

Psalm 144— 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 144

- As the follow-up to the preceding four laments, Psalm 144 is a song of praise and therefore a real ‘new’ song. No wonder that this is explicitly expressed in its meaningful centre, v. 9a: “O God, I shall sing a new song”. The word ‘new’ is not only situated in the middle of the 5-word centre, but also in the middle of the entire psalm. In its capacity as ‘new’ song it preludes [Psalm 145](#), which is labeled as ‘Song of Praise’.
- Its canto structure is determined by the categories: words spoken to, and about God.

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

- Van der Lugt: 1-2, 3-4 | 5-6, 7-8 || 9-10, 11 | 12, 13-14a, 14b-15 (2 cantos, 4 Canticles and 9 strophes, with 20 verselines and 43 cola).
- Fokkelman: 1-2, 3-4 || 5-6, 7-8 || 9-10b, 10c-11 || 12, 13-14a, 14b-15 (4 stanzas and 9 strophes, with 19 verselines and 41 cola, taking v. 7 as a tricolon and 9-11 as 4 bicola).
- Labuschagne: 1-2 || 3-4 | 5-6, 7-8 | 9-10, 11 || 12, 13, 14-15 (3 cantos and 9 strophes, with 20 verselines and 43 cola, like Van der Lugt, except that I do not split v. 14).
- Christensen, who includes the heading in the word-count: 1-2, 3-4 || 5-7, 8-9, 10-12 || 13, 14-15 (3 cantos and 7 strophes, disregarding the caesuras between vs. 8 and 9 and between vs. 11 and 12, which other commentators take seriously into account).

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	לְדָוִד הִלְלוּ	1 = 1 + 0				
	בְּרִיךְ יְהוָה צוּרֵי	1	3	3	3	
	הַמְלִמְד יָדַי לְקַרְבֵּי	3	3		3	
	אֲצַבְעוֹתַי לְמִלְחָמָה:	2		2	2	
2	חֲסָדַי וּמְצוּדָתִי	2	2	2	2	
	מִשְׁגָּבִי וּמִפְלִטֵי לִי	3	3	3	3	
	מִגְּנֵי וּבֹו חֲסִיתִי	3	3	3	3	
	הַרְוֵד עִמִּי תַחְתֵּי:	3		3	3	
	Canto I Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-2	19	= 14	+ 5	= 19	+ 0
3	יְהוָה מִחֲאָדָם וַתִּדְעֵהוּ	4	4	4	4	4
	כִּן־אֲנוֹשׁ וַתִּתְשַׁבְּהוּ:	3		3	3	3
	Total, v. 3	7	= 4	+ 3	= 0	+ 7
	Total, v. 1-3	26	= 18	+ 8	= 19	+ 7
4	אָדָם לְהַבִּיל דְּמָה	5	3	3	3	3
	יָמָיו כְּצֶל עוֹבֵר:	3		3	3	3
	Total, v. 4	6	= 3	+ 3	= 0	+ 6
	Canticle II.1 Strophe 2 Total, v. 3-4	13	= 7	+ 6	= 0	+ 13
	Total, v. 1-4	32	= 21	+ 11	= 19	+ 13

