

Psalm 135— 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 135

- Psalm 135 is obviously the follow-up to Psalm 134. There (134:1-2), the servants of YHWH, who stand in his house, are instructed to lift up their arms to the sanctuary and *bless* YHWH. Here (135:1-2), they are called on to *praise* him for his love and goodness.
- At the same time, Psalm 135 preludes and introduces Psalm 136, the Song of Praise *par excellence*, with which it constitutes the Great Hallel. This is underscored by the fact that the psalm is marked with a *hallelu-yah* at its beginning and end. The *hallelu-yahs* do not belong to its poetical body, being attached to it by the editors of the Psalter, in my opinion, to mark the beginning of the final praises offered to YHWH, which culminate in the five *Hallelu-yah* Psalms 146-150. For the function of *hallelu-yah*, see the Introduction to [Book V](#), “First Group of Eleven Psalms (107-113 + 114-117).
- Like Psalm 118, which it resembles in many ways, Psalm 135 is a sort of anthology, reiterating themes from the preceding psalms in a variegated mosaic of statements about YHWH’s saving acts. Its meaningful centre, vs. 10-12, dealing with the defeat of Sihon and Og, is clearly an elaboration on the meaningful centre of Psalm 118 (v. 15c): ‘The right hand of YHWH acts with power’. It relies particularly on Psalm 115 (vs. 3-8) for the theme of the futility of the idols in comparison with YHWH (vs. 15-18).

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

- Van der Lugt and Labuschagne: 1-2, 3-4 | 5-7 || 8-9, 10-12 | 13-14 || 15-17, 18 | 19-21 (3 cantos, 6 canticles with 9 strophes, 21 verselines and 47 cola).
- Fokkelman: 1-2, 3-4 | 5-7, 8-9, 10-12 | 13-14, 15-18, 19-21 (3 cantos with 8 strophes, 21 verselines and 46 cola, taking v. 5ab as a single colon).

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 coincides with that of the Masoretic verses.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	הִלְלוּ יְהוָה Heading	<u>2</u> = <u>2</u>				
	הִלְלוּ אֶת־שֵׁם יְהוָה [^]	4	4		4	
	הִלְלוּ עֲבָדֵי יְהוָה:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 1	<u>7</u>	= 4	+ 3	= 7	+ 0
2	שְׁעֵמֲדִים בְּבַיִת יְהוָה [^]	3	3		3	
	בְּחִצְרוֹת בַּיִת אֱלֹהֵינוּ:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 2	<u>6</u>	= 3	+ 3	= 6	+ 0
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-2	<u>13</u>	= 7	+ 6	= 13	+ 0
3	הִלְלוּ יְהוָה כִּי־טוֹב יְהוָה [^]	5	5		5	
	זָמְרוּ לְשִׁמּוֹ כִּי נְעִים:	4		4	4	
	Total, v. 3	<u>9</u>	= 5	+ 4	= 9	+ 0
4	כִּי־יַעֲקֹב בָּחַר לֹו יְהוָה [^]	5	5		5	
	יִשְׂרָאֵל לְסִגְלָתוֹ:	2		2	2	
	Total, v. 4	<u>7</u>	= 5	+ 2	= 7	+ 0
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 3-4	<u>16</u>	= 10	+ 6	= 16	+ 0
	Canticle I.1 Total, v. 1-4	<u>29</u>	= 17	+ 12	= 29	+ 0

