Psalm 149— 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 149

- Psalm 149, the fourth Hallelu-yah Psalm, is the follow-up to its predecessor, where it is clearly preluded in the coda, as we have seen. It shares several features with the other psalms in the sub-group of 146-150, suggesting that they stem from the same hand.
- The 60-word psalm, as it stands in Codex L, is a numerical composition of exceptional quality based on the intentional reading כָּל־אֻמִּים, 'non-nations', in v. 7b (two words!).
- The canto structure of the 60-word text is primarily determined by the two leading themes: the praises due to YHWH (Canto I), and the execution of judgement on the foreign nations (Canto II). The significant numerical structure and several literary devices underscore the delimitation of the two cantos.
- The numerical value of the keyword חֲסִידִים 'the faithful', positioned at the arithmetic centre of the text (v. 5a), defines its total number of words: 60 (8+15+10+4+10+13).

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt: 1-2, 3-4 || 5-6, 7-9 (2 cantos with 4 strophes, 9 verselines and 18 cola).
- Fokkelman: similarly.
- Labuschagne: 1-3, 4-5 || 6, 7-9 (2 cantos with 4 strophes, 9 verselines and 18 cola).

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words of praise to YHWH; **d**: words about vengeance on the nations.
- The numbering of the verselines coincides with that of the Masoretic verses.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	הַלְלוּ יָהּ Hallelu-yah	2	= 2	+ 0		
	שִׁירוּ לַיהוָה שִׁיר חָדָשׁ^	4	4		4	
חֲסִידִים = **60**	תְּהִלָּתוֹ בִּקְהַל חֲסִידִים:	3		3	3	
(8+15+10+4+10+13 = 60)	Total, v. 1	7	= 4	+ 3	= 7	+ 0
2	יִשְׂמַח יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֹשָׂיו^	3	3		3	
	בְּנֵי־צִיּוֹן יָגִילוּ בְמַלְכָּם:	4		4	4	
	Total, v. 2	7	= 3	+ 4	= 7	+ 0
	Total, v. 1-2	14	= 7	+ 7	= 14	+ 0
3	יְהַלְלוּ שְׁמוֹ בְמָחוֹל^	3	3		3	
	בְּתֹף וְכִנּוֹר יְזַמְּרוּ־לוֹ:	4		4	4	
	Total, v. 3	7	= 3	+ 4	= 7	+ 0
Strophe 1	Total, v. 1-3	21	= 10	+ 11	= 21	+ 0
4	כִּי־רוֹצֶה יְהוָה בְּעַמּוֹ^	4	4		4	
	יְפָאֵר עֲנָוִים בִּישׁוּעָה:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 4	7	= 4	+ 3	= 7	+ 0
5 Middle words (v. 5a):	יַעְלְזוּ חֲסִידִים בְּכָבוֹד^	3	3		3	
59 = 28 + 3 + 28	יְרַנְּנוּ עַל־מִשְׁכְּבוֹתָם:	3		3	3	
Middle verseline and cola (v. 5)	Total, v. 5	6	= 3	+ 3	= 6	+ 0
Strophe 2	Total, v. 4-5	13	= 7	+ 6	= 13	+ 0
Canto I	**Total, v. 1-5**	**34**	= **17**	+ **17**	= 34	+ 0

6	רוֹמְמוֹת אֵל בִּגְרוֹנָם^	3	3					3
	וְחֶרֶב פִּיפִיּוֹת בְּיָדָם:	3		3				3
	Strophe 3 Total, v. 6	6	= 3	+ 3	= 0	+		6
	Total, v. 3-6	**26**	= 13	+ 13	= 20	+		6
7 *	לַעֲשׂוֹת נְקָמָה בַּגּוֹיִם^	3	3					3
	תּוֹכֵחֹת [בַּלְאֻמִּים] בַּל־אֻמִּים :	3/2		3				3/2
	Total, v. 7	6/5	= 3	+ 3/2	= 0	+		6/5
	Total, v. 1-7	**46/45**	= 23	+ 23/22	= 34	+		12/11
8	לֶאְסֹר מַלְכֵיהֶם בְּזִקִּים^	3	3					3
	וְנִכְבְּדֵיהֶם בְּכַבְלֵי בַרְזֶל:	3		3				3
	Total, v. 8	6	= 3	+ 3	= 0	+		6
	Total, v. 1-8	**52/51**	= 26	+ 26/25	= 34	+		18/17
9	לַעֲשׂוֹת בָּהֶם מִשְׁפָּט כָּתוּב	4	4					4
	הָדָר הוּא לְכָל־חֲסִידָיו הַלְלוּ־יָהּ:	4	4					4
	Total, v. 9	8	= 8	+ 0	= 0	+		8
	Strophe 4 Total, v. 7-9	20/19	= 14	+ 6/5	= 0	+		20/19
	Numerical Chiasmus v. 1-5	**34**	= 17	+ 17	= 34	+		0
	Canto II Total, v. 6-9	**26/25**	= 17	+ 9/8	= 0	+		26/25
	Total, v. 1-9	60/59	= **34**	+ **26**	= 34	+		26/25
	With the two *halllelu-yahs*, v. 1-9	64/63	= 38	+ **26/25**				

