the letters צ,פ,ע,ס,נ,מ,ד.
[28] All of the verses between the verses which contain the first two occurrences of the word רשע in v 6 and 17, namely vv 7-16, contain 80 words. The number 8 and its multiples represent the covenant between God and Israel. See reference in n. 63. Where the covenant is in effect we don't find any רשע.
[29] It is further interesting that the number nine plays such a prominent role in the ninth psalm. If the placement of this psalm in the ninth position is intentional, this would indicate that the author of this psalm or an editor familiar with the system also had a hand in editing the entire book of Psalms. Psalm 10 contains the ten verse section of missing letters.

The first two words of 10:2 include the first three and last three letters of the alphabet: **בגאות רשע**. This is a hint that the section beginning with these words is missing letters on purpose. The writers knows and is always aware of the alphabet – so its disappearance here is for a good reason. Even the order of these six letters shows a chiasm – the second letter of the alphabet, ב, followed by the third, ג, followed by the


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first, א. After the intervening ו we have the last letter, followed by the third to last followed by the second to last. 231-132. This correlates with the appearance of רשע in the first three verses of this section at the second place in v 2, as the third word of v 3 and the first word of v 4.

We see in many verses of these acrostics that the verse starting with a certain letter also contains that letter many more times. By looking for repeated letters in the section of missing letters, we can see that even though these verses don't begin with the correct letter, they still retain a residue of their correct form. The verse that would be the ע verse, v 8, has ס in במסתרים, then ע in עיניו, then פ in יצפנו. ס comes again in the next verse in במסתר and בסכה. V 9, which would be the פ verse, has פ twice at the end of לחטוף and יחתף and each time followed by ע in עני.

[30] Pointed out by Meir Gruber in *Olam Hatanakh*, *Tehillm I* (Tel Aviv, 1995), 111.

[31] Kraus, *Psalms 1-59,* 319, and Craige, *Psalms 1-50,* 216, suggest adding a ו to אותך of v 5 and to change ראה of v 18 to קשה or קראה thus recovering the missing verses. These emendations are unconvincing. As noted before, it is unlikely that such blatant scribal errors could be made in such a simple alphabetic pattern. Delitzsch, *Psalms*, I, 424, prefers to leave the anomalies as they are and calls attempts to restore them "violent." It is interesting that even though two verses are missing, there is an extra ר verse and an added פ verse at the end so that the total number of verses remains twenty two as it would be in a complete acrostic. The same phenomenon occurs in Ps 34 where one missing verse is made up by an added פ verse for a total of twenty two verses excluding superscripture.

[32] The restoration of order at 9:20 happens with the כ attached verse. Similarly the restoration at 10:16 happens at the ש attached verse. Therefore, the letters כ and ש are not themselves significant since only their attached verses and not their primary verses restore the pattern. Furthermore, only ו and ק restore order after the total disruption of a missing letter.

[33] The psalmist prays "take me out of my distress" – ממצוקותי הוציאני. If we read the word הוציאני as a self-reflective command, it instructs the reader to extract the word for hope from the word for distress.

[34] Note that v 5 is one of two tricola in this psalm (the other is v 8) and קויתי occurs in the last third. The final third of a tricolon is the part that breaks from the usual bicolon meter causing those last few words to stand out. By placing this key word in the last third, perhaps the writer means to call attention to its importance.

[35] The word אשמחה of the prayer in Ps 9:3 is responded to in Ps 34:3, ישמעו ענוים וישמחו.

[36] It only occurs twice more in Psalms (5:12 and 68:4) and only four times in the rest of the Bible.

[37] Already Delitzsch, *Psalms,* 417, noticed the connection between Pss 25 and 34: "At the beginning of the ע,מ and פ-1 strophes they run parallel both in sound and sense, and, after having gone through the alphabet, they both have a concluding strophe, beginning with a פ-2, whose commencement and contents are nearly akin."

[38] NJPS translates 25:12 not as a question but as a statement, "Whoever fears the Lord, he shall be shown what path to choose." However, it does translate 34:13 as a question, "Who is the man who is eager for life, who desires years of good fortune." Considering the close relationship between these two psalms, it is preferable to be consistent and explain both verses as questions.

[39] יראת ה' אלמדכם are exactly the center words of Ps 34, thus testifying to their centrality in the message of the psalm as a didactic statement about how to relate to God.

[40] The motif of tasting in Ps 34:9, טעמו וראו, is also part of a learning process of starting off slowly until one appreciates what is good.

[41] Even though טוב begins the ט verse of many other acrostics (Pss 112:5; 119:65, (66), 68, 71, 72; 145:9; Lam 3:25, 26, 27), the word has special significance in the acrostics of book 1 of Psalms.

[42] These two verses in turn play off of Ps 10:8 – עיניו להלכה יצפנו.

[43] The motif of protecting bones picks up on the ש verse of Ps 10:15, שבר זרוע רשע and is continued in Ps 37:17, כי זרועות רשעים תשברנה. The ש verse of Ps 37:37 also begins שמר just like Ps 34.

[44] The encouragement to pray is found both by looking at the example of the psalmist praying himself, and from his statements directed not to God but toward the reader such as v 8-10 where God is referred to in third person.

[45] See, e.g. Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 403; Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 296; F.L. Hossfeld and E. Zenger, *Psalmen* (Freiberg: Herder, 2000), I, 233; but cf. Delitzsch, *Psalms*, II, 12, who takes לעולם in v. 28c as beginning of the ע verse and argues that "the circumstance that the preposition ל stands before the acrostic letter need not disturb us." Cf. also A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 195, who makes a similar suggestion using MT but nonetheless opts for emending the text.


