

Psalm 128— 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 128

- Being the follow-up to Psalm 127, Psalm 128 elaborates on the theme of children as the blessed heritage from YHWH.
- As in Psalms 122 and 123, the direction of address determines the strophic structure of the psalm. And as in most of these psalms, the number of words is defined by the numerical value of a keyword, which is here **כָּנֹפֶן**, 'like a vine', (45) in v. 3a.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 1-2, 3 || 4-5a, 5b-6 (2 cantos with 4 strophes, 8 verselines and 16 cola, inserting a supposed missing colon in v. 5: **עֲשֵׂה לְשָׁמַיִם וְאָרֶץ** - cf. Ps. 121:2 and 134:3).
- Fokkelman: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6 (3 strophes with 8 verselines and 15 cola).
- Labuschagne: 1, 2-3, 4 || 5-6 (2 cantos with 4 strophes, 8 verselines and 15 cola).

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words addressed to the reader/listener; **d**: words in 3rd person form.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת	2	= 2	+ 0		
	אֲשֶׁר־יִרְאֵה יְהוָה ¹	4	4			4
	הַחֲלֵף בְּדַרְכָּיו:	2		2		2
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 1	6	= 4	+ 2	= 0	+ 6
2	יְגִיעַ ¹ כַּפִּיָּךְ כִּי תֹאכְלֵה	4	4		4	
	אֲשֶׁר־יָטוּב לָךְ:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 2	7	= 4	+ 3	= 7	+ 0
	Total, v. 1-2	13	= 8	+ 5	= 7	+ 6
3	אֲשֶׁתֶּךָ כָּנֹפֶן פֹּרִיָּה ²	3	3		3	
	בְּיַרְכְּתֵי ³ בֵּיתְךָ	2	2		2	
	כַּשְׁתְּלֵי זְיֹתִים ⁴	3	3		3	
	סָבִיב ⁵ לְשִׁלְחָנְךָ:	2		2	2	
	Middle colon: 15 = 7 + 1 + 7					
	Middle word: 45 = 22 + 1 + 22					
	Total, v. 3	10	= 8	+ 2	= 10	+ 0
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 2-3	17	= 12	+ 5	= 17	+ 0
	Total, v. 1-3	23	= 16	+ 7	= 17	+ 6
4	הֵינָה כִּי־כֹן יִבְרַךְ נֶבֶר	5	5			5
	יִרְאֵה יְהוָה: 10	2	2			2
	Strophe 3 Total, v. 4	7	= 7	+ 0	= 0	+ 7
	Total, v. 3-4	17	= 15	+ 2	= 10	+ 7
	Canto I Total, v. 1-4	30	= 23	+ 7	= 17	+ 13

5	יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה מְצִיּוֹן	6	3	3	3	0
	וּרְאֵה בְטוֹב יְרוּשָׁלַם	7	3	3	3	
	כָּל יַמֵּי תְהִיָּה : מְצִיּוֹן		3	3	3	
	Total, v. 5		9	= 6 + 3	= 9	+ 0
6	וּרְאֵה בְנֵי לְבָנֶיךָ	8	3	3	3	
6b Coda	עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל : שְׁלוֹם		3	3	3	0
	Total, v. 6		6	= 3 + 3	= 6	+ 0
	Canto II Strophe 4 Total, v. 5-6		15	= 9 + 6	= 15	+ 0
	Total, v. 1-6		45	= 32 + 13	= 32	+ 13
	With the heading, v. 1-6		47	= 34 + 13		

Observations

- The middle word of the psalm, לְשִׁלְחָנְךָ (45 = 22 + 1 + 22), falls within the middle colon, v. 3d (15 = 7 + 1 + 7) סְבִיב לְשִׁלְחָנְךָ, ‘around your table’, and may be considered a meaningful centre: the place where the children are to be found. They are likened to shoots of the olive tree, the tree of life in antiquity, that touched every phase of daily life.

By adding 3 words in v. 5, Van der Lugt counts 48 words, the numerical value of Zion (as in Psalms 48, 87 and 126). In this case the meaningful centre is constituted by the 12 words of the 2 middle verselines (4-5, vs. 3cd-4ab): 48 = 18 + 12 + 18

בְּנֵיךָ כַּשְׂתְּלֵי זֵיתִים סְבִיב לְשִׁלְחָנְךָ
הִנֵּה כִי־כֵן יְבָרְךָ גִּבֹר וְרֵא יְהוָה:

Your children will be like olive shoots.

Thus shall the person be blessed who fears YHWH.

