

# Psalm 147— 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 147

- The psalm is a fine example of a meticulously designed numerical composition with a lucid, regular rhetorical structure. Additionally, being a song of praise, it exhibits the typical characteristics of a hymn, particularly the use of stereotyped verbal forms and series of 7 and 11, as in Psalm 145, 146, 148, 149 and 150.

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

- Van der Lugt and Labuschagne: 1-3, 4-6 || 7-8, 9-11 || 12-14, 15-17, 18-20 (3 cantos with 7 strophes, 21 verselines and 42 cola, supplying the presumably missing colon, v. 8d).
- Fokkelman: similarly, except that he maintains MT and finds 20 verselines with 41 cola).

## Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words in the hymnic passages; **d**: words in their introductions.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה Hallelu-yah	2 = 2 + 0				
* *	כִּי־טוֹב זְמִירָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ־ כִּי־נַעֲשִׂים נְאוּהָ תְהִלָּה:	1 4 4	4	4		4 4
	Total, v. 1	8 = 4 + 4 = 0 + 8				
2	בּוֹנֵה יְרוּשָׁלַם יְהוָה־ נְדָחַי יִשְׂרָאֵל יִכְנֹס:	2 3 3	3	3	3	
	Total, v. 2	6 = 3 + 3 = 6 + 0				
3	הֲרַפָּא לְשִׁבּוּרֵי לֵב־ וּמַחֲפָשׁ לְעַצְבוֹתָם:	3 3 2	3	3	3	
	Total, v. 3	5 = 3 + 2 = 5 + 0				
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-3	19 = 10 + 9 = 11 + 8				
4	מוֹנֵה מִסְפֵּר לְכוֹכְבֵי־ לְכָל־שָׁמַיִם יִקְרָא:	4 3 3	3	3	3	
	Total, v. 4	6 = 3 + 3 = 6 + 0				
	Total, v. 2-4	17 = 9 + 8 = 17 + 0				
5	נְדוּל אֲדוֹמֵי־ לְתִבּוֹנָתוֹ אֵין מִסְפֵּר:	5 4 3	4	4	4	
	Total, v. 5	7 = 4 + 3 = 7 + 0				
6	מְעוֹדֵד עֲנִיִם יְהוָה־ מִשְׁפִּיל רָשָׁעִים עַד־אַרְיָן:	6 3 4	3	3	3	
	Total, v. 6	7 = 3 + 4 = 7 + 0				
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 4-6	20 = 10 + 10 = 20 + 0				
	Canto I Total, v. 1-6	39 = 20 + 19 = 31 + 8				

