

# Psalm 140— 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 140

- There is a close relationship between Psalm 140 and Psalms 91 and 110, which are specifically devoted to the security and safety of the king in time of conflict and war. In the meaningful centre of Psalm 140, trust in YHWH is phrased as a prayer directly addressed to him - in much the same way as in [Psalm 91](#).
- The psalm has a lucid strophic structure, which is determined by the use of the *kabod* number **23** and neatly demarcated in MT by the three *selahs*. Psalm 140 is the first psalm after Psalm 89 having the *selah* device.

## Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 2-4, 5-6 || 7-9, 10-12 || 13-14 (3 cantos and 5 strophes, with 14 verselines and 28 cola, regarding vs. 5-6 and 10-12 as 3 bicola).
- Fokkelman: similarly, except that he finds 29 cola; like Van der Lugt, he regards vs. 5-6 and 10-12 as 3 verselines, but takes v. 11 as a tricolon; moreover, he moves the last word of v. 9 to v. 10a).
- Labuschagne: cantos and strophes similarly as Van der Lugt, but I find **13** verselines and **30** cola, taking vs. 4 and 12 as tricola because of the atnach, which is in both verses disregarded by Van der Lugt and Fokkelman; I also differ from them in taking vs. 5-6 as two tricola.

## Logotechnical analysis

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

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	לְמִנְצַחַת מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד : Heading, v. 1	3	= 3	+ 0		
2	חֲלָצְנִי יְהוָה מֵאֲדָם רָעָה מֵאִישׁ חֲמָסִים תִּנְצְרֵנִי : Total, v. 2	1 4 3 7	4	4 3	4 3	4 3 7
3	אֲשֶׁר חָשְׁבוּ רָעוֹת בְּלִבָּם כָּל־יּוֹם יִגְדְּרוּ מִלְחָמוֹת : Total, v. 3	2 4 4 8	4	4 4	4 4	4 4 8
4	שָׁנְנוּ לְשׁוֹנָם כְּמוֹ-נָחַשׁ חֲמַת עֵבֶשׁוּבָה תַּחַת שְׁפָתַימוּ סֵלָה : Total, v. 4 Total, v. 3-4	3 4 2 2 8 16	4	4 2 2	4 2 2	4 2 2 8 16
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 2-4	23	= 14	+ 9	= 23	+ 0



## Observations

- The two middle words are יהוה אֱלֹהֵי, 'YHWH, my Lord', in v. 8a (110 = 54 + 2 + 54). By adding 6 words on either side, we find 14 words addressed to YHWH that constitute the meaningful centre on word level, vs. 7-8 (110 = 48 + 14 + 48). However, there is a better candidate on colon level, which includes the 2-word introduction to the prayer, the middle 4 cola of vs. 7-8 falling within the middle strophe, vs. 7-9 (30 = 13 + 4 + 13). The centre is highlighted by the fact that it is flanked by 13 cola and 'embraced' by 17 cola.

אָמַרְתִּי לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֶתָּה ^ הִאֲזִינָה יְהוָה קוֹל תַּחֲנוּנָי:  
 יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי עֹשֵׂה יְשׁוּעוֹתֵי ^ סִכְתָּה לְרֹאשִׁי בְּיוֹם נִשְׁק:

I say to YHWH: "You are my God! // Hear, YHWH, my plea for mercy.

YHWH, my Lord, my strong deliverer, you shield my head on the day of battle."

Though this centre is in itself meaningful, it is also likely that the author consciously designed the entire 25-word central strophe, vs. 7-9, to be the meaningful centre. It may not simply be a matter of chance that the central strophe is surrounded by 85 (5 x 17) words (110 = 46 + 25 + 39).

This larger meaningful centre, dealing with the security of the speaker (king David), recalls Psalms 91 and 110, which are also particularly concerned with the security and personal safety of the king in time of war. Being a direct address to God, the meaningful centre is phrased in much the same way as that of Psalm 91. The direct address to God is a powerful rhetorical device to express the idea of personal trust in God. Therefore, Psalm 140 may be regarded as a prayer for the personal safety of the king in battle. See Observations 1-3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 91](#) and Observations 3-4 in that of Psalm [110](#).

- Psalm 140 is the first psalm after Psalm 89 in which the *selah* (3x) emerges. It is here clearly a demarcating device helping to define the strophic structure:

Strophe 1	vs. 2-4	+ <i>selah</i>	3 verselines	7 cola	23 words
Strophe 2	vs. 5-6	+ <i>selah</i>	2 verselines	6 cola	23 words
Strophe 3	vs. 7-9	+ <i>selah</i>	3 verselines	6 cola	25 (2 + 23) words
Strophe 4	vs. 10-12		3 verselines	7 cola	23 words
Strophe 5	vs. 13-14		2 verselines	4 cola	16 words.

The use of 23 words (representing the glory of YHWH, which signifies his presence) in no less than four strophes, underscores the present strophic structure, which has been recognized by the great majority of scholars.

For a survey of the occurrences of *selah*, a brief discussion and relevant literature, see Pieter van der Lugt, *Cantos and Strophes*, pp. 560-561.

- The change from words directly addressed to God to words spoken about him structure the text in the following way:

vs. 2-6	Prayer: description of the hostility toward the speaker	46 w.	
vs. 7	Words spoken about God		2 w.
vs. 7-9	Prayer: plea to God for mercy and deliverance	23 w.	
vs. 10-13	Words spoken about God		31 w.
vs. 14	Prayer: the just and upright shall praise God	8 w.	
vs. 2-14	The psalm as a whole	77	+ 33 w.

This seems to suggest that the author endeavoured to achieve exactly 77 words addressed directly to God (Column c): the product of 7, the number of fullness and 11, the number of fulfilment. Because there are 110 (10 x 11) words in total, the 33 words spoken about God (Column d) are also a multiple of 11.

These 33 words are to be regarded as a kind of interior monologue in which the speaker utters a self-reflection in the presence of God. Compare Ps. 141:5-7 and 142:4c-5 – see Observation 2 in my Analysis of [Psalm 141](#), and Observation 4 in that of [Psalm 142](#).

4. The divine name numbers **17** and **26** and the *kabod* number **23** are woven into the fabric of the text to signify YHWH's presence:
- vs. 2-4        **23** words in total (Strophe 1)
  - vs. 5-6        **23** words in total (Strophe 2)
  - vs. 2-5        **34** (2 x **17**) words in total
  - vs. 7-9        **23** words addressed to God (Strophe 3)
  - vs. 10-12     **23** words in total (Strophe 4)
  - vs. 11-13     **26** words in total
  - vs. 12-14     **26** words in total
  - vs. 7-14       **26** words after atnach
  - vs. 2-14       **68** (4 x **17**) words before atnach.
5. The name יהוה appears **7** times (vs. 2a, 5a, 7a, 7b, 8a, 9a, and 13a), אֱלֹהֵי 1x (v. 8a), and אֱלֹהִים, 'my God', 1x (v. 7a).

© 2008  
 Dr. C.J. Labuschagne    Senior Lecturer in Semitic Languages (retired),  
    Brinkhorst 44    University of Pretoria, South Africa  
 9751 AT Haren (Gron)    and  
    The Netherlands    Professor of Old Testament (retired),  
[labuschagne.cj@planet.nl](mailto:labuschagne.cj@planet.nl)    University of Groningen, The Netherlands