

# 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 **כַּנּוֹן**, '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 15 cola).
- 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 3<sup>rd</sup> person form.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת	2 = 2 + 0				
	אֲשֶׁר־יֵרָא יְהוָה <sup>1</sup>	4	4			4
	הַהֲלֵךְ בְּדַרְכָּיו:	2		2		2
	<b>Strophe 1 Total, v. 1</b>	<b>6 = 4 + 2 = 0 + 6</b>				
2	יָגִיעַ <sup>1</sup> כַּפְיָךְ כִּי תֹאכֵל	4	4		4	
	אֲשֶׁר־יָדָה וְטוֹב לָךְ:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 2	7 = 4 + 3 = 7 + 0				
	Total, v. 1-2	13 = 8 + 5 = 7 + 6				
3	כַּנּוֹן = 45 פְּרִיָּה	3	3		3	
	(11 + 3 + 17 + 14) בְּיַדְךָ <sup>3</sup>	2	2		2	
	בְּנֵיךָ <sup>4</sup> כְּשֶׁתֵּלֵי זֵיתִים	4	3	3	3	
	סָבִיב <sup>5</sup> לְשִׁלְחָנְךָ:	2		2	2	
	<b>Middle colon:</b> 15 = 7 + 1 + 7					
	<b>Middle word:</b> 45 = 22 + 1 + 22					
	<b>Strophe 2 Total, v. 2-3</b>	<b>10 = 8 + 2 = 10 + 0</b>				
	<b>Total, v. 1-3</b>	<b>23 = 16 + 7 = 17 + 6</b>				
4	The 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> instance					
	הִנֵּה כִּי־כֹן יְבָרַךְ נָבֵר	5	5			5
	of בָּרַךְ, 'to bless', in a series of 10	2	2			2
	in vs. 4a and 5a	7 = 7 + 0 = 0 + 7				
	<b>Strophe 3 Total, v. 4</b>	<b>17 = 15 + 2 = 10 + 7</b>				
	<b>Total, v. 3-4</b>	<b>17 = 15 + 2 = 10 + 7</b>				
	<b>Canto I Total, v. 1-4</b>	<b>30 = 23 + 7 = 17 + 13</b>				

5	יְבָרְכֶם יְהוָה מִצִּיּוֹן	6	3	3	3	0
	וּרְאֵה בְטוֹב יְרוּשָׁלַם	7	3	3	3	
	כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ : מִצִּיּוֹן		3	3	3	
	Total, v. 5		9	= 6 + 3	= 9	+ 0
6	וּרְאֵה בְנֵים לְבָנֶיךָ	8	3	3	3	
<b>6b Coda</b>	עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל : שְׁלוֹם		3	3	3	0
	Total, v. 6		6	= 3 + 3	= 6	+ 0
	<b>Canto II Strophe 4 Total, v. 5-6</b>		<b>15</b>	= 9 + 6	= 15	+ 0
	Total, v. 1-6		<b>45</b>	= 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) סָבִיב 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.
- 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 verselines each. Therefore, he divides Psalm 128 into 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 observed by Van der Lugt.

v. 1	Strophe 1	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	Blessed are the <i>God-fearing</i>	6
vs. 2-3	Strophe 2	2 <sup>nd</sup> person	Elaboration on the blessing	17
v. 4	Strophe 3	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	This is how the <i>God-fearing</i> are blessed	7
vs. 5-6	Strophe 4	2 <sup>nd</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> person form and **13** in 3<sup>rd</sup> 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”.

The linear parallelism based on verbal repetitions, which Van der Lugt observed between vs. 1-3 and 4-6, in my opinion, does not define the canto structure, but only serves to reinforce the unity of the text. See Observation 2 in my Analysis of [Psalm 116](#).

- The unity of the text is also reflected in the conspicuous series of 7 nouns with 2<sup>nd</sup> 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. Van der Lugt calls this monocolic verseline a protruding or projecting colon ('vooruitspringende stiche'). Though he does not mention Psalm 128 specifically, he has discovered this pattern in several other psalms, e.g., 6:7-8, 8:2, 31:8-9, 35:17-18, 56:9-10a, 87:5-6, 90:10, 130:7-8 and 137:8-9.\*

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 **כִּנְפֵן**, '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:

יְבָרֶכְךָ יְהוָה מִצִּיּוֹן עֹשֵׂה 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](#).

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\* See his Dissertation, *Strofische structuren in de Bijbels-Hebreeuwse poëzie*, Kampen 1980, pp. 492-497, and his forthcoming book *Cantos and Strophes in Biblical Hebrew Poetry. With Special Reference to the First Book of the Psalter (Oudtestamentische Studiën 53)*, Brill: Leiden 2006, Chapter V, 6.3. Compare also his *Rhetorical Criticism and the Poetry of the Book of Job (Oudtestamentische Studiën 32)*, E.J. Brill: Leiden - New York - Köln 1995, pp. 483-485.