

# Psalm 146— 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 146

- Psalm 146 is the first of the five Hallelu-yah Psalms (146-150) concluding both Book V and the entire Psalter. They are all provided with a *hallelu-yah* at the beginning and end. Typical of these psalms is that God is never addressed directly but only spoken about.
- Psalm 146 is the follow-up to both Psalm 145 and 144, reiterating the idea of YHWH's *kingship and wondrous deeds* (Psalm 145) and the theme of the *happiness* of YHWH's people expressed by the keyword אֲשֶׁרִי, 'happy' (Psalm 144). The three psalms also share the use of series of seven.
- The numerical structure of the psalm is determined by form and content, and buttressed by the number **26** and the numerical value of the keyword אֲשֶׁרִי, **52**.

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

- Van der Lugt: 1-2 || 3-4, 5-6 || 7-8, 9-10 (3 cantos, 5 strophes, 9 verselines and 23 cola, taking vs. 1 and 6-9 as tricola).
- Fokkelman: 1-2, 3-4, 5-7b, 7c-9, 10 (5 strophes, 11 verselines and 24 cola, regarding the *hallelu-yah* at the beginning as the first colon – only here, not in Psalms 147-150 - and taking the *hallelu-yah* at the end as a subscription).
- Labuschagne: 1-2, 3-4 || 5-7b || 7c-9, 10 (3 cantos, 5 strophes, 10 verselines, 23 cola, taking vs. 7a-b and 7c-8a as separate verselines).

## Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: trust in YHWH as *Saviour*; **d**: happiness: YHWH is *Creator* and *Sustainer*.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה Hallelu-yah	<u>2</u>	= 2	+ 0		
	הַלְלִי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־יְהוָה:	1	4	4	4	
2	אֲהַלֵּלָהּ יְהוָה בְּחַיִּי^	3	3		3	
	אֲזַמְרָה לֵאלֹהֵי בְעוֹדֵי:	<u>3</u>		3	3	
	<b>Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-2</b>	10	= 7	+ 3	= 10	+ 0
3	אֶל־תִּבְטְחוּ בַגְּדֵיבַיִם^	2	3		3	
	בְּבֶן־אָדָם שָׂאִין לוֹ תְשׁוּעָה:	<u>5</u>		5	5	
	Total, v. 3	8	= 3	+ 5	= 8	+ 0
4	תֵּצֵא רוּחוֹ יֹשֵׁב לְאֲדָמָתוֹ^	3	4		4	
	בַּיּוֹם תִּהְיֶה אֲבִדוֹ עֲשֵׂתִנְתּוֹ:	<u>4</u>		4	4	
	Total, v. 4	8	= 4	+ 4	= 8	+ 0
	<b>Strophe 2 Total, v. 3-4</b>	16	= 7	+ 9	= 16	+ 0
	<b>Canto I Total, v. 1-4</b>	26	= 14	+ 12	= 26	+ 0