5	6	יהוה הט־שְׁמִיךָ וְתִרְדֵּ֣ה נַע בְּהָרִים וַיַּעֲשֵׂנוּ׃ Total, v. 5 Total, v. 1-5	4 4 3 3 <u>7 = 4 + 3 = 0 + 7</u> 39 = 25 + 14 = 19 + 20	4 3 7 39
6	7	בְּרוּךְ בְּרֶקֶת וְתַפִּיצֵם־ שְׁלַח חֲצִיךָ וְתַהַמֵּם׃ Total, v. 6 Strophe 3 Total, v. 5-6 Total, v. 3-6 Total, v. 1-6	3 3 3 3 <u>6 = 3 + 3 = 0 + 6</u> 13 = 7 + 6 = 0 + 13 <u>26 = 14 + 12 = 0 + 26</u> 45 = 28 + 17 = 19 + 26	3 3 6 13 26 45
7	8	שְׁלַח יְדִיךָ מִמְרוֹם פָּצְנִי וְהַצִּילֵנִי מִמִּים רַבִּים־ מִיַּד בְּנֵי נֹכַר׃ Total, v. 7 Total, v. 5-7 Total, v. 4-7	3 3 2 2 2 2 3 3 <u>10 = 7 + 3 = 0 + 10</u> <u>23 = 14 + 9 = 0 + 23</u> 29 = 17 + 12 = 0 + 29	3 2 2 3 10 23 29
8	10	אֲשֶׁר פִּיהֶם דְּבַר־שְׁוֹאֵ֣ה וַיִּמְיָנִם יָמִין שְׁקֵר׃ Total, v. 8 Strophe 4 Total, v. 7-8 Canticle II.2 Total, v. 5-8 Total, v. 3-8 Total, v. 1-8	4 4 3 3 <u>7 = 4 + 3 = 0 + 7</u> 17 = 11 + 6 = 0 + 17 <u>30 = 18 + 12 = 0 + 30</u> 43 = 25 + 18 = 0 + 43 62 = 39 + 23 = 19 + 43	4 3 7 17 30 43 62
9	11	Middle colon: אֱלֹהִים שִׁיר חֲדָשׁ אֲשִׁירָה לְךָ־ בְּנֹבֵל עֲשׂוֹר אֲזַמְרָה־לְךָ׃ Middle words: 129 = 62 + 5 + 62 Total, v. 9 Total, v. 7-9 Total, v. 3-9	5 5 4 4 <u>9 = 5 + 4 = 0 + 9</u> <u>26 = 16 + 10 = 0 + 26</u> <u>52 = 30 + 22 = 0 + 52</u>	5 4 9 26 52
10	12	הַנּוֹתֵן הַשׁוֹעָה לַמְּלָכִים הַפּוֹצֵה אֶת־דָּוִד עַבְדּוֹ מִחֶרֶב רָעָה׃ Total, v. 10 Strophe 5 Total, v. 9-10	3 3 4 4 2 2 <u>9 = 9 + 0 = 0 + 9</u> 18 = 14 + 4 = 0 + 18	3 4 2 9 18
11	13	פָּצְנִי וְהַצִּילֵנִי מִיַּד בְּנֵי־נֹכַר אֲשֶׁר פִּיהֶם דְּבַר־שְׁוֹאֵ֣ה וַיִּמְיָנִם יָמִין שְׁקֵר׃ Strophe 6 Total, v. 11 Canticle II.3 Total, v. 9-11 Canto II Total, v. 3-11	2 2 3 3 4 4 3 3 <u>12 = 9 + 3 = 0 + 12</u> <u>30 = 23 + 7 = 0 + 30</u> <u>73 = 48 + 25 = 0 + 73</u>	2 3 4 3 12 30 73

12	אֲשֶׁר ¹ בָּנִינוּ כְּנֹטְעִים	15	3	3	3
	מְגִדְלִים בְּנִעוּרֵיהֶם		2	2	2
	מְנֻחֵינוּ כְּזֵיתָא ²	16	2	2	2
	מִחֻשְׁבוֹת תְּבִנֵית הַיְכָל:		3	3	3
	Strophe 7 Total, v. 12		10	= 7 + 3	= 10 + 0
13	מְזֻיָּנוּ מְלֵאִים מִפִּיקִים ³	17	3	3	3
	מִזֵּן אֶל־זֵן		3	3	3
	צְאוּנָנוּ מֵאֲלִיפוֹת ⁴	18	2	2	2
	מִרְפָּבוֹת ⁵ בְּחֻצוֹתֵינוּ:		2	2	2
	Strophe 8 Total, v. 13		10	= 10 + 0	= 10 + 0
	Total, v. 12-13		20	= 17 + 3	= 20 + 0
14	אֶלּוּפֵינוּ מְסֻבִּלִים ⁶	19	2	2	2
	אֵין־פֶּרֶץ וְאֵין יוֹצֵאתָא		4	4	4
	וְאֵין צְנֻחָה ⁷ בְּרַחֲבֵינוּ:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 14		9	= 6 + 3	= 9 + 0
15	אֲשֶׁרִי = 52	20	4	4	4
	אֲשֶׁרִי הָעָם שֶׁכָּכָה לוֹא		4	4	4
	(1 + 21 + 20 + 10 = 52): אֲשֶׁרִי הָעָם שֶׁתְּהִיָּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ:		4	4	4
	Total, v. 15		8	= 4 + 4	= 8 + 0
	Strophe 9 Total, v. 14-15		17	= 10 + 7	= 17 + 0
	Canticle III Total, v. 12-15		37	= 27 + 10	= 37 + 0
	Total, v. 9-15		67	= 50 + 17	= 37 + 30
	Total, v. 3-15		110	= 75 + 35	= 37 + 73
	Total, v. 1-15		129	= 89 + 40	= 56 + 73
	With the heading, v. 1-15		130	= 90 + 40	

Observations

- The middle word is **תָּרַשׁ**, 'new' (129 = 64 + 1 + 64), v. 9a, but by adding two words on either side, we find a larger logotechnical centre (129 = 62 + 5 + 62), which coincides precisely with the middle colon (43 = 21 + 1 + 21). This is a clear indication that v. 9a is the consciously designed meaningful centre:

אֱלֹהִים שִׁיר תָּרַשׁ אֲשֶׁרֶךָ לָךְ O God, I shall sing a new song to you.

