

Psalm 125— 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 125

- The general theme of the preceding psalms, God's protection and salvation in times of distress, is reiterated and elaborated here. That we have to do with psalms stemming from the same hand, is strongly suggested by the many features they share.
- As in Psalms 121-123, the total number of words (**47**) is determined by the numerical value of a keyword, in this case, the word **הַבְּטָחִים**, 'those who trust'.
- The psalm is rounded off by a coda, a feature it shares with Psalms 124 and especially with Psalm 128.
- The idea that YHWH surrounds his people as the mountains surround Jerusalem, is symbolically buttressed by the 4 occurrences of the name YHWH surrounding the meaningful centre (v. 3), where the Name is conspicuously lacking.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 1-2, 3, 4-5 (3 strophes, 6 verselines with 14 cola, taking v. 1 as a bicolon by relocating the *'atnach* (in MT after **בִּיהוָה**) after **צִיּוֹן**).
- Fokkelman: similarly, also by taking v. 1 as a bicolon (however, without relocating the *'atnach*!) except that he regards v. 5c as a separate verseline (7 verselines).
- Labuschagne: 1-2, 3, 4-5 (3 strophes, 6 verselines and 15 cola, taking v. 1 as a tricolon by maintaining the *'atnach* as positioned by the Masoretes). From a logotechnical point of view there is no cogent reason to relocate 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		
	הַבְּטָחִים = 47	1	2	2		2
	צִיּוֹן² See Observation 5		4	4	4	4
	לְעוֹלָם יָשׁוּב:	2		2	2	2
	Total, v. 1	8	= 2	+ 6	= 8	+ 0
2	יְרוּשָׁלַם הָרִים סְבִיב לָהּ	2	4	4	4	4
	וַיִּתְּנָה סְבִיב לְעַמּוּזֵי	3	3		3	3
	מִעַתָּה וְעַד־עוֹלָם:	3		3	3	3
	Total, v. 2	10	= 7	+ 3	= 10	+ 0
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-2	18	= 9	+ 9	= 18	+ 0
3	Middle strophe	3	5	5	5	5
	עַל גּוֹרֵל הַצְּדִיקִים	3	3		3	3
	לְמַעַן לֹא־יִשְׁלַחוּ הַצְּדִיקִים	4	4	4	4	4
	בְּעוֹלְתָהּ יְדִיהֶם:	2	2		2	2
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 3	14	= 14	+ 0	= 14	+ 0

4	הַיְשִׁיבָה יְהוָה לְטוֹבִים וְלִישָׂרִים בְּלִבּוֹתָם: Total, v. 4	5	3	3	3
			2	2	2
			5	= 3 + 2	= 0 + 5
5	וְהַמַּטִּים עַקְלֹתוֹתָם יֹדְיִכֶם יְהוָה אֶת־פְּעָלֵי הָאָוֶן [^] v. 5c Coda על־יִשְׂרָאֵל: שָׁלוֹם ⁶	6	2	2	2
			5	5	5
			3	3	3
	שָׁלוֹם ⁶ See Observation 5		10	= 7 + 3	= 10 + 0
	Total, v. 5		47	= 33 + 14	= 42 + 5
	Total, v. 1-5		49	= 35 + 14	
	With the heading, v. 1-5				

Observations

1. The middle word, על, 'upon' (23 + 1 + 23), situated within the middle colon (7 + 1 + 7), does not deserve the status of consciously designed meaningful centre. Neither does the middle colon. The middle strophe, v. 3 as a whole, however, is the best candidate:

כִּי לֹא יָנוּחַ שִׁבְט הָרָשָׁע עַל גּוֹרֵל הַצְּדִיקִים
לְמַעַן לֹא־יִשְׁלַחוּ הַצְּדִיקִים בְּעִנְלָתָהּ יָדֵיהֶם:

Surely, the sceptre of wickedness shall not rest upon the allotment of the righteous;
So that the righteous will not extend their hands to wrongdoing.

The meaningful centre is made up of 14 (2 x 7) words. Compare the 14 words in total after atnach and the 42 (6 x 7) words spoken about God (Column c).

2. The beginning of the Strophe 3, vs. 4-5, is marked by the sudden change from 3rd to 2nd person form: the 5 words in v. 4 are directly addressed to YHWH. Logotechnically, this causes the formula 47 = 42c + 5d, with 42 (6 x 7) words spoken about God and 5 words addressed to him. It recalls Psalm 120, where we find the formula 49 = 42c + 7d, and Psalm 126, with the formula 48 = 42c + 6d.
3. The numerical value of the very first word of the psalm, which may certainly be considered a keyword, הַבֹּטְחִים, 'those who trust' (5 + 2 + 9 + 8 + 10 + 13 = 47), has apparently determined the total number of words. Compare Psalms 121-123 and 126.
4. The last colon, v. 5c, appears to be a typical coda, that stands out within the last strophe, as v. 8 in Psalm 124. Compare Ps. 128:6b, where this particular coda reverberates.*
5. For the significance of the 7 occurrences of the name Zion and the word שָׁלוֹם, 'peace', in the Songs of Ascents, see Observation 7 in my Analysis of [Psalm 122](#).
6. As in Psalms 120-123, the author may not have endeavoured to weave divine name numbers into the text. The appearance of the *kabod* numbers 32 and 23 in vs. 1-3 may have been deliberately designed to symbolize YHWH's presence.
7. The name יהוה occurs 4x (vs. 1a, 2b, 4a and 5b), but significantly, not in the meaningful centre. This may be explained as consciously intended to let the divine name *surround* the meaningful centre in the same fashion as the mountains surround Jerusalem and YHWH surrounds his people (v. 2!).

© 2012

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@gmail.com University of Groningen, The Netherlands

* Van der Lugt remarks: "the colon is a relatively independent blessing at the end of the poem, but belongs to the foregoing line; cf. Ps. 128:6b and Ex. 15:18." In my judgement, Fokkelman goes too far in considering the last colon as a separate verseline.