5	$\boxed{\text{אָשְׁרֵי}} = 52$	שָׂאֵל יַעֲקֹב בְּעֶזְרוֹ <sup>^</sup>	4	4	4	4
	(1+21+20+10 = 52)	שִׁבְרוּ עַל־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ:		4	4	4
	The 26th occurrence of	Total, v. 5		8	= 4 + 4 = 0 + 8	
	this key-word in the Psalter	Total, v. 1-5		34	= 18 + 16 = 26 + 8	
6	Middle word:	עֲשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ	5	3	3	3
	81=40+ $\boxed{1}$ +40	אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם <sup>^</sup>		6	6	6
	Mid. colon: 23=11+ $\boxed{1}$ +11	הַשֶּׁמֶר אָמַת לְעוֹלָם:		3	3	3
	Middle verselines (6-7b):	Total, v. 6		12	= 9 + 3 = 0 + 12	
7a	10 = 4 + 2 + 4	עֲשֵׂה מִשְׁפָּט לְעֹשִׂיקִים	6	3	3	3
7b	Five middle cola:	נָתַן לֶחֶם לְרַעֲבִים <sup>^</sup>		3	3	3
	23 = 9 + 5 + 9	Total, v. 7ab		6	= 6 + 0 = 0 + 6	
		Total, v. 6-7b		18	= 15 + 3 = 0 + 18	
	<b>Canto II Middle Strophe 3</b>	<b>Total, v. 5-7b</b>		26	= 19 + 7 = 0 + 26	
		Total, v. 1-7b		52	= 33 + 19 = 26 + 26	
7c	Centre of vs. 5-10	יְהוָה מִתִּיר אֲסוּרִים:	7	3	3	3
8a	55 = 26 + $\boxed{3}$ + 26	יְהוָה פָּקַח עֵינָיִם		3	3	3
8b		יְהוָה זָקַף כַּפּוּפִים <sup>^</sup>	8	3	3	3
		יְהוָה אָהַב צְדִיקִים:		3	3	3
9		יְהוָה שָׁמַר אֶת־גֵּרִים	9	4	4	4
		יְתוֹם וְאַלְמָנָה יַעֲזֹרֶנָּה <sup>^</sup>		3	3	3
		וְדַרְךְ רַשָּׁעִים יַעֲזוּב:		3	3	3
		Total, v. 9		10	= 7 + 3 = 10 + 0	
		Strophe 4 Total, v. 7c-9		22	= 13 + 9 = 22 + 0	
10	Coda	יִמְלֹךְ יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם	10	3	3	3
		אֱלֹהֵינוּ צִיּוֹן לְדָר וְדָר תִּלְלוּ־יְהוָה:		4	4	4
		Strophe 5 Total, v. 10		7	= 7 + 0 = 7 + 0	
		Total, v. 9-10		17	= 14 + 3 = 17 + 0	
		Total, v. 8-10		26	= 20 + 6 = 26 + 0	
		<b>Canto III Total, v. 7c-10</b>		29	= 20 + 9 = 29 + 0	
		<b>Cantos II-III Total, v. 5-10</b>		55	= 39 + 16 = 29 + 26	
		Total, v. 1-10		81	= 53 + 28 = 55 + 26	
		With the two <i>hallelu-yahs</i> , v. 1-10		85	= 57 + 28	

## Observations

1. As in Psalm 145, the middle word is כָּל, 'all', in v. 6b; by adding 2 words on either side, we get a reasonable meaningful centre: the 5 words in v. 6b (81 = 38 + 5 + 38):

הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם the sea and all that is in them.

In my opinion, it is unlikely that the author consciously designed these words to be the meaningful centre. In themselves, they do not make sense, because the preposition בָּם, 'in them', relates to heaven, earth and sea, not only to the sea as suggested here. Therefore, the middle colon would be a better candidate, v. 6c (23 = 11 + 1 + 11):

הַשֹּׁמֵר אֶמֶת לְעוֹלָם who keeps faith forever.

However, the 26-word middle canto, coinciding with the middle strophe, vs. 5-7b, which contains the 2 middle verselines and the 5 middle cola is by far the best option:

אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׂאֵל יַעֲקֹב בְּעֶזְרוֹ ^ שִׁבְרוּ עַל־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ<sup>5</sup>  
 עֲשֵׂה שְׂמִים וָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם ^ הַשֹּׁמֵר אֶמֶת לְעוֹלָם:<sup>6</sup>  
 עֲשֵׂה מִשְׁפָּט לְעֲשׂוּקִים נֹתֵן לֶחֶם לְרָעִיבִים<sup>7a-b</sup>

Happy is he whose helper is the God of Jacob // whose hope is in YHWH his God.

Who made heaven and earth // the sea and all that is in them // who keeps faith forever.

Who deals out justice for the oppressed // who gives food to the hungry.

This statement is particularly meaningful, because it expresses the essential idea of the psalm. What makes Israel happy to have YHWH as their God is that he is the Creator and Sustainer of the world and their Saviour.

2. The distinct content of the meaningful centre, which is introduced by אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׂאֵל, 'happy', on the one hand, and the following section, vs. 7c-9, which is significantly introduced by five successive cola beginning with the name YHWH, on the other hand, clearly define the basic caesurae in the text: between vs. 4||5 and 7b||7c. Therefore, I propose the following strophic structure:

Strophe 1 vs. 1-2	The speaker's intention to praise YHWH	10 words	} 52
Strophe 2 vs. 3-4	Warning not to trust in human beings	16 words	
Strophe 3 vs. 5-7b	Happy is the person whose help is in YHWH	26 words	
Strophe 4 vs. 7c-9	Seven successive saving acts by YHWH	22 words	
Strophe 5 v. 10	YHWH's everlasting kingship	7 words.	