5	כִּי אֲנִי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־גָדוֹל יְהוָה [^] וְאֶרְגִּינוּ מִכָּל־אֱלֹהִים: Total, v. 5	3 3 3 3 3 3 <hr/> 3 3 3 9 = 6 + 3 = 9 + 0
6	כָּל אֲשֶׁר־חָפֵץ יְהוָה עָשָׂה בַשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ [^] בַּיָּמִים וְכָל־תְּהוֹמוֹת: Total, v. 6 Total, v. 4-6	4 4 4 3 3 3 <hr/> 3 3 3 10 = 7 + 3 = 10 + 0 26 = 18 + 8 = 26 + 0
7	מֵעֵלָה נִשְׁאִים מִקְצֵה הָאָרֶץ בְּרָקִים לְמִטֵּר עָשָׂה [^] מוֹצֵא־רִיחַ מֵאוֹצְרוֹתָיו: Total, v. 7	4 4 4 3 3 3 <hr/> 3 3 3 10 = 7 + 3 = 10 + 0 29 = 20 + 9 = 29 + 0 51 = 33 + 18 = 51 + 0
	Canticle I.2 Strophe 3 Total, v. 5-7 Total, v. 2-7	29 = 20 + 9 = 29 + 0 51 = 33 + 18 = 51 + 0
	Canto I Total, v. 1-7	58 = 37 + 21 = 58 + 0
8	שֶׁהִכָּה בְּכוֹרֵי מִצְרַיִם [^] מֵאָדָם עַד־בְּהֵמָה: Total, v. 8 Total, v. 6-8	3 3 3 3 3 3 <hr/> 6 = 3 + 3 = 6 + 0 26 = 17 + 9 = 26 + 0
9	שִׁלַּח אֶתֹּת וּמִפְתִּיִם בְּתוֹכְכִי מִצְרַיִם [^] בְּפִרְעֹה וּבְכָל־עַבְדָּיו: Total, v. 9 Strophe 4 Total, v. 8-9 Total, v. 6-9	3 3 3 2 2 2 <hr/> 3 3 3 8 = 5 + 3 = 8 + 0 14 = 8 + 6 = 14 + 0 34 = 22 + 12 = 34 + 0
10	שֶׁהִכָּה גִּזְיִים רַבִּים [^] Middle colon: 47=23+ 1 +23: וַיְהִרְגוּ מַלְכִּים עֲצוּמִים: Total, v. 10	3 3 3 3 3 3 <hr/> 6 = 3 + 3 = 6 + 0
11	לְסִיחֹן מִלֶּדֶ הָאֲמָרִי Middle word: 163=81+ 1 +81 וַיִּלְעֹגוּ מִלֶּדֶ הַבָּשׂוּף [^] וּלְכָל מַמְלָכוֹת כְּנָעַן: Total, v. 11	3 3 3 3 3 3 <hr/> 9 = 6 + 3 = 9 + 0
12	וַנִּתֵּן אֲרָצָם נַחֲלָה [^] נַחֲלָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַמּוֹ: Middle strophe (vs. 10-12): 9=4+1+4 Total, v. 12 163 = 72 + 21 + 70 Strophe 5 Total, v. 10-12	3 3 3 3 3 3 <hr/> 6 = 3 + 3 = 6 + 0 21 = 12 + 9 = 21 + 0 35 = 20 + 15 = 35 + 0
13	26 letters יְהוָה שִׁמְךָ לְעוֹלָם [^] יְהוָה זְכָרְךָ לְדֹר־וָדָר: Total, v. 13	3 3 3 4 4 4 <hr/> 7 = 3 + 4 = 0 + 7
14	כִּי־יִדְוִין יְהוָה עַמּוֹ [^] וְעַל־עַבְדָּיו יִתְנַחֵם: Total, v. 14 Canticle II.2 Strophe 6 Total, v. 13-14 Canto II Total, v. 8-14	4 4 4 3 3 3 <hr/> 7 = 4 + 3 = 7 + 0 14 = 7 + 7 = 7 + 7 49 = 27 + 22 = 42 + 7

15	עֲצָבֵי תַגְזִים כִּסְף וְזָהָב־ מַעֲשֵׂה יָדַי אָדָם: Total, v. 15	4 4 4 3 3 3 7 = 4 + 3 = 7 + 0
16	פֶּה־לָהֶם וְלֹא יִדְבְּרוּ־ עֵינִים לָהֶם וְלֹא יֵרְאוּ: Total, v. 16	4 4 4 4 4 4 8 = 4 + 4 = 8 + 0
17	אֲזִנִּים לָהֶם וְלֹא יֶאֱזִינֻ־ אֶף אֵין־יִשְׁרֹנָה בְּפִיהֶם: Total, v. 17 Total, v. 16-17	4 4 4 5 5 5 9 = 4 + 5 = 9 + 0 17 = 8 + 9 = 17 + 0
	Strophe 7 Total, v. 15-17	24 = 12 + 12 = 24 + 0
18	כְּמוֹתָם יִהְיוּ עֹשִׂיהֶם־ כָּל אֲשֶׁר־בָּטַח בָּהֶם: Strophe 8 Total, v. 18 Canticle III.1 Total, v. 15-18 Total, v. 5-18	3 3 3 4 4 4 7 = 3 + 4 = 7 + 0 31 = 15 + 16 = 31 + 0 109 = 62 + 47 = 102 + 7
19	בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּרְכּוּ אֶת־יְהוָה־ בֵּית אֶהְרֹן בָּרְכּוּ אֶת־יְהוָה: Total, v. 19 Total, v. 18-19	5 5 5 5 5 5 10 = 5 + 5 = 10 + 0 17 = 8 + 9 = 17 + 0
20	בֵּית הַלְוִי בָרְכּוּ אֶת־יְהוָה־ יִרְאִי יְהוָה בָּרְכּוּ אֶת־יְהוָה: Total, v. 20	5 5 5 5 5 5 10 = 5 + 5 = 10 + 0
21	Coda בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה מִצִּיּוֹן שֶׁכֶן יְרוּשָׁלַם תְּלַל־יְהוָה: First instance in a series of 7 in Psalms 135-150 See Observation 5 below Canticle III.2 Strophe 9 Total, v. 19-21 Canto III Total, v. 15-21 Total, v. 1-21 With the heading and תְּלַל־יְהוָה (2x) v. 1-21	3 3 3 2 2 2 5 = 5 + 0 = 5 + 0 15 = 10 + 5 = 15 + 0 25 = 15 + 10 = 25 + 0 56 = 30 + 26 = 56 + 0 163 = 94 + 69 = 156 + 7 167 = 96 + 71 = 160 + 7

