

Psalm 138— 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 138

- Psalm 138 opens the series of eight Davidic psalms (138-145), which conclude the last Sub-Group of Eleven Psalms (135-145). It is the first psalm in Book V in which the syntax (main- and subordinate clauses) determines the structure of the text. Psalm 136 is a special case, because of the use of the refrain. The last examples I encountered were [Psalms 98](#) and [100](#).
- The author deliberately used syntax to structure his text, instead of the change from words addressed to God to words spoken about him.

Strophic structure - Canto boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 1-3, 4-6, 7-8 (3 strophes with 8 verselines and 20 cola; in regards vs. 7-8, colometric division uncertain – 2 tricola or 3 bicola?).
- Fokkelman: 1-3, 4-6, 7, 8 (4 strophes, 9 verselines and 21 cola, taking v. 7 as 2 bicola).
- Labuschagne: 1-3 || 4-6 || 7, 8 (3 cantos and 4 strophes (like Fokkelman), but I find 10 verselines and 21 cola, regarding vs. 1-2 as three bicola and v. 7 as two bicola).

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words in the main clauses; **d**: words in the subordinate clauses.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	לְדָוִד הִלְלוּ	1	= 1	+ 0		
	אֹדֶךָ בְּכָל-לֵבִי	1	3	3	3	
	נֶגְדַת אֱלֹהִים אֲזַמְרֶךָ:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 1	6	= 3	+ 3	= 6	+ 0
2	אֲשַׁתְּחִנֶּה אֶל-הַיָּכַל קִדְשֶׁךָ	2	4	4	4	
	וְאֹדֶה אֶת-שִׁמְךָ	3	3		3	
	עַל-חַסְדֶּךָ וְעַל-אַמְתָּךָ	3	4	4	4	
	כִּי-הִגְדַּלְתָּ עַל-כָּל-שִׁמְךָ אִמְרָתֶךָ:	6		6		6
	Total, v. 2	17	= 11	+ 6	= 11	+ 6
3	בַּיּוֹם קָרָאתִי וַתִּעַנֵּנִי	4	3		3	
	תִּרְהַבְנִי בְּנַפְשִׁי עֹז:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 3	6	= 3	+ 3	= 6	+ 0
	Total, v. 2-3	23	= 14	+ 9	= 17	+ 6
	Canto I Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-3	29	= 17	+ 12	= 23	+ 6

4	יִדְוֹדָה יְהוָה כָּל־מַלְכֵי־אֲרָץ ^	5	5	5	5
	Middle word: כִּי שָׁמְעוּ אִמְרֵי־פִיָּהּ :		4	4	4
	75 = 37 + 1 + 37	Total, v. 4	9	= 5 + 4	= 5 + 4
5	וַיִּשְׁירוּ בְּדַרְכֵי יְהוָה ^	6	3	3	3
	Middle colon: כִּי גָדוֹל כְּבוֹד יְהוָה :		4	4	4
	21 = 10 + 1 + 10	Total, v. 5	7	= 3 + 4	= 3 + 4
	Middle verselines: 10 = 4 + 2 + 4	Total, v. 4-5	16	= 8 + 8	= 8 + 8
	In terms of words: 75=29+16+30	Total, v. 4-5	5	5	5
6	כִּי־רָם יְהוָה וְשָׁפַל יִרְאֶהָ ^	7	5	5	5
	כְּבוֹד = 23		3	3	3
	Including heading: 30+16+30	Total, v. 6	8	= 5 + 3	= 0 + 8
	וַנְּבִיחַ מִמְּרָחֵק יַיָּדַע:	Total, v. 1-6	24	= 13 + 11	= 8 + 16
	Canto II Strophe 2 Total, v. 4-6		53	= 30 + 23	= 31 + 22
7	אִם־אֵלֶּהּ בְּקִרְבֵּי צָרָה	8	4	4	4
	תַּחֲיִינִי עַל אַף אִיבֵי		4	4	4
	תִּשְׁלַח יָדָהּ ^	9	2	2	2
	וְתוֹשִׁיעֵנִי יְמִינָהּ :		2	2	2
	Strophe 3 Total, v. 7		12	= 10 + 2	= 8 + 4
8	יְהוָה יִגְמַר בְּעַדֵּי	10	3	3	3
	יְהוָה חֲסִדָּהּ לְעוֹלָם		3	3	3
	מַעֲשֵׂי יְדִידָהּ אֶל־תִּרְפָּהּ :		4	4	4
	Strophe 4 Total, v. 8		10	= 6 + 4	= 10 + 0
	Canto III Total, v. 7-8		22	= 16 + 6	= 18 + 4
	Total, v. 2-8		69	= 43 + 26	= 43 + 26
	Numerical v. 1-3		29	= 17 + 12	= 23 + 6
	Chiasmus v. 4-8		46	= 29 + 17	= 26 + 20
	Total, v. 1-8		75	= 46 + 29	= 49 + 26
	With the heading, v. 1-8		76	= 47 + 29	

