

Psalm 143— 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 143

- Psalm 143 is the last of four prayers for deliverance from a troublesome situation (140-143). It is the follow-up to the preceding psalm with which it has close ties.
- The psalm is in three parts which are determined by three distinct themes:
 - vs. 1-6 (delimited by *selah*), a prayer for deliverance from death threats by enemies
 - vs. 7-10 a prayer for deliverance from enemies and guidance on level ground
 - vs. 11-12, a plea to God to preserve his life and to wipe out all his enemies.
 This does not mean that we have to do with three disparate sections; on the contrary, they have a common theme, the menace from the enemies to the speaker's life.

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

- Van der Lugt: 1, 2 | 3, 4-5 || 6-7b, 7c-8b | 8c-9, 10 || 11-12 (3 cantos and 9 strophes, with 18 verselines and 38 cola, taking v. 1 as 2 bicolic verselines – see Observation 5 below).
- Fokkelman: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6 || 7, 8-9 || 10, 11-12 (3 stanzas and 7 strophes, with 16 verselines and 35 cola, taking v. 1 as a tricolon).
- Labuschagne: 1-2 | 3-4, 5-6 || 7, 8, 9-10 || 11-12 (3 cantos and 7 strophes with 17 verselines and 37 cola, taking v. 1, with Fokkelman, as a tricolon).

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: rescue me from the death threat; **d**: hear me, spare me and guide me.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	מְזִמּוֹר לְדָוִד	2	= 2	+ 0		
	יְהוָה שָׁמַע תְּפִלָּתִי	1	3	3	3	
	הֲאֵזִינָה אֶל־תַּחֲנוּנָיִי		3	3	3	
	בְּאִמְנַתְךָ עֲנֵי בְּצַדִּיקְךָ:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 1	9	= 6	+ 3	= 9	+ 0
2	וְאֶל־תְּבוּא בְּמִשְׁפַּט	2	3	3	3	
	אֶת־עֲבֹדֶיךָ		2	2	2	
	כִּי לֹא־יִצְדַק לְפָנֶיךָ	3	4	4	4	
	כָּל־חַי:	2		2	2	
	Total, v. 2	11	= 5	+ 6	= 11	+ 0
	Canticle I.1 Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-2	20	= 11	+ 9	= 20	+ 0

3	4	כי רדף אויב נפשי	4	4	4	
		דכא לארץ תיתי		3	3	3
	5	הושיבני במחשבים	2		2	2
		כמתי עולם:	2	2	2	
		Total, v. 3	11	= 7	+ 4	= 11 + 0
4	6	נתת עטף עלי רוחי	3	3		3
		בתוכי ישתומם לבי:	3		3	3
		Total, v. 4	6	= 3	+ 3	= 6 + 0
		Strophe 2 Total, v. 3-4	17	= 10	+ 7	= 17 + 0
5	7	זכרתי ימים מקדם	3	3		3
		הגיתי בכל פעלי	3	3		3
		במעשה ידי אשוחח:	3		3	3
		Total, v. 5	9	= 6	+ 3	= 9 + 0
		Total, v. 3-5	26	= 16	+ 10	= 26 + 0
		Total, v. 1-5	46	= 27	+ 19	= 46 + 0
6	8	פרשתי ידי אליה	3	3		3
		נפשי כארץ עיפה לך סלה:	4		4	4
		Total, v. 6	7	= 3	+ 4	= 7 + 0
		Strophe 3 Total, v. 5-6	16	= 9	+ 7	= 16 + 0
		Canticle I.2 Total, v. 3-6	33	= 19	+ 14	= 33 + 0
		Canto I Total, v. 1-6	53	= 30	+ 23	= 53 + 0
7	9	מהר ענני יהנה	3	3		3
		פלתה רוחי	2	2		2
		אל תסתר פניך ממני	4	4		4
		ונמשלתי עם ירדני בור:	4		4	4
		Strophe 4 Total, v. 7	13	= 9	+ 4	= 0 + 13
8	11	השמיעני בבקר חסדיך	3	3		3
		כירבך בטחתי	3	3		3
	12	הודיעני דרך זון אליך	4	4		4
		כיר אליך נשאתי נפשי:	4		4	4
		Strophe 5 Total, v. 8	14	= 10	+ 4	= 0 + 14
		Canticle II.1 Total, v. 7-8	27	= 19	+ 8	= 0 + 27
		Total, v. 6-8	34	= 22	+ 12	= 7 + 27
9	13	תצילני מאיבי יהנה	3	3		3
		אליך כסתי:	2	2		2
		Total, v. 9	5	= 5	+ 0	= 0 + 5
		Total, v. 7-9	32	= 24	+ 8	= 0 + 32
10	14	למדני לעשות רצונך	3	3		3
		כיראתה אלוהי	3	3		3
	15	רוחך טובה	2	2		2
		תנחני כארץ מישור:	3		3	3
		Total, v. 10	11	= 8	+ 3	= 0 + 11
		Canticle II.2 Strophe 6 v. 9-10	16	= 13	+ 3	= 0 + 16
		Canto II Total, v. 7-10	43	= 32	+ 11	= 0 + 43