Observations

1. In search of the meaningful centre of Psalm 135, I found the middle strophe (Strophe 5), vs. 10-12, to be the best candidate (9 = 4 + 1 + 4). It is highlighted by the middle word in v. 11b (163 = 81 + 1 + 81), the middle colon in v. 10b (47 = 23 + 1 + 23), and the middle verseline in v. 11(9 = 4 + 1 + 4), which all fall within the middle strophe.
In much the same way as Psalm 118, on word level, it has a slightly off-centre meaningful middle (72 + 21 + 70) – see Observation 1 in my Analysis of Psalm 118.
The meaningful centre here clearly elaborates on the meaningful centre of Psalm 118, ‘The right hand of YHWH acts with power’ (118:15c), showing the close connection between the two psalms:
Vs. 10-12: the defeat of Sihon and Og demonstrating YHWH’s power 21 words.

2. The dependence of Psalm 135 on Psalm 118 is additionally demonstrated by the fact that, as in Psalm 118, the direction of address is used to achieve a specific compositional formula – see Observation 6 in my Analysis of [Psalm 118](#). As shown in Columns c and d, there are **156** (6 x **26**) words spoken *about* God, and **7** directly addressed to God.

In light of the apparent purpose of compositional formula in Psalm 118 – to prelude Psalm 119 – there is every reason to believe that in Psalm 135 the formula **156 + 7** has been designed to prelude Psalm 136, more particularly its **26** stereotyped subordinate clauses containing altogether **78** (3 x **26**) words. The **7** words addressed to YHWH appear to have been meticulously devised so as to comprise exactly **26** letters, in support of this precluding function.

3. The number of fullness, **7**, which symbolizes not only the abundance of the praise due to YHWH but also the fullness of his acts, appears to play an important role. I have marked all the occurrences of number **7** and its multiples in **bold** face in the chart, though some instances may be coincidence. Note also that all three cantos comprise **7** verselines.
4. Like Psalm 118, Psalm 135 is concluded by a coda: v. 21, which clearly stands out in terms of content within the last strophe. For the coda, see the [General Introduction](#), “The use of a coda as a device for conclusion”. This is additional evidence for the dependence of Psalm 135 (and 136) on Psalm 118. Note also that the four words **כִּי לְעוֹלָם הַסְדֵּרוֹ**, ‘for his steadfast love endures for ever’, in the coda of Psalm 118 (v. 29b), reverberates **26** times in Psalm 136.
5. Psalm 135 is the first psalm in a typical series of eleven psalms forming a coherent group: the Second Group of Eleven Psalms in Book V (135-137 + 138-145). The compositional unity of the larger group, Psalms 135-150, is strikingly demonstrated by the series of **7** occurrences of the important key-word, the root **בִּרַךְ**, ‘to bless’ (135:21a, 144:1a, 145:1b, 2a, 10b, 21b, 147:13b). See the Introduction to [Book V](#).
6. The divine name numbers feature in the following fashion:

vs. 1-4	17 words before atnach
vs. 4-6	26 words in total
vs. 2-7	51 (3 x 17) words in total
vs. 6-8	26 words in total, with 17 words before atnach
vs. 6-9	34 (2 x 17) words in total
vs. 16-17	17 words in total
vs. 5-18	102 (6 x 17) words spoken about God (Column c)
vs. 18-19	17 words in total
vs. 15-21	26 words after atnach
vs. 1-21	156 (6 x 26) words spoken about God (Column c).
7. The name **יְהוָה** occurs 15 times (vs. 1a, 1b, 2a, 3a, 5a, 6a, 13a, 13b, 14a, 19a, 19b, 20a, 20b (2x) and 21a). The shorter form **יְהִי** occurs twice (vs. 3a and 4a), bringing the total number of occurrences of the divine name up to **17**. The designations **אֱלֹהֵינוּ**, ‘our God’, and **אֲדֹנָינוּ**, ‘our Lord’, occur in vs. 2b and 5c respectively.

© 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