

Psalm 110— Logotechnical Analysis

Guidelines

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

Specific features of Psalm 110

- The psalm has a very lucid structure. However, there are some matters, plain in themselves, which some scholars have found perplexing, and this blurred their understanding of it. Close reading reveals that the poem reflects six crucial elements of a formulary for the inaugural ceremony of the king:
 - the designation by YHWH: the king is invited to sit at *YHWH's right hand* (v. 1)
 - the presentation of the sceptre (v. 2)
 - the acclamation by the people: the king is assured of their allegiance (v. 3)
 - the solemn proclamation of the inaugural words (v. 4)
 - the farewell address to reassure the king that YHWH is at *his right hand* (vs. 5-6)
 - the sacramental act performed by the king: drinking water from the stream (v. 7).
- YHWH's personal participation in the ceremony is underscored in the text by the ingenious use of the name YHWH exclusively in connection with the three oracles, and by the use of exactly **17** words to phrase the oracles.
- The **7** Masoretic verses can be outlined in a menorah pattern, with v. 4 at the centre.
- In terms of content, certain features of Psalm 110 are reminiscent of Psalms 46 and 91.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 1, 2-3 || 4-5, 6-7 (2 cantos with 4 strophes, 8 verselines and 18 cola).
- Fokkelman: 1, 2-3, 4-5a, 5b-7 (4 strophes with 9 verselines and 20 cola).
- Labuschagne: 1-2, 3-4 || 5-6, 7 (2 cantos with 4 strophes, 8 verselines and 18 cola).

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words spoken to the king about God; **d**: words spoken by YHWH.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

			Total	a	b	c	d
1		לְדָוִד מִזְמוֹר	2	= 2	+ 0		
		נָאִם יְהוָה לְאֹדְנִי	1	3	3	3	
	Oracle 1	יָשָׁב לְיְמִינֵי	2	2			2
		עַד־אֲשֵׁית אֵיבֶיךָ	2	3	3		3
		תָּדַם לְרַגְלֶיךָ:	2		2		2
		Total, v. 1	10	= 5	+ 5	= 3	+ 7
2		מִטְּשֵׁה־עֵזָךְ יִשְׁלַח מַצִּיּוֹן	3	5	5	5	
	Oracle 2	יְרֵדָה בְּקֶרֶב אֵיבֶיךָ:	3	3	3		3
		Total, v. 2	8	= 5	+ 3	= 5	+ 3
	Strophe 1	Total, v. 1-2	18	= 10	+ 8	= 8	+ 10

3	Middle 6 cola: $(18 = 6 + 6 + 6)$	עֲמֹד נֹדֶבֶת בְּיוֹם חִילָּךְ בְּהַדְרֵי־קֹדֶשׁ מִרְחֹם מְשַׁחֲרֵה לְךָ טַל יִלְדָּתִיךָ : middle verselines $(8 = 3 + 2 + 3)$	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
4	Middle word: $(31+1+31)$	וְשָׁבַע יְהוָה וְלֹא יִנָּחֵם אֶת־הַכֹּהֵן לְעוֹלָם עַל־דְּבַרְתִּי מִלְּפִי־צֶדֶק : Total, v. 4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4
	Strophe 2	Total, v. 3-4		11	= 8	+ 3	= 11	+ 0	
	Canto I	Total, v. 1-4		22	= 15	+ 7	= 15	+ 7	
				40	= 25	+ 15	= 23	+ 17	
5		אֲדַנִּי עַל־יְמִינֶךָ מִחֵץ בְּיוֹם־אֲפֹ מִלְּכִים : Total, v. 5	6	3	3	3	3	3	3
6		יִדִּין בְּגוֹיִם מְלֵא גִּיּוֹתָ מִחֵץ רֹאשׁ עַל־אֶרֶץ רַבָּה : Total, v. 6	7	4	4	4	4	4	4
	Strophe 3	Total, v. 5-6		7	= 3	+ 4	= 7	+ 0	
		Total, v. 1-6		16	= 7	+ 9	= 16	+ 0	
				56	= 32	+ 24	= 39	+ 17	
7		מִנְחַל בְּדָרְךָ יִשְׁתָּהָ עַל־כֵּן יָרִים רֹאשׁ : Total, v. 7	8	3	3	3	3	3	3
	Strophe 4	Total, v. 7		7	= 3	+ 4	= 7	+ 0	
	Canto II	Total, v. 5-7		23	= 10	+ 13	= 23	+ 0	
		Total, v. 4-7		34	= 17	+ 17	= 27	+ 7	
		Total, v. 2-7		53	= 30	+ 23	= 39	+ 14	
		Total, v. 1-7		63	= 35	+ 28	= 46	+ 17	
		With the heading, v. 1-7		65	= 37	+ 28			