What makes it particularly meaningful is the fact that Psalm 144 is indeed a 'new song', seeing that the preceding four psalms are all laments. As a song of praise, Psalm 144 anticipates the alphabetic acrostic, Psalm 145 - which is explicitly entitled a 'Psalm of Praise' - lauding YHWH's greatness and goodness.

YHWH is strikingly addressed as אֱלֹהִים, Elohim, instead of YHWH. Unlike the appellative אֱלֹהֵי, 'his God', in v. 15b, אֱלֹהִים is here used as a personal name. In my opinion, it functions as a rhetorical device to highlight the significance of the words in this part of the address.

- V. 9a clearly stands out because it marks the beginning of the passage in which king David is specifically referred to, which means that there is a caesura between vs. 8 and 9. The other hard breaks in the text defining the strophic structure are also easily recognizable. They give the following division of the text:

Strophe 1	(vs. 1-2)	Words spoken about YHWH in 'I'-form
Strophe 2	(vs. 3-4)	Words addressed to YHWH (initial vocative)
Strophes 3-4	(vs. 5-8)	Words addressed to YHWH (initial vocative)
Strophe 5-6	(vs. 9-11)	Words addressed to YHWH as Elohim (initial Elohim)
Strophes 7-9	(vs. 12-15)	Words spoken about YHWH in 'we'-form.

The canto structure presented here is fundamentally determined by the categories: words spoken about YHWH and words addressed to him:

Canto I	vs. 1-2	Words spoken about YHWH in 'I'-form
Canto II.1	vs. 3-4	Words addressed to YHWH
Canto II.2	vs. 5-8	Words addressed to YHWH
Canto II.3	vs. 9-11	Words addressed to YHWH as Elohim
Canto III	vs. 12-15	Words spoken about YHWH in 'we'-form.

3. The choice for a 1-word heading was obviously intentional to achieve **130** (5 x **26**) words in total. Compare Observation 1 in my Analysis of [Psalm 141](#).

4. The description of the blissful, affluent society in the 'we'-passage, Canto III, is highlighted by the **7** objects explicitly labeled as 'ours'. The function of the number of fullness is to express symbolically the high level and fullness of Israel's prosperity:

v. 12a	our sons
v. 12c	our daughters
v. 13a	our garners
v. 13c	our sheep
v. 13d	our fields
v. 14a	our oxen
v. 14c	our streets.

For a close parallel, compare Observation 4 in my Analysis of [Psalm 8](#) and for random examples, see the [General Introduction](#), "Special patterns", "The menorah pattern". Similar series of **7** items are further on to be found in Psalms [145](#), [146](#), [148](#) and [150](#). Please consult the relevant Observations in my Analyses of these psalms.

5. In v. 1a we find the 2nd occurrence of the keyword בָּרַךְ, 'to bless', in a series of **7** in Psalms 135-150 (135:21a, 144:1a, 145:1b, 2a, 145:10b, 145:21b, 147:13b). Together with the **10** occurrences in the Songs of Ascents - see Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 134](#) – there are in total **17** instances in Psalms 120-147. See Observation 4 in my Analysis of [Psalm 145](#).

6. The fact that there are **52** words in vs. 3-9 may not be a coincidence, since it represents the numerical value of the other important key-word אֲשִׁירֵי, 'happy', occurring twice at the end of the text (vs. 15a and 15b). Throughout the Psalter, it signifies the happiness of Israel as the people of YHWH. Here, it precludes the use of the key-word in Psalm 146:5, where we find the very last instance of its **26** occurrences in the Psalter. See especially Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 1](#), where we find the first instance, and consult also Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 146](#).

7. The *kabod*- and divine name numbers feature in the following fashion in the text:

vs. 1-3	26 words in total	vs. 7-8	17 words in total
vs. 1-4	32 words in total	vs. 7-9	26 words in total
vs. 3-6	26 words in total	vs. 3-9	52 (2 x 26) words in total
vs. 1-6	17 words after atnach	vs. 9-11	23 words before atnach
vs. 5-7	23 words in total	vs. 12-13	17 words before atnach
vs. 4-7	17 words before atnach	vs. 14-15	17 words in total
		vs. 9-15	17 words after atnach.

8. The name יהוה appears 4x (vs. 1a, 3a, 5a and 15b) and אֱלֹהִים 2x (in vs. 9a and 15b, where it clearly functions as a device for inclusion).

© 2008

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@planet.nl University of Groningen, The Netherlands