11	לְמַעַן שְׁמֹד יְהוָה תִּתְּנֵנִי 16	4	4	4
	בְּצַדִּיקְתָּהּ תּוֹצִיא מִצָּרָה נַפְשִׁי:	4	4	4
	Total, v. 11	8	= 4 + 4	= 0 + 8
	Total, v. 9-11	24	= 17 + 7	= 0 + 24
12	וּבַחֲסֵדְךָ תִּצְמִית אִיָּבִי 17	3	3	3
	וְהֶאֱבַדְתָּ כָּל־צָרָרִי נַפְשִׁי	4	4	4
	כִּי אֲנִי עֲבָדְךָ:	3	3	3
	Total, v. 12	10	= 7 + 3	= 0 + 10
	Canto III Strophe 7 Total, v. 11-12	18	= 11 + 7	= 0 + 18
	Total, v. 9-12	34	= 24 + 10	= 0 + 34
	Total, v. 6-12	68	= 46 + 22	= 7 + 61
	Total, v. 1-12	114	= 73 + 41	= 53 + 61
	With the heading and סְלָה (1x), v. 1-12	117	75	42

Observations

- The 2 words in v. 7b כְּלָתָה רוּחִי, 'my spirit fails', constitute the logotechnical centre of the psalm (114 = 56 + 2 + 56), which coincides with the middle colon (37 = 18 + 1 + 18). The meaningful centre, however, is the middle verseline, v. 7a-b (17 = 8 + 1 + 8):

מְהֵרָה עֲנֵנִי יְהוָה כְּלָתָה רוּחִי

Hasten to answer me, YHWH // my spirit fails!

This passionate plea for help by the speaker, who finds himself at death's door, aptly expresses the gist of the psalm.

- With the great majority of commentators, as far as I can see, I divide the poem, in terms of content, into two parts: vs. 1-6 and 7-12. Each part begins with an urgent plea to God to respond to the speaker's cry for help (v. 1 and v. 7).

The theme of vs. 1-6 is the imminent death threat from the enemies, which is elaborated in the 17-word self-reflection in vs. 3-4. For the rhetorical device of self-reflection, see the three preceding psalms: Ps. 140:7a and 10-13, Ps. 141: 5-7, and Ps. 142:4c-5.

In the second part, vs. 7-12, the speaker goes a step beyond the cry for help, focusing on the preservation of his life and God's guidance after his salvation. In my opinion, the *selah* after v. 6, which delimits Canto I, marks the break between the two sections – compare the demarcating function of the *selahs* in [Psalm 140](#).

In terms of content, the second part, vs. 7-12, divides into two sections: 7-10, a prayer for personal attention on God's part, and vs. 11-12, a prayer specifically for protection against the enemies. This warrants a 3-canto structure:

Canto I	vs. 1-6	8 verselines	18 cola	53 words
Canto II	vs. 7-10	7 verselines	14 cola	43 words
Canto III	vs. 11-12	2 verselines	5 cola	18 words.

The canto framework presented here is not supported by numerical factors.