Observations

- The middle word, **וְלֹא**, 'and not', in v. 4a, cannot qualify for meaningful centre, which is to be found on verseline level, vs. 3-4, the two central verselines $(8 = 3 + 2 + 3)$, coinciding with the six middle cola $(18 = 6 + 6 + 6)$:

עֲמֹד נֹדֶבֶת בְּיוֹם חִילָּךְ בְּהַדְרֵי־קֹדֶשׁ מִרְחֹם מְשַׁחֲרֵה לְךָ טַל יִלְדָּתִיךָ :
וְשָׁבַע יְהוָה וְלֹא יִנָּחֵם אֶת־הַכֹּהֵן לְעוֹלָם עַל־דְּבַרְתִּי מִלְּפִי־צֶדֶק :

Your people will participate when you take up arms; in holy splendour, born of the dawn;
to you will be the dew of your youth.

YHWH has sworn an oath and will not change his mind: you are a priest for ever //
after the order of Melchizedek.

The meaningful centre stands out, not solely by the fact that it contains the two middle verselines, the 4 middle cola and the only two *tricola* in the entire poem, but also in terms of content, constituting the heart of the psalm: the climax of the inaugural ceremony.

Additionally, the meaningful centre is made up of **22** words, with **11** in v. 3 and **11** in v. 4, the number of fulfilment, symbolizing the realization of the successful reign of the king.

The seven Masoretic verses can be outlined in a menorah pattern, with v. 4 at the centre, as proposed by Christensen (vs. 1, 2, 3, **4**, 5, 6, 7). This menorah structure is legitimate in so far as it does not disturb the natural caesurae in the text. However, it is very unlikely that the author intended a menorah pattern with a meaningful centre differing from the one above. See my critical remarks about the prerequisites for a genuine menorah in Observation 4 in my Analysis of [Psalm 105](#).

2. The key to understanding the structure of Psalm 110 lies in having a clear view of the ceremony involved, which is, in my view, the swearing in of an Israelite king. In fact, what makes the poem special is that it contains all crucial elements of the formulary for the inaugural ceremony of a new king. These elements determine its basic structure.

In the first part of the ceremony, the solemn proclamation of the inaugural oracles, the priest/prophet formally addresses the king on behalf of YHWH, who actively officiates in connection with the three oracles (vs. 1b-d, 2b and 4bc). The priest/prophet pronounces the introductory words and proclaims the oracles (1-4).

In order to emphasize YHWH's personal involvement, the speaker deliberately uses the name YHWH in each of the introductory statements (in vs. 1a, 2a and 4a). Having reserved the holy name for this purpose, he refrains from using it again further on in the second part of the ceremony. Therefore, in his final address to the king (vs. 5-6), the poet purposely uses the designation *Adonay*, 'my Lord', instead of YHWH (v. 5a). At the same time, in doing so, he refers back to the word *Adonî*, 'my lord' (the king) in v. 1a.

As Van der Lugt has remarked (*Cantos and Strophes in Biblical Hebrew Poetry*, III), there is a very close relationship between God and the king and the use of the same designation for both is one of the ways to express their intimate relationship.

In terms of content and what has been said above, I find a major caesura between vs. 4 and 5, which divides the psalm into the following two cantos:

Canto I	vs. 1-4	the inaugural ceremony: the king is solemnly sworn in
Canto II	vs. 5-7	the post-inaugural address and the departure of the king.

The two cantos are additionally defined by the strong anaphora '*right hand*' at the beginning of the first oracle (v. 1b) and at the beginning of the farewell address (v. 5a).

On rhetorical grounds Van der Lugt divides the text into 1-3 (Canto I) and 4-7 (Canto II), assuming a caesura between vs. 3 and 4. This means that the strong meaningful centre, vs. 3-4, is not taken seriously as a deliberately designed unity, despite the fact that it is strongly underscored by being made up of exactly **22** words. This is one of the instances, in my opinion, where the supposed framework of a text based on rhetorical considerations should not prevail over the structure arising from the content and other formal considerations.

3. Having delimited the two cantos, we can now divide the text in more detail in terms of the strophic structure:

Strophe 1a (v. 1)	Proclamation of the first oracle : be seated <u>at YHWH's right hand</u>
Strophe 1b (v. 2)	The sceptre ceremony: proclamation of the second oracle
Strophe 2a (v. 3)	The king is assured of the people's homage and allegiance
Strophe 2b (v. 4)	The solemn inauguration: proclamation of the third oracle
Strophe 3 (vs. 5-6)	The farewell address: Adonay, the Warrior, is <u>at your right hand</u>
Strophe 4 (v. 7)	The king departs to drink water from the stream, undauntedly.