7	עָנוּ לַיהוָה בַּתּוֹדָה <sup>^</sup> זָמְרוּ לְאַלְהֵינוּ בְּכִנּוּר: Total, v. 7 Total, v. 4-7	7	3	3	3	3	3	6 = 3 + 3 = 0 + 6 26 = 13 + 13 = 20 + 6
8	הַמְכֶסֶה שָׁמַיִם בְּעֵבִים הַמְכִין לָאָרֶץ מְטָר <sup>^</sup> הַמְצְמִיחַ הַרִים חֲצִיר 8d** יַעֲשֶׂב לְעֵבֶרֶת הָאָדָם:	8	3	3	3	3	3	9/12 = 6 + 3/6 = 9/12 + 0 15/18 = 9 + 6/9 = 9/12 + 6
9	נֹתֵן לְבַהֲמָה לְחֶמְהָ <sup>^</sup> Vs. 9-11 middle strophe: לְבַנֵּי עָרֵב אֲשֶׁר יִקְרְאוּ: 7 = 3 + 1 + 3 Total, v. 9	10	3	3	3	3	3	7 = 3 + 4 = 7 + 0
10	Middle verseline לא בְּנוֹרֶת הַסּוֹס יִחַפֵּי <sup>^</sup> Middle cola: 20+2+20: לְאַבְשׁוּקֵי הָאִישׁ יִרְצָה: Middle words: 140 = 68 + 4 + 68 Total, v. 10	11	4	4	4	4	4	8 = 4 + 4 = 8 + 0
11	רוֹצֵה יְהוָה אֶת־יִרְאָיו <sup>^</sup> אֶת־הַמְּיַחֲלִים לְחֶסֶדּוֹ: Total, v. 11 Strophe 4 Total, v. 9-11 Total, v. 8-11	12	4	4	4	4	4	31/34 = 17 + 14/17 = 31/34 + 0 37/40 = 20 + 17/20 = 31/34 + 6 76/79 = 40 + 36/39 = 62/65 + 14
12	שָׁבְחֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם אֶת־יְהוָה <sup>^</sup> הַלְלֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ צִיּוֹן: Total, v. 12	13	4	4	4	4	4	7 = 4 + 3 = 0 + 7
13	כִּי־חֹק בְּרִיחֵי שְׁעָרֶיךָ <sup>^</sup> This is the 7 <sup>th</sup> occurrence of this keyword in a series of 7 in Psalms 135-147. See Observation 5 in my Analysis of Psalm 135.	14	4	4	4	4	4	7 = 4 + 3 = 7 + 0
14	הַשֵּׁם־גְּבוּלְךָ שְׁלוֹם <sup>^</sup> חֶלֶב חֲטִיִּים יִשְׁבִיעֶךָ: Strophe 5 Total, v. 12-14 Total, v. 8-14	15	3	3	3	3	3	6 = 3 + 3 = 6 + 0 20 = 11 + 9 = 13 + 7 51/54 = 28 + 23/26 = 44/47 + 7
15	הַשְׁלַח אִמְרָתוֹ אֶרֶץ <sup>^</sup> עַד־מְהֵרָה יְרוּיַח דְּבָרוֹ: Total, v. 15 Total, v. 11-15	16	3	3	3	3	3	7 = 3 + 4 = 7 + 0 34 = 18 + 16 = 27 + 7
16	הַנֶּתֵן שְׁלֵג כְּצֶמֶר <sup>^</sup> כְּפֹר כְּאֶפֶר יְפֹר: Total, v. 16	17	3	3	3	3	3	6 = 3 + 3 = 6 + 0
17	מִשְׁלִיחַ קָרְחוֹ כַפְתִּים <sup>^</sup> לְפָנַי קָרְחוֹ מִי יַעֲמֹד: Total, v. 17 Strophe 6 Total, v. 15-17 Total, v. 14-17 Total, v. 13-17	18	3	3	3	3	3	7 = 3 + 4 = 7 + 0 20 = 9 + 11 = 20 + 0 26 = 12 + 14 = 26 + 0 33 = 16 + 17 = 33 + 0

18	ישלח דברו וימסם <sup>א</sup>	19	3	3	3
	ישב רוחו ויזלו־מים:		4	4	4
	Total, v. 18		7	= 3 + 4	= 7 + 0
19	מוֹדֵד דְּבָרָיו לְיַעֲקֹב <sup>א</sup>	20	3	3	3
	הָקִיּוּ וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו לְיִשְׂרָאֵל:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 19		6	= 3 + 3	= 6 + 0
	Total, v. 16-19		26	= 12 + 14	= 26 + 0
20	לֹא עָשָׂה כֵּן לְכָל־גּוֹי	21	5	5	5
***	וּמִשְׁפָּטִים בְּלִי־יָדָעִם הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 20		8	= 8 + 0	= 8 + 0
	<b>Strophe 7 Total, v. 18-20</b>		21	= 14 + 7	= 21 + 0
	Total, v. 16-20		34	= 20 + 14	= 34 + 0
	<b>Canto III Total, v. 12-20</b>		61	= 34 + 27	= 54 + 7
	Total, v. 7-20	98/101	= 54 + 44/47	= 85/88 + 13	
	Total, v. 1-20	137/140	= 74 + 63/66	= 116/119 + 21	
	With the two <i>hallelu-yahs</i> , v. 1-20	141/144	= 78 + 63/66		

\* In the exclamations כִּי־טוֹב, 'How good', and כִּי־נְעִים, 'How pleasant', the particle כִּי primarily has an asseverative function, reinforcing an affirmation. However, since the addition of the *hallelu-yah*, the particle apparently came to be understood as a conjunction meaning 'for', in the synagogal liturgy. Compare the RSV: "Praise the LORD! For it is good....". The REB, e.g., renders correctly: "How good is it...how pleasant...".

