

Psalm 150— 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 feature of Psalm 150

- The strophic structure of the text reflects the universality and the comprehensiveness of the praise due to God by the use of the number of fulfilment, **11**, to structure the text in the pattern $4 + 7 = 11$. Strophe 1 (vs. 1-2) has **4** cola with **11** words, and Strophe 2 (3-6) **7** cola with **22** words. This division of the text is significantly confirmed on letter level.

Strophic structure - Strophe boundary: |

- Van der Lugt: 1-2 | 3-6 (2 strophes with 5 verselines and 11 cola, taking v. 6 as the 3rd colon of verseline 5).
- Fokkelman: similarly, but he finds 6 verselines and 12 cola, taking the concluding *hallelu-yah* as the 2nd colon of verseline 6.
- Labuschagne: as Fokkelman, 6 verselines. I find 11 cola, taking v. 6a as a monocolon.

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: opening and concluding call to praise God; **d**: ninefold call to praise him.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	הַלְלוּ יְהוָה Hallelu-yah	<u>2</u> = 2 + 2				
	הַלְלוּ אֱלֹהֵי בְרָכָה שׁוֹן	1 3	3			3
	הַלְלוּהוּ בְרָקִיעַ עִזּוֹ:	3		3	3	
2	הַלְלוּהוּ בְּנִבְוֹתָיו	2 2	2		2	
	הַלְלוּהוּ כְּרֹב גְּדֻלוֹ:	3		3	3	
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-2	11 = 5 + 6			8 + 3	
3	הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתִקְעַ שׁוֹפָר	3 3	3		3	
	Middle word: 16 + 1 + 16 : וְכִנּוֹר וְכִנּוֹר	3		3	3	
	Middle colon: 11 = 5 + 1 + 5 Total, v. 3	<u>6</u> = 3 + 3			<u>6</u> + <u>0</u>	
	No meaningful centre Total, v. 1-3	17 = 8 + 9			14 + 3	
4	הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתֹף וּמְחֹלָל	4 3	3		3	
	הַלְלוּהוּ בְּמִנִּים וְעוּגָב:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 2-4	<u>17</u> = 8 + 9			<u>17</u> + <u>0</u>	
	Total, v. 1-4	23 = 11 + 12			20 + 3	
5	הַלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצְלֵי שִׁמְעַ	5 3	3		3	
	הַלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצְלֵי תְרוּעָה:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 2-5	23 = 11 + 12			23 + 0	
6	כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְהַלֵּל יְהוָה הַלְלוּ יְהוָה	6 4	4			4
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 3-6	<u>22</u> = 13 + 9			<u>18</u> + <u>4</u>	
	Total, v. 1-6	33 = 18 + 15			26 + 7	
	With the two <i>hallelu-yahs</i> , v. 1-6	37 = 22 + 15				

Observations

1. Psalm 150 concludes not only the five closely connected Hallelu-yah Psalms (146-150) but also the 31 psalms of Book Vb (120-150), and, last but not least, in its capacity of super doxology, the entire Psalter. The author invites every living creature on earth to praise YHWH with every possible instrument.
2. Neither the middle word וְכִנּוֹר, 'and lyre', nor the middle colon, v. 3b, seem to have been intended to constitute a meaningful centre. This is not surprising, given the stringent structure of the psalm on the level of cola, words, and even letters.
3. The only caesura in the text is that between vs. 2||3. In my opinion, there is no break between 4||5, as suggested by Christensen. The psalm clearly divides into two close-knit strophes: vs. 1-2 and vs. 3-6, determined by content and logotechnical devices.

Strophe 1 Call to praise God in all his dwellings 4 cola 11 words

Strophe 2 Call to praise him with all possible instruments 7 cola 22 words.

The number of fulfilment, 11, defines the bipartite framework in two ways: on the level of cola, by means of the 4 + 7 = 11 pattern, and on word level, by 11 words in Strophe 1 and 22 (2 x 11) in Strophe 2. Compare the use of this pattern in [Psalm 146](#) (Observation 4) and [Psalm 147](#) (Observation 3). The strophic structure is corroborated on the level of letters: Strophe 1 has 52 (2 x 26) letters and Strophe 2 104 (4 x 26) – see Observation 8.

4. In the 7 cola of Strophe 2 we find 10 explicitly mentioned musical instruments:

1. praise him with the shofar¹
2. praise him with harp² and lyre³
3. praise him with timbrel⁴ and dance⁵
4. praise him with stringed instruments⁶ and pipes⁷
5. praise him with sounding cymbals⁸
6. praise him with triumphant cymbals⁹
7. let everything with breath¹⁰ praise YH.

In my opinion, the dance was considered an *instrument* producing music, since in biblical antiquity, as in many cultures, dancing was the *bodily* expression of music. It was performed to the accompaniment of musical instruments, especially the timbrel, to convey feelings of pleasure and joy. The use of the body as a musical instrument involved stamping of the feet, clapping of the hands, rhythmic twisting and writhing, and letting bangles and anklets sound.

The word מְחוֹל, 'dance', most certainly did not have the (erotic) connotation some people sense in the English word 'dance'. Therefore, we should not allow puritan aversion against modern forms of dancing to make us frown upon dancing in biblical times. Neither is there any reason for trying to find some musical instrument behind the word מְחוֹל. It was only in medieval Hebrew that the feminine form מְחֻלָּה (and in modern Hebrew also מְחוֹל) achieved the derived meaning of 'timbrel' or 'tambourine' – see *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 569.

What is true of the dance as an instrument producing music also applies to the 10th instrument: 'everything that breathes' (v. 6), the many-voiced vehicle for expressing praise of all living beings.

5. Unlike Van der Lugt, who takes v. 6 as the third colon of verseline 5, I consider it a separate monocolic verseline, in accordance with the Masoretic verse division. In terms of form (the deviating verbal form **תִּהְיֶה לֵל**) and content ('everything that has breath'), it may even be regarded as a little coda concluding the doxology as a grand finale.
6. The first and last cola (v. 1a and v. 6) stand out (Column d), because they deviate from the stereotyped phrasing of vs. 1b-5 (Column c). They clearly serve as a device for inclusion. The inclusion are made up of altogether **7** words, while the inner body of the psalm (Column c) has **26** words.
7. Despite the stringent use of the number **11** to structure the text logotechnically, the author still managed to weave the *kabod* number **23** as well as the two divine name numbers into its fabric:

vs. 1-3	17 words in total
vs. 2-4	17 words in total
vs. 1-4	23 words in total
vs. 2-5	23 words in total
vs. 1b-5	26 words in total
vs. 1-6	156 (6 x 26) letters in total.
8. Instead of the name **יְהוָה**, which is significantly absent, we find the word **אֱלֹ**, 'God' (v. 1a) - compare Ps. 146:5a and Ps. 149:6a - and surprisingly, the short form **יְהִ** in v. 6, in addition to the two instances in the two *hallelu-yahs*. It is likely that its use served to achieve exactly **156** (6 x **26**) letters in the 33 words of the psalm in order to render the concluding doxology a perfect numerical composition, even on the level of letters.

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