- The strophic structure of the psalm is disputed. Van der Lugt argues that Psalms 126-130 – stemming from the same author - all have exactly the same strophic structure: 2 cantos consisting of 2 strophes with 2 bicolic verselines each. Therefore, he divides Psalm 128 into vs. 1-2, 3 || 4-5a, 5b-6, which he buttresses up by pointing out that the verbal repetitions display a linear parallelism between the two cantos, vs. 1-3 and 4-6. Fokkelman and Christensen, on the other hand, find 3 strophes: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6.

I find 2 cantos with 4 strophes divided as follows: 1, 2-3, 4 || 5-6, which is primarily based on the change in the form of address. It is exactly in this respect that the author varies the rather stereotyped compositional pattern suggested by Van der Lugt.

v. 1	Strophe 1	3 rd person	Blessed are the God-fearing	6
vs. 2-3	Strophe 2	2 nd person	Elaboration on the blessing	17
v. 4	Strophe 3	3 rd person	This is how the God-fearing are blessed	7
vs. 5-6	Strophe 4	2 nd person	YHWH bless you to see your grandchildren	15

Canto I (1-4) is demarcated by the obvious inclusion יְרֵא יְהוָה, ‘those who fear YHWH’. Logotechnically, it displays the same compositional formula as Canto I in Psalm 127, the YHWH-*echad* formula: 30 = 17 + 13 (17 words in 2nd person form and 13 in 3rd person).

The formula recurs in vs. 1-2 (13 words) and 3-4 (17 words), as can be seen in the chart.

As in Psalm 127, the *kabod* number 23 (in vs. 1-3 and in the words before *atnach* in vs. 1-4) and the *kabod* number 32 in Column c, additionally symbolize God’s presence.

Canto II (vs. 5-6) contains the concluding blessing of YHWH from Zion and the invitation to the addressed to experience (or enjoy, רְאֵה) the prosperity of Jerusalem and to see his grandchildren (vs. 5-6a). V. 6b is a coda (as in Ps. 125:5c), “Peace be on Israel”. For the coda, see the [General Introduction](#), “The use of a coda as a device for conclusion”.

3. The unity of the text is also reflected in the conspicuous series of **7** nouns with 2nd person suffixes (marked and numbered in the chart): **your hands, your wife, your house, your children, your table, your life, your grandchildren**. This is reminiscent, e.g., of [Psalm 8](#). The number **7** emphasizes the idea of the fullness and exuberance of God's blessing.

Canto II has a remarkable structure: v. 5a stands out in the concluding strophe as being a separate (monocolic!) verseline, followed by two bicolic verselines, v. 5bc and 6ab.

4. As in nearly all the psalms in this corpus, the total number of words in Psalm 128 is defined by the numerical value of a keyword: in this case, **45**, which is derived from **כִּנְוֶן**, 'like a vine', in v. 3a (11 + 3 + 17 + 14 = 45). This may be adduced as evidence to rule out the idea that v. 5 has lost a 2- or 3-word colon through text corruption, as presumed by many scholars. In my opinion, the 45-word psalm was incorporated in the corpus as it stands in Codex L. However, I cannot exclude the possibility that there was a longer, earlier version in which v. 5ab resembled [Ps. 134:3](#), where we read **three extra words** after the phrase occurring also here:

יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה מִצִּיּוֹן עֲשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ:

May YHWH bless you from Zion, **the Maker of heaven and earth**.

Since this is in fact a Zion Psalm, my guess is that the 'original' version consisted of **48** (45 + 3) words, the numerical value of Zion, like the other Zion Psalms: 87 and 126 – see Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 126](#).

5. For the significance of the **7** occurrences of the word **שָׁלוֹם**, 'peace', and the name **צִיּוֹן**, 'Zion', see Observation 7 in my Analysis [of Psalm 122](#).

For the series of **10** occurrences of the root **בֵּרַךְ**, 'to bless', in the Songs of Ascents, occurring here in vs. 4a and 5a, see Observation 6 in my Analysis of [Psalm 124](#).

6. The compositional formula in terms of the division of the text by atnach, 45 = **32 a** + **13b**, is repeated in the division based on the direction of address: 45 = **32 c** + **13d**. This may be consciously designed.
7. The name **יהוה** occurs 3 times (1a, 4b, 5a), which means that there are **7** occurrences of the divine name in Psalms 126 and 127 and altogether **17** in Psalms 125-129. See Observation 7 in my Analysis of [Psalm 124](#).

© 2012

<p style="text-align: center;">Dr. C.J. Labuschagne Brinkhorst 44 9751 AT Haren (Gron) The Netherlands labuschagne.cj@gmail.com</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Senior Lecturer in Semitic Languages (retired), University of Pretoria, South Africa and Professor of Old Testament (retired), University of Groningen, The Netherlands</p>
---	--