

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 two parts, which are determined by two distinct themes:
vs. 1-6 (delimited by *selah*), a prayer for deliverance from death threats by enemies;
vs. 7-12, a plea to God to preserve his life and guide him on level ground.

This does not mean that we have to do with two disparate sections; on the contrary, they have a common theme, the menace from the enemies of the speaker to his life, and they are bound together by the numerical structure overlying the poetic framework.

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).
- 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 Heading	2 = 2 + 0				
	יְהִי שִׁמְעַתְּ תְּפִלָּתִי 1	3	3		3	
	הֲאֵינִי אֶל־תַּחֲנוּנִי־אֵ	3	3		3	
	בְּאִמְנַתְּךָ עֲנֵי בְּצַדִּיקְךָ:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 1	9 = 6 + 3 = 9 + 0				
2	וְאֶל־תְּבוֹא בְּמִשְׁפַּט	3	3		3	
	אֶת־עֲבֹדְךָ־אֵ	2	2		2	
	כִּי לֹא־יִצְדַּק 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
		במתי עולם:	2	2	2	
		Total, v. 3	11	= 7 + 4	= 11	+ 0
4	6	ותתעטר 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 ידיך 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	מחר 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	= 13	+ 0
8	11	השמיעני בבקר חסדיך	3	3	3	
		כירבך בטחתי	3	3	3	
	12	הודיעני דרך זולתי	4	4	4	
		כיראליך נשאתי נפשי:	4		4	4
		Strophe 5 Total, v. 8	14	= 10 + 4	= 14	+ 0
		Canticle II.1 Total, v. 7-8	27	= 19 + 8	= 27	+ 0
		Total, v. 6-8	34	= 22 + 12	= 34	+ 0
9	13	הצילני מאיבי יהנה	3	3	3	
		אליך כסתי:	2	2	2	
		Total, v. 9	5	= 5 + 0	= 5	+ 0
		Total, v. 7-9	32	= 24 + 8	= 32	+ 0
10	14	למדני לעשות רצונך	3	3	3	
		כיראתה אלוהי	3	3	3	
	15	רוחך טובה	2	2	2	
		תנחני בארץ מישור:	3		3	3
		Total, v. 10	11	= 8 + 3	= 11	+ 0
		Canticle II.2 Strophe 6 v. 9-10	16	= 13 + 3	= 16	+ 0
		Canto II Total, v. 7-10	43	= 32 + 11	= 43	+ 0

11	לְמַעַן־שָׁמַךְ יְהוָה יִתְחַנְּנֵי ^א 16	4	4	4
	בְּצַדִּיקְתֶּךָ תוֹצִיא מִצָּרָה נַפְשִׁי:	4	4	4
	Total, v. 11	8	= 4 + 4	= 0 + 8
	Total, v. 9-11	24	= 17 + 7	= 0 + 24
12	וּבְחִסְדֶּךָ תִּצְמִית אֵיכָּי 17	3	3	3
	וְהֶאֱבַדְתָּ כָּל־צָרָרִי נַפְשִׁי ^א	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 סֵלָה (1x), v. 1-12	117	75	42

Observations

- The 2 words in v. 7b כָּלְתָה 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 כָּלְתָה 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. This means that the *kabod*- and divine name numbers do not structure the text but only demonstrate its unity. The unity of Cantos II and III, vs. 7-12 is reinforced by a numerical chiasmus:

Canto II,	vs. 7-10	43 = 32a + 11b
Canto III	vs. 11-12	18 = 11a + 7b
Total	vs. 7-12	61 = 43a + 18b.

For this literary device, see the [General Introduction](#), “The Numerical Chiasmus”.

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

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

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

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