In my judgement, v. 3 stands apart from the preceding 3-word oracle dealing with the sceptre ceremony (v. 2b). The statement about the allegiance of the people (v. 3) clearly leads up to the climax of the inauguration: the proclamation of the third oracle (v. 4). In fact, the acclamation by the people is a prerequisite for the inauguration. Therefore, v. 3 is intimately connected to v. 4, together with which it constitutes the meaningful centre.

Most significantly, the three oracles have altogether exactly **17** words (Column d), symbolically representing YHWH's presence and emphasizing in still another way his personal participation in the first part of the ceremony.

The poem is in many respects reminiscent of Psalm 91, which is also particularly concerned with the security of the king and his *personal* safety in time of war. See Observations 2-4 in my Analysis of [Psalm 91](#) and also compare Observation 1 in my

Analysis of Psalm 140. Likewise, here in Psalm 110, the military aspects of the inaugural ceremony are of paramount importance. This is demonstrated by:

- YHWH's pledge to the king: "I shall make your enemies your footstool" (v. 1)
- the sceptre ceremony and the command to reign over his enemies (v. 2)
- the homage paid by the people and their allegiance in time of war (v. 3)
- the farewell address to assure the king that YHWH will fight his wars (vs. 5-6)
- last but not least, the *personal* safety of the king when he sets out for battle (v. 7).

The notion of *security* is subtly expressed in the 7-word farewell statement in v. 7:

"he will drink from the stream on his way; for that reason he holds his head high".

These words primarily relate to a sacramental act (H.-J. Kraus in *Biblischer Kommentar*, 1959) concluding the inaugural ceremony: drinking water streaming from Gihon (compare I Ki. 1:38, the hurried inauguration of Solomon at Gihon).

However, there is more to it. The farewell statement can also be interpreted as a metaphor expressing the epitome of security. Whoever drinks water from a stream in times of war, finds himself in a dangerous and vulnerable position, since he has to prostrate himself. Therefore, one does so only when there is no danger. A soldier drinking from a stream – whether he laps the water with his tongue like a dog or kneels down to drink (Judg. 7:5) – symbolizes the awareness of personal security. Therefore, feeling safe, he can hold his head high, that is to say, he has nothing to fear. YHWH is at his right hand.

The metaphor recalls Ps. 46:5-8: YHWH's presence guarantees the king's security.

"There is a river whose streams bring joy to the city of God...
God is in her midst; she will not be overthrown."

4. With regard to the identity of the king, Michael C. Astour has put forward the interesting observation that his name is revealed by the acrostic formed by the speech of YHWH in vs. 1-4, namely שִׁמְעוֹן, Simeon. "The warlike atmosphere of the psalm points to Simon Maccabeus, who became high priest, general, and ruler of the Jews in 141 B.C." (Article 'Mechizedek' in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, IV, 685). If the acrostic was deliberately designed by the poet, this strongly suggests a late date for the psalm.

In light of the close relationship with Psalm 1, Van der Lugt tentatively suggests that 'drinking from the stream' (v. 7a) may have the connotation 'studying the Torah', which makes the king 'hold his head high' (v. 7b).

5. Logotechnically, the divine name numbers, together with the *kabod* numbers, represent YHWH's presence and his active participation in the ceremony:

vs. 1-4	23 words spoken to the king about YHWH (Column c)
vs. 1-4	17 words in total spoken by YHWH (Column d)
vs. 1-6	32 words before atnach
vs. 4-7	34 words in total, with 17 before and 17 after atnach
vs. 5-7	23 words in total
vs. 2-7	23 words after atnach
vs. 1-7	46 (2 x 23) words in total spoken about God.

Incidentally **46** is the numerical value of the word 'my king' in the name Melchizedek (v. 4).

There are many occurrences of the number **7** - too many to wave aside as coincidence:

- the pattern of the oracles in terms of words: **17** = **7** + **3** + **7** (Column d)
- the compositional formula in terms of atnach: **63** = **35** + **28** (multiples of **7**)
- the **56** (8 x **7**) words in vs. 1-6
- the **7** words in v. 5 and v. 7
- the **7** Masoretic verses.

Moreover, the use of the number of fulfilment, **11**, in the meaningful centre of the psalm strongly suggests that both numbers were used purposefully.

6. The name יהוה occurs 3 times (vs. 1a, 2a and 4a), each time specifically in connection with the proclaiming of the three oracles, in order to define them as YHWH's own words. In his final address to the king, the speaker refers to YHWH as אֱלֹהֵי, 'my Lord' (v. 5a).

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