Observations

- The middle word happens to be פִּיָּהּ, 'your mouth', in v. 4b (75 = 37 + 1 + 37), but the two middle verselines, vs. 4-5, may be considered the consciously designed meaningful centre (10 = 4 + 2 + 4):

יִדְוֹדָה יְהוָה כָּל־מַלְכֵי־אֲרָץ ^ כִּי שָׁמְעוּ אִמְרֵי־פִיָּהּ :
וַיִּשְׁירוּ בְּדַרְכֵי יְהוָה ^ כִּי גָדוֹל כְּבוֹד יְהוָה :

All the kings of the earth will praise you, YHWH, when they hear the words of your mouth
Yes, they will sing of YHWH's ways, for great is the glory of YHWH.

It is interesting to note that, on word level, the pivotal verselines constitute a slightly off-centre meaningful middle (75 = 29 + 16 + 30). Including the 1-word heading causes the two middle verselines to coincide with the 16 middle words (76 = 30 + 16 + 30). It is likely that a 1-word heading was deliberately chosen to achieve this – compare Observation 1 in my Analysis of [Psalm 141](#).

- In terms of content, the entire section dealing with the homage the foreign kings are expected to pay to YHWH, vs. 4-6, may safely be considered the larger meaningful core of the poem. What is said in v. 6, that YHWH regards the lowly and knows the haughty, clearly refers to the kings and cannot be left out of consideration. This is corroborated by the logotechnical structure: the 24-word section, vs. 4-6, is surrounded by 51 (3 x 17) words: 29 + (24) + 22. This is a typical logotechnical device expressing the symbolical presence of YHWH: he surrounds them.

- Though Psalm 138 is not a typical royal psalm, it is the first of a series of 8 psalms designed as Davidic compositions (138-145), as indicated by the headings. The speaker is supposed to be David, the archetype of the Israelite king. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that the meaningful centre is about 'all the kings of the earth'. Because David's rule depends on their acceptance of his rule and that of YHWH, they are expected to acknowledge YHWH's dominion and to praise him.
- The canto structure proposed here, is supported by the device of the numerical chiasmus, appearing here for the first time after Psalms 109 and 114. In terms of the division by *atnach*, it links vs. 1-3 to vs. 4-8. For its function, see the [General Introduction](#), "The numerical chiasmus":

Canto I	vs. 1-3	$29 = 17a + 12b$
Canto II-III	vs. 4-8	$46 = 29a + 17b$
Total	vs. 1-8	$75 = 46a + 29b.$

- In many psalms, the change from words addressed to God to words spoken about him, and *vice versa*, has a structuring role. Here, it was not feasible, because the author clearly used syntax to structure his text numerically. The structure based on the change in the direction of address is as follows:

vs. 1-4	addressed to God	38 words	
vs. 5-6	spoken about him		15 words
vs. 7	addressed to God	12 words	
vs. 8a	spoken about him		3 words
vs. 8bc	addressed to God	7 words	
Total		57 words	18 words

The syntactical framework does not coincide with this structure but overlies it. The change from words addressed to God to words spoken about him only functions as an attention-drawing device marking the end (vs. 5-6) of the second strophe and the end of the poem as a whole (v. 8bc). Compare, e.g., Pss. 20:10, 68:36, 73:28, and 90:17.

- Significantly, in terms of syntax, the text divides into **49** (7 x 7) words in the main clauses (Column c) and **26** in the subordinate clauses (Column d). Note that **49** is the numerical value of **כְּבוֹד יְהוָה**, 'the glory of YHWH', in v. 5b ($23 + 26 = 49$). Given the considerable number of occurrences of the *kabod* number **23** (11 + 2 + 6 + 4), and its multiples, it is here obviously a structuring number.

Since the word **כְּבוֹד**, 'glory', appears explicitly in the text (v. 5b), I list its occurrences together with those of the divine name numbers. See the [General Introduction](#), "Special patterns" for the function of the *kabod* numbers, which I do not regard as having a regular, but only an incidental structural function. Here is the survey:

vs. 2	17 words in total
vs. 2-3	23 words in total
vs. 1-3	17 words before <i>atnach</i> and 23 words in the main clauses
vs. 1-6	23 words after <i>atnach</i>
vs. 2-8	69 (3 x 23) words in total, with 43 before and 26 after <i>atnach</i>
vs. 4-8	46 (2 x 23) words in total, with 17 words after <i>atnach</i>
vs. 4-8	26 words in the main clauses
vs. 1-8	46 (2 x 23) words before <i>atnach</i> , 26 words in the subordinate clauses.

- The name **יהוה** occurs 6 times: vs. 4a, 5a, 5b, 6a, 8a and 8b.

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