\*\* Seeing the strikingly irregular *tricoloric* verseline of v. 8 in a poem made up of *bicoloric* verselines, there is every reason to follow some LXX manuscripts and the Latin Version supplying the presumably missing colon, v. 8d: וַיַּעֲשֶׂב לְעִבְרַת הָאָדָם, 'and plants for the use of mankind' (quoted from Ps. 104:14b). As I shall show below, there are logotechnical considerations supporting the restoration. The word-count of the restored text is highlighted.

\*\*\* With LXX, the Syriac Version and Targum (see BHS), I reprint the MT reading בְּלִי־יָדָעִם, 'they have never known them', to read בְּלִי־יָדָעִם, 'he has never taught them'. A Qumran fragment, which reads בְּלִי־הוֹדִיעֵם, 'he has never taught them', supports the proposed repointing.

## Observations

1. In terms of words, the logotechnical centre of the restored text is v. 10b (140 = 68+4+68), significantly flanked by 4 x 17 words on either side:

לֹא־בְשׂוּקֵי הָאִישׁ יִרְצָה: 'he takes no pleasure in the legs of a man'.

The logotechnical centre is in itself meaningful, but since it falls within the middle verseline (21=10+1+10), which coincides with the 2 middle cola (42=20+2+20), the entire v. 10 is a more plausible consciously designed meaningful centre:

לֹא בְנִבּוֹרַת הַסּוּס יִחְפֹּץ<sup>א</sup> לֹא־בְשׂוּקֵי הָאִישׁ יִרְצָה:

He does not delight in the strength of a horse // nor does he take pleasure in men's legs.

Van der Lugt takes the middle strophe, vs. 9-11, as the 'centre of the poem', which coincides with the 3 middle verselines (21= 9+3+9) and the 6 middle cola (42=18+6+18).

2. The psalm has a perfectly regular strophic structure arranged in a menorah pattern:

vs. 1-3	I	Strophe 1	3 verselines	6 cola	19 words
vs. 4-6		Strophe 2	3 verselines	6 cola	20 words
vs. 7-8	II	Strophe 3	3 verselines	6 cola	18 words
vs. 9-11		<b>Strophe 4</b>	<b>3 verselines</b>	<b>6 cola</b>	<b>22 words</b>
vs. 12-14	III	Strophe 5	3 verselines	6 cola	20 words
vs. 15-17		Strophe 6	3 verselines	6 cola	20 words
vs. 18-20		Strophe 7	3 verselines	6 cola	21 words.

In terms of content, there is another framework based on the hymnic passages (Column c) and their introductions (Column d), which overlies the rhetorical structure:

- v. 1            How good is it to sing psalms of praise to YHWH!
- vs. 2-6        **Eleven** characteristics of YHWH
- v. 7            Sing to YHWH with thanksgiving!
- vs. 8-11       **Seven** acts performed by YHWH and things he delights in
- v. 12          Sing to YHWH, Jerusalem! Praise your God, Zion!
- vs. 13-20      **Fourteen** deeds performed by YHWH for the benefit of Israel.

As in Psalms 145, 146, 148 and 150, the author uses the number of fullness, **7**, and the number of fulfilment, **11**, to create series: in this case, to enumerate YHWH's activities. Exactly **119** (**7 x 17**) words are used to describe his activities (Column c), and **21** (**3 x 7**) for the introductions (Column d).