* For the enigmatic words בַּל־אֻמִּים, 'non-nations', of the Leningrad Codex in v. 7b (occurring also in Psalms 44:15, 57:10, and 108:4), see the note at the end of the chart in my Analysis of [Psalm 44].

In Pss. 44:15, 57:10 and 108:4, I have chosen to read and count בַּל־אֻמִּים as a single word, בַּלְאֻמִּים. In Psalm 149, however, the logotechnical evidence strongly suggests that the word was consciously intended *to be read* as two words, giving 60 words in total, instead of 59. In my view, it was *deliberately* written as two words to make the denigrating wordplay more concrete. It is important to note that the two-word reading is most functional in the context of Psalm 149, being perfectly in line with the leading theme of the second half of the psalm (vs. 6-9): wreaking vengeance on the foreign nations. This seems to suggest that the 2-word tradition originated in Psalm 149 and that the other instances, in Psalms 44, 57 and 108, were written in Codex L accordingly as two words.

In my analysis, I shall discuss both the 59-word and the 60-word text. Van der Lugt and Fokkelman count 59 words, leaving a 60-word text completely out of consideration. Christensen, on the other hand, does not consider a 59-word text, but analyses a 64-word text (the 60 words of the psalm as it stands in Codex L + the 4 words in the two hallelu-yahs) – see his logoprosodic analysis on www.bibal.net/.

Observations

1. In terms of the 60 words of the Codex L text, the logotechnical middle is to be found in v. 5a: the two words חֲסִידִים בְּכָבוֹד, 'the faithful in glory' (60 = 29 + 2 + 29), but they do not meet the requirement for meaningful centre. A 59-word text, however, appears to have a most appropriate and probably conciously designed meaningful centre: the three words in v. 5a (59 = 28 + 3 + 28):

יַעְלְזוּ חֲסִידִים בְּכָבוֹד^ Let the faithful exult in glory!

The meaningful centre on word level falls within the middle verseline coinciding with the two middle cola v. 5, which buttresses its meaningfulness:

יַעְלְזוּ חֲסִידִים בְּכָבוֹד ^ יְרַנְּנוּ עַל־מִשְׁכְּבוֹתָם:
Let the faithful exult in glory // let them sing for joy on their beds.

The image of the rejoicing faithful certainly represents the gist of the psalm, which is a triumphant song of praise: the faithful may rejoice and rest assured that under all circumstances YHWH, their Maker and Saviour, is with them.

2. The word חֲסִידִים, 'the faithful', occurring also in vs. 1b and 9b, where it functions as an inclusion, occupies pride of place in the artithmetic middle of the text, which is not surprising, because it is a keyword of paramount importance. This is underscored by the fact that its numerical value, **60** (8 + 15 + 10 + 4 + 10 + 13) corresponds precisely with the number of words in the text as it stands in Codex L, reading בָּל־אֻמִּים as two words. Let us now examine the 60-word text logotechnically and in terms of content.

3. The 60-word text divides into two parts (cantos), tied together by a numerical chiasmus demonstrating their literary unity – see the chart:

   vs. 1-5   Call to Israel to praise and to rejoice in YHWH's glory: **34** (**17** + **17**) words
   vs. 6-9   Filled with joy, they are urged to wreak vengeance: **26** (**17** + 9) words.

