

Psalm 126— 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 126

- The total number of words (48) in Psalm 126 is determined by the numerical value of no less than two key-words: רִנָּן, 'to rejoice', and צִיּוֹן, 'Zion'. See below Observation 3. The psalm shares this number with two other Zion Psalms: [48](#) and [87](#).
- Unlike the preceding psalms, except Psalm 121, this psalm has a meaningful centre in terms of words: the 6 middle words are to be found in v. 3.
- The number of fullness, 7, is throughout used as a structuring device. See Observations 4 and 5.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 1-2b, 2c-3 || 4-5, 6 (2 cantos, 4 strophes with 8 verselines and 16 cola, dividing v. 2cd into 5w. + 3w. instead of 3w. + 5w. as indicated by the *atnach* in MT).
- Fokkelman and Labuschagne: similarly, except that they divide v. 2cd into 3w. + 5w as indicated by the *atnach*.

Logotechnical analysis

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

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת	2 = 2 + 0				
	בְּשׁוּב יְהוָה אֶת־שִׁיבֹת צִיּוֹן ² = 48	1	5	5	5	
	הֲיִינּוּ כַחֲלָמִים: (18 + 10 + 6 + 14 = 48)	2		2	2	
	See Observation 3 and 4! Total, v. 1	7 = 5 + 2 = 7 + 0				
2a	אֲזַ וּמָלֵא שְׂחוֹק פִּינוּ	2	4	4	4	
2b	וּלְשׁוֹנֵנוּ רִנָּה = 20+14+14=48	2	2		2	
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-2b	13 = 11 + 2 = 13 + 0				
2c	אֲזַ יֵאמְרוּ בְּגוֹיִם	3	3		3	
2d	הַגְּדִיל יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת עִם־אֱלֹהֵהּ:	5		5	5	
3	הַגְּדִיל יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת עִמָּנוּ	4	4	4	4	
	Middle 6 words: 48 = 21 + 6 + 21 : הֲיִינּוּ שְׂמֵחִים	2	2		2	
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 2c-3	14 = 9 + 5 = 14 + 0				
	Canto I Total, v. 1-3	27 = 20 + 7 = 27 + 0				

4	שׁוֹבָה יְהוָה אֶת־שְׁבוּתֵנוּ	5	4	4	4
	כְּאִפְקִים בְּנֹגֵב:		2	2	2
	Total, v. 4		6	= 4 + 2	= 0 + 6
	Total, v. 3-4		12	= 10 + 2	= 6 + 6
	Total, v. 2-4		26	= 19 + 7	= 20 + 6
5	הִזְרַעְתָּ בְּרִמְעָה	6	2	2	2
See v. 2b above	בְּרִנָּה יִקְצְרוּ:		2	2	2
	Total, v. 5		4	= 4 + 0	= 4 + 0
Strophe 3	Total, v. 4-5		10	= 8 + 2	= 4 + 6
6	הַלֹּחַד יִלֵּךְ וּבִכְה	7	3	3	3
	נִשָּׂא מִשָּׂדֶה־הַזֶּרַע		3	3	3
See v. 2b above	בְּאֵיבֹא בְרִנָּה	8	3	3	3
	נִשָּׂא אֶל־מַתְיֹר:		2	2	2
Strophe 4	Total, v. 6		11	= 9 + 2	= 11 + 0
Canto II	Total, v. 4-6		21	= 17 + 4	= 15 + 6
	Total, v. 1-6		48	= 37 + 11	= 42 + 6
	Including the heading, v. 1-6		50	= 39 + 11	

* In v. 2, the Masoretes have two poetic verselines (v. 2ab and cd), as in quite a number of instances in the Psalter – compare e.g., [Psalm 127:2](#). The reason for this has apparently to do with the number of Masoretic verses they wanted to achieve. This is a subject for further study. What needs our attention now is the uncertainty among scholars in regards the placement of the *atnach* in v. 2cd. Here, and elsewhere in comparable cases, Van der Lugt notes: “colometric division uncertain”. He himself ignores the *atnach* and divides the 8 words into 5 + 3. Many commentators, who follow H. Bardtke in *BHS*, take the placement of *atnach* seriously and consider the verseline as a tricolon: 3 + 2 + 3 words. Fokkelman, however, takes the verseline as a bicolon dictated by *atnach*: 3 + 5 words, which is in agreement with my own position and that of Christensen. See the [General Introduction](#), “Criteria for logotechnical analysis.”

It is intriguing to note that a relocation of *atnach* to the end of v. 2b – at the end of the first verseline – yields the compositional formula $27 = 17a + 10b$ in vs. 1-3, and $48 = 34a + 14b$ in vs. 1-6. Compare [Ps. 127:1](#), where we find the *atnach* also at the end of the first verseline.

Observations

1. The six words in the logotechnical centre of the psalm may safely be regarded as the meaningful centre, v. 3 ($48 = 21 + 6 + 21$):

הַגְּדִיל יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת עִמָּנוּ הֵייוֹנוּ שְׂמֵחִים:

Great things indeed YHWH did for us we were glad.

The 6-word pivot of the poem is surrounded by 42 (6 x 7) words, which corresponds precisely with the compositional formula based on the direction of address: 42 words spoken about God (Column c), and 6 words directly addressed to him (Column d).

Compare [Psalm 120](#) ($49 = 42c + 7d$), and [Psalm 125](#) ($47 = 42c + 5d$).

2. As in Psalm 125, Canto I (vs. 1-3) is concluded by the meaningful centre, while Canto II (vs. 4-6) starts with words directly addressed to God (v. 4). Both devices buttress the canto division.
3. It is not surprising to find that in this psalm, as in the preceding psalms, the total number of words (48) is determined by the numerical value of a keyword, in this case צִיּוֹן, ‘Zion’, in the very first colon ($18 + 10 + 6 + 14 = 48$). In this respect, Psalm 126 resembles two other Zion Psalms: Psalm 48 (with 48 words surrounding the core of the poem) and Psalm 87 (with 48 words in total). See Observation 2 in my Analysis of [Psalm 48](#) and Observation 2 in that of [Psalm 87](#). Incidentally, 48 also represents the numerical value of the word הַזֶּרַע, ‘seed’, in v. 6b, but this may just be coincidence.

However, Pieter van de Lugt drew my attention (private communication) to the fact that there is another key-word, namely רָגַן, 'to rejoice', of which the numerical value is likewise **48** (20 + 14 + 14 = 48) – cf. vv. 2b, 5b and 6c.

4. For the significance of the **7** occurrences of the name **Zion** in the Songs of Ascents, see Observation 7 in my Analysis of [Psalm 122](#).

5. There are two occurrences of the divine name numbers: the **26** words in vs. 2-4 and the **17** words before atnach in vs. 4-6.

As in most of the preceding psalms in this group, the number of fullness, **7**, appears to have played an important role in the structuring of the text:

7 words in v. 1

14 words in v. 2

14 words before and **7** after atnach in vs. 1-2

14 words in vs. 2c-3

7 words after atnach in vs. 1-3

21 words in vs. 4-6

21 words on either side of the meaningful centre: 21 + **6** + 21.

6. The name יהוה occurs 4x (vs. 1a, 2d, 3a, and 4a), as in Psalms 124 and 125.

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Dr. C.J. Labuschagne
Brinkhorst 44
9751 AT Haren (Gron)
The Netherlands
labuschagne.cj@gmail.com

Senior Lecturer in Semitic Languages (retired),
University of Pretoria, South Africa
and
Professor of Old Testament (retired),
University of Groningen, The Netherlands