Strophes 1-2 constitute Canto I and Strophes 4-5 Canto III, which means that the present framework overrules the rhetoric structure proposed by Van der Lugt. He finds caesurae between vs. 1||3 and vs. 6||7, and follows the Masoretic verse division of vs. 7-8. The caesura I find between vs. 4||5 is underscored by the fact that Strophes 1-2 have 26 words, precisely as in Strophe 3. And the caesura between vs. 7b||7c is similarly underscored by the fact that Strophes 1-3 (vs. 1-7b) are made up of 52 (2 x 26) words, the numerical value of אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׂאֵל, 'happy'.

Seeing its content, v. 10 is obviously a coda. See Observation 6 below.

3. What makes the 26-word meaningful centre particularly significant is that it features the 26<sup>th</sup> and last appearance in the Psalter of this important key-word. As we have seen, it is clearly precluded in Psalm 144:15 - see Observation 6 in my Analysis of [Psalm 144](#). Moreover, it is the very first word in Psalm 1 and is woven 26 times into the text of Psalms 1-146. Consult Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 1](#).

4. The canto division of the psalm appears to be supported by a significant number of words and letters:

Canto I	vs. 1-4	<b>26</b> words	<b>108</b> (12 x 9) letters
Cantos II-III	vs. 5-10	<b>55</b> words	<b>216</b> (2 x 108 = 2 x 12 x 9) letters.

Since this cannot be waved aside as mere coincidence, the question arises why the poet used the numbers 9 and 12 as products to determine the number of letters in both parts of the text. The number **9** seems to have a special symbolic meaning, seeing that the psalm has **81** (9 x 9) words and the name YHWH occurs exactly **9** times (Observation 8). Further investigation may shed more light on its symbolic significance and on the use of letter count as an additional structural device in the book of Psalms.<sup>1</sup>

5. Psalm 146 is one of those psalms that have more than one distinct meaningful centre. The second part of the psalm (Cantos II-III, vs. 5-10, i.e., Strophes 3-5) has its own logotechnical centre, namely v. 7c, which is significantly flanked by **26** words on either side (55 = 26 + 3 + 26), with the key-word **מַתִּיר** at the centre:

**יְהוָה מַתִּיר אֲסוּרִים** YHWH sets the prisoners free.

This statement is clearly the consciously designed meaningful centre of this section, for the liberation of prisoners, signifying the freeing of the exiles, is YHWH's saving act *par excellence* and also one of the crucial leading themes in the Songs of Ascents. Therefore, it is not surprising that it has pride of place in the second part of the psalm, as the first and foremost of YHWH's *seven* saving acts. The fact that **מַתִּיר**, 'he sets free', is the middle word of this section strongly highlights YHWH's saving act *par excellence*.

6. The division of the text in vs. 6-9 is corroborated by the well-known **4 + 7 = 11** pattern in the summation of YHWH's wondrous deeds: consisting of **4** deeds phrased by means of participles dealing with YHWH as *Creator* and *Sustainer* (vs. 6-7b) and **7** deeds listing his distinctive characteristics (7c-9), with a caesura between v. 7b and 7c:

v. 6a	1.	who made heaven and earth
v. 6b	2.	who keeps faith forever
v. 7a	3.	who deals out justice for the oppressed
v. 7b	4.	who gives food to the hungry.
v. 7c	1.	YHWH sets the prisoners free
v. 8a	2.	YHWH opens the eyes of the blind
v. 8b	3.	YHWH raises those who are bowed down
v. 8c	4.	YHWH loves the just
v. 9a	5.	YHWH protects the strangers
v. 9b	6.	the widow and the fatherless he upholds
v. 9c	7.	but the course of the wicked he thwarts.

7. The divine name numbers feature in the following way in the text:

vs. 1-4	<b>26</b> words in total
vs. 1-5	<b>34</b> (2 x 17) words in total
vs. 5-7b	<b>26</b> words in total
vs. 9-10	<b>17</b> words in total
vs. 8-10	<b>26</b> words in total
vs. 7-10	<b>26</b> words before atnach
vs. 1-10	<b>85</b> (5 x 17) words, including the two <i>hallelu yah</i> 's.

<sup>1</sup> For the observation about the letter count (which I checked and found to be correct) I am indebted to Mr. P.H. Lamberts, who has followed my analyses through the years with keen interest.

8. The name יהוה appears no less than **9** times, of which the middle instance falls in v. 8a (vs. 1a, 2a, 5b, 7c, **8a**, 8b, 8c, 9a, 10a). The designations אֱלֹהִים and אֱלֹהִים occur in v. 5; the form יהֹ occurs twice (in the heading and subscription).

© 2009  
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](mailto:labuschagne.cj@planet.nl) University of Groningen, The Netherlands