Canto I is exclusively concerned with praises of YHWH and the joy of the faithful ones in his *glory*. The delimitation of Canto I is corroborated by its **34** words carefully contrived to have **17** words before and **17** after atnach. It is additionally demarcated by the apparent inclusion formed by the keyword חֲסִידִים , the faithful', in v. 1b and v. 5a, and by the fact that it is concluded by an explicit reference to the *'glory'* of YHWH (v. 5a).

In **Canto II** we have a totally different situation: this part of the psalm deals with the stark reality of the precarious position of the faithful in the world: having to execute judgement on the foreign nations threatening their existence. To this end, their point of departure is the "exaltation of God in their throats and a sword of mouths in their hand" (v. 6b). This metaphor signifies their first and foremost weapons, which I shall briefly explain below. The outcome of the struggle will be "the *'glory'* ('honour', הָדָר) for all his faithful" (v. 9b).

Therefore, in my judgement, the major caesura in the text is to be found between vs. 5||6 and not between vs. 4||5, as many scholars, including Van der Lugt and Fokkelman, contend. V. 6, at the beginning of Canto II, represents the nexus between the two distinct parts and also marks the turning-point in the text.

The interpretation of the psalm hinges on the correct understanding of the image in question, to which W.S. Prinsloo and Joshua Berman have recently contributed.[*] Though I do not agree with their division of the text, vs. 1-6a and vs. 6b-9, assuming with the New American Bible a break between vs. 6a||6b, their other insights proved to be helpful. In my opinion, v. 6 as a whole represents the nexus between Canto I and Canto II – and not particularly v. 6b, as claimed by Berman. V. 6a concludes the purely laudatory activity of the organs of speech, while v. 6b introduces a metaphorical activity: the 'sword of mouths', signifying the potency of speech as a weapon. At the same time, it denotes the primary instrument for the execution of justice, the conventional double- (or multi-) edged sword, to be followed by chains and iron shackles.

The delimitation of Canto II, vs. 6-9, is logotechnically supported by its **26** words, with **17** before and 9 after atnach. In addition, it is concluded by the הָדָר (*'glory'*, *'adornment'*), of YHWH's faithful (v. 9b), precisely as YHWH's כָּבוֹד (*'glory')* concludes Canto I (v. 5a).

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[*] W.S. Prinsloo, "Psalm 149: Praise Yahweh with Tambourine and Two-edged Sword", *ZAW* 109 (1997), pp. 395-407, and Joshua Berman, "The 'Sword of Mouths' (Jud. iii 16; Ps. cxlix 6; Prov. v 4): A Metaphor and its Ancient Near Eastern Context", *VT* 52 (2002), pp. 291-303.

The **7** acts performed by the faithful – arranged in a menorah pattern with the punishment of the peoples at the centre - are additional evidence for the unity of Canto II:

1. they have exaltations in their throats (v. 6a)
2. they have a sword of mouths in their hands (v. 6b)
3. they will wreak vengeance on the nations (v. 7a)
4. **and punishment on the peoples (v. 7b)**
5. they will bind their kings with chains (v. 8a)
6. and their nobles with iron shackles (v. 8b)
7. they will execute the judgement decreed against them (v. 9a).

V. 9b, which does not feature in the series of the **7** acts, is clearly designed as a coda. Compare the coda of Psalm 148 – see Observation 5 in my Analysis of Psalm 148.

4. In the 60-word text, the *kabod* number **23** and the divine name numbers feature in the following way:

vs. 1-5	**34** words in total, with **17** before and **17** after atnach
vs. 3-6	**26** words in total
vs. 1-7	**46** words in total, with **23** before and **23** after atnach
vs. 1-8	**52** words in total, with **26** before and **26** after atnach
vs. 6-9	**26** words in total, with **17** before atnach
vs. 1-9	**34** (2 x **17**) words before and **26** after atnach
vs. 1-9	**34** (2 x **17**) words in Column c and **26** in Column d.

5. The explicit reference to the dance and its accompanying musical instruments in v. 3 clearly serves to prelude the 10 musical instruments in Psalm 150. There we find two animated instruments: the 'dance' (the 5th), and 'everything with breath' (the 10th). Compare Observation 4 in my Analysis of Psalm 150.

6. The name יהוה appears 2x (vs. 1a an 4a) and אֵל once (v. 6a); the form יָהּ occurs 2x (in each of the two *hallelu-yahs*).

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