- The kabod- and divine name numbers feature in the text in the following way:

vs. 3-4	17 words in total	vs. 7-10	32 words before atnach
vs. 3-5	26 words in total	vs. 9-11	17 words before atnach
vs. 1-5	46 (2 x 23) words in total	vs. 9-12	34 (2 x 17) words in total
vs. 1-6	23 words after atnach	vs. 6-12	68 (4 x 17) words in total
vs. 6-8	34 (2 x 17) words in total		with 46 (2 x 23) before atnach
vs. 7-9	32 words in total		

- The name יְהוָה appears 4 times: vs. 1a, 7a, 9a and 11a; אֱלֹהֵי, 'my God', 1x (v. 10b).

5. An Alternative Analysis Put Forward by Pieter van der Lugt

(To be published in his *Cantos and Strophes in Biblical Hebrew Poetry, III*)

Contrary to the mainstream of scholarly opinion that the *sh* after v. 6 indicates a major break in the text, Van der Lugt argues that real breaks are to be found after v. 5 and v. 10. In terms of verbal recurrences (especially the word נפשי, 'my soul', in 3a, 6b, 8d, 11b and 12b) and other formal and semantic considerations, he divides the text into an uninterrupted series of four 4-line canticles (1-2, 3-5, 6-8b, and 8c-10) and a concluding 2-line canto (11-12). Moreover, in v. 1d he inserts the (obviously missing?) word תַּחֲנוּן, 'grant me life', because the entire phrase בְּצַדִּיקְתָּהּ תַּחֲנוּן, 'by your righteousness grant me life' was evidently taken over from Ps. 119:40b.

1 יהוה שמע תפילתי האזנה אל-תחנוני באמנתך עוני בצדקתך תַּחֲנוּן:	I.1 10
2 ואל-תבוא במשפט את-עבדך כי לא-יצדק לפניך כל-חי:	11
3 כי רַחֵם אוֹיְבֵי נַפְשִׁי דַבֵּא לְאַרְצַן תִּתֵּי הוֹשִׁיבֵנִי בְּמַחְשָׁפִים כְּמַתִּי עוֹלָם:	I.2 11
4 ותתעטף עלי ריחי בתוכי ישתומם לבי:	15
5 וְכִרְתִּי יָמִים מִקֶּדֶם הִגִּיתִי בְּכָל-פְּעֻלָּה בְּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדַי אֲשׁוּחָח:	26
6 פִּקְשָׁתִי יְדֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ נַפְשִׁי כְּאַרְצ־עֵינָה לֹא סָלָה: מִתֵּר עֲנִי וְיִהְיֶה כְּלִתָּה רִיחִי	II.1 12
אל-תסתר פניך ממני ונמשלתי עם-יְרֵדֵי בֹר:	14
8 הַשְׁמִיעֵנִי בִּבְקָרְךָ חֲסִדֶּךָ כִּי-בָהּ בְּטַחְתִּי הוֹדִיעֵנִי דְרָךְ-זֵנוֹ אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי-אֱלֹהֶיךָ נִשְׁאַתִּי נַפְשִׁי:	II.2 13
9 הַצִּילֵנִי מֵאִיְבֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּסְתִי: 10 לְמַדְרֵנִי לַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹנְךָ כִּי-אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי רִיחֶךָ טוֹבָה תִּנְחַנֵּי בְּאַרְצ־מִישׁוֹר:	11
11 לְמַעַן-שָׁמַךְ יְהוָה תַּחֲנוּן בְּצַדִּיקְתְּךָ תוֹצִיא מִצָּרָה נַפְשִׁי:	III 18
12 וּבְחֲסִדֶּךָ תִּצְמַנֵּת אֵיבֵי וְהִאֲבֹדְתָּ כָּל-צָרָתִי נַפְשִׁי כִּי אֲנִי עֲבָדֶךָ:	

Vs. 6-7b constitute the meaningful centre, being the middle strophe (9=4+1+4), the two middle verselines (18=8+2+8) and the four middle cola (38=17+4+17).

Having studied Van der Lugt's analysis, I have to conclude that his architecture of the psalm based on the emended text is in many respects far superior to the one I proposed in my analysis, and also more balanced and more regular. However, I have maintained my analysis as an effort to comprehend the structure of the extant text.

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