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[46] In fact, there is only one other occurrence in the entire Tanakh: על פני צורי היעלים (1 Sam 24:3).
[47] Craige, *Psalms 1-50,* 294, splits all three verses into two. This does not fit the syntax of v 20 where he adds the word "too" in order for the sentence fragment, "the Lord's enemies", to make sense.
[48] This verse also contains the center words of the psalm - כיקר כרים כלו בעשן כלו as the first occurrence of the word כלו (149th of the 297 words in the psalm without superscripture) is the center word of the Psalm. With great artistry, the כ sound is repeated alliteratively in the כ verse of the acrostic. The last two letters of v 20, לו, are then repeated at the beginning of v 21 to create a smooth transition.
[49] All word counts exclude superscripture.
[50] The * symbol in all tables is a replacement for the Yod of YHVH. The first words of all primary verses are highlighted in yellow and the first words of all secondary verses are highlighted in gray. V 29 is blocked off because it is not counted. Verses boxed in red mark section breaks because they have no attached verses thus breaking the primary-attached pattern.
[51] Noted by both Delitzsch, II, 12, and Kirkpatrick, 195.
[52] The ע is approximately 3.74% of the letters in Tanakh, 3.93% of the letters in Psalms and 5.75% of the letters in Ps 37. This is one of the highest rankings in Psalms. Those with higher ranking are smaller in size and therefore less statistically important.
[53] Exactly eight verses have no occurrence of the letter ע.
[54] In vv 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 20, 21, 28, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38, and 40. רשע appears more times in this psalm than in any other psalm.
[55] It is appropriate that v 10 should refer to v 29 since they are literary counterparts. ע is the sixteenth letter of the alphabet and so the ע verse would have been the sixteenth primary verse had it existed. The letter ו verse is the appropriate letter to correspond to the letter ע verse as it is the sixteenth primary verse from the end. (The idea of corresponding letters is similar to the *Atbash* system used in Jer 25:26, 51:41 where ששך represents בבל.) Furthermore, the second letter of v 10 is an ע (וע**ַ**נוים) as is the second letter of v 11, its secondary verse (as noted above on p 6). There are only eight verses in the psalm that begin with a ו and only in vv 10 and 11 does an ע follow the initial ו. The counterparts of the ע verse are two consecutive verses that (ignoring the ו) begin with ע. So, in a sense, the missing ע verse can be found hiding behind the ו verse.
Only two others letters in this acrostic begin both the primary and attached verses. Vv 10 and 11 both begin with וע and vv 14 and 15 both begin with ח. Taking the ו verse as the counterpart to ע we see that repetition only occurs at the letters representing 70 and 8. Once again, 7 and 8 are the two key numbers of the psalm.
[56] Translating not as "better the little that the righteous man has than the great abundance of the wicked," like NJPS, but as "better a few righteous people than a multitude of many wicked people." This verse may thus be another self-reference to the words צדיק, which appears ten times, and רשע, which appears fourteen times. Even though רשע appears more times, צדיק is still better.
[57] V 10, which states this promise most prominently, is seven words long, begins at the seventieth word and ends with the seventy-seventh. It is precisely when completely surrounded by sevens that the psalmist offers the promise that soon, they will disappear.
[58] NJPS translation.
[59] One could also add רא of ראיתי and רח of כאזרח as phonetically close equivalents. Even the vowels under each of these pairs of letters is either a *kamatz* or *patah* making the וע resonance even clearer. Also, just as in the כ verse, the acrostic letter ר at the beginning of this verse repeats alliteratively throughout the rest of the verse. This phenomenon occurs in many other verses of the psalm to a greater or lesser extent. Particularly interesting is v 14 where the verb פתחו is used in an unusual way to refer to drawing a sword instead of the expected שלפו, probably to add an alliteration of the ח – חרב פתחו.
[60] It is also found in Ps 34:17.
[61] This verse begins with קוה and follows up on v 9 which also has וקוי as well as יכרתון. This קוה fills in the missing ק verse of Ps 25 where the word קוה was only hinted to in the last four letters of מצוקותי in 25:17.
[62] See also ישעיה 21:60 ועמך כלם צדיקים לעולם יירשו ארץ. The phrase is also in 25:13 – וזרעו יירש ארץ as part of the description of he who fears God.
[63] See http://www.judaic.org/general/vezot2_number_symbolism.pdf.
[64] This would also explain why exactly eight verses have no occurrence of ע. No evil resides where the covenant is intact.
[65] There are other correspondences between word counts across the acrostics. There are 130 words in first two sections of Ps 9:1-17 and the middle section of Ps 37:12-28 is also 130 words. Ps 37 has 77 words


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before the breakpoint at v 11 and another 77 words after the breakpoint at v 29. There are 38 words before the missing ו verse in Ps 25 (vv 1-5) and there are 32 words after the missing ק verse (vv 18-22) for a total of 70 words surrounding the center section of 89 words. There are 41 words before the missing ו verse in Ps 34 (vv 1-5) and 36 words from the ק verse to the end (vv 19-23) for a total of 77 words surrounding the center section of 88 words.

[66] For a discussion of acrostics in ancient Near Eastern literature see John F. Brug, "Biblical Acrostics and Their Relationship to Other Ancient Near Eastern Acrostics."


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