In addition to this, Psalm 147 has **7** strophes, **21** (**3 x 7**) verselines, **42** (**6 x 7**) cola and **140** (**20 x 7**) words. Needless to say, omitting the restored colon of v. 8d would wreak havoc with these beautiful statistics.

The 11 characteristic deeds and qualities of YHWH listed in vs. 2-6:

1. he builds up Jerusalem
2. he gathers the outcasts of Israel
3. he heals the broken-hearted
4. and he binds up their wounds
  1. he numbers the stars one by one
  2. he calls each by name
  3. great is our Lord
  4. and surpassing in power
  5. his skill is beyond telling
  6. he lifts up the downtrodden
  7. he casts the wicked to the ground.

Compare the pattern of the **14** deeds in vs. 13-20.

The 7 acts performed by YHWH and things he delights in, mentioned in vs. 8-11:

1. he covers the sky with clouds
2. he provides rain for the earth
3. he makes the hills sprout grass and plants for the use of mankind
4. he gives food to the cattle and to the ravens
5. he does not delight in the strength of a horse
6. he does not take pleasure in men's legs
7. he takes pleasure in those who fear him, who wait for his love.

The 14 deeds performed by YHWH for the benefit of Israel listed in vs. 13-20:

1. he strengthens the bars of your gates
2. he blesses your inhabitants within you
3. he makes peace in your borders
4. he satisfies you with the finest wheat
  5. he sends his command to the earth
  6. he gives snow like wool
  7. he sprinkles hoarfrost like ashes
  8. he scatters his ice like morsels
  9. he sends his word
  10. and he melts them
  11. he makes his wind blow
12. he has declared his words to Jacob
13. he has not dealt thus with any other nation
14. he has never taught them his ordinances.

The **14** activities are in three parts, according to the pattern **4 + 7 + 3**: the first **4** deeds together with the *last 3* (altogether **7**) relate to YHWH's care for *the city of Jerusalem and the land of Israel*, while the middle **7** deeds have to do with his control of *the climate*.

3. In v. 13b we find the 7<sup>th</sup> and last occurrence of the key-word בָּרַךְ, 'to bless', in the series of **7** in Psalms 135-150 (135:21a, 144:1a, 145:1b, 2a, 10b, 21b, 147:13b). Together with the **10** occurrences in the Songs of Ascents (124:6, 128:4, 5, 129:8a, 8b, 132:15a (2x), 134:1, 2 and 3) – see Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 134](#) – there are altogether **17** instances in Psalms 120-150.

The blessing commanded by YHWH on Zion (Psalm 133!) and carried out by the priests (Psalm 134!) runs as a red thread through the fabric of the text and reaches its culmination point here. Since there is every reason to believe that the use of this numerical device is not mere coincidence, it can be considered additional evidence for the compositional unity of these 31 psalms (120-150).

4. The divine name numbers feature in the following fashion:

vs. 2-4	<b>17</b> words in total
vs. 4-7	<b>26</b> words in total
vs. 8-12	<b>34</b> words, with <b>17</b> before and <b>17</b> after atnach
vs. 8-14	<b>26</b> words after atnach
vs. 11-15	<b>34</b> (2 x <b>17</b> ) words in total
vs. 14-17	<b>26</b> words in total
vs. 13-17	<b>17</b> words after atnach
vs. 16-19	<b>26</b> words in total
vs. 16-20	<b>34</b> (2 x <b>17</b> ) words in total
vs. 12-20	<b>34</b> (2 x <b>17</b> ) words before atnach
vs. 1-20	<b>119</b> (7 x <b>17</b> ) words in the hymnic passages.

5. The name יהוה appears 5 times (vs. 2a, 6a, 7a, 11a and 12a), the word אֱלֹהִים 3 times (vs. 1a, 7b and 12b), and אֲדֹנָיִנוּ, 'our Lord', once (v. 5a). The form הַיְיָ occurs 2x (in each of the *hallelu-yahs*).

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