

# Psalm 56:1–14

## Translation, Logoprosodic Analysis, and Observations

### Prayer for Deliverance: Terror and Trust

Ps 56:1–14

#### A. *Have Mercy on Me, O God, for They Press Their Attack against Me* (56:1–2) [4.4]

56:1	For the music director / on “A Dove of Silence, Distant Ones” / a <i>Miktam</i> belonging to David // when the Philistines seized him in Gath //	17 2 7 1 <u>14 1</u>	5 5 0 2 2 0 <u>4 0 4</u>
		55:13–56:1	<b>119 87 32</b>
56:2	Have mercy on me, O God / for men hound me // all day long / they press their attack against me //	21 2 <u>15 2</u>	5 5 0 <u>4 0 4</u>
		55:24–56:2	<b>34 23 11</b>

#### B. *My Slanderers Hound Me Continually, Attacking Me Haughtily* (56:3) [2.2]

56:3	My slanderers hound me / all day long //	<u>13 2</u>	<u>4 4 0</u>
		55:21–56:3a	<b>64 51 13</b>
	For many are attacking me / <sup>a</sup> haughtily //	<u>15 2</u>	<u>5 0 5</u>
		55:21–56:3	<b>69 51 18</b>

#### C. *When I am Afraid, I Trust God Whose Word I Praise* (56:4–5) [6.5]

56:4	<b>Whenever</b> / <sup>a</sup> I am afraid // as for me / <b>in you I trust</b> //	6 2 <u>10 2</u>	2 2 0 <u>3 0 3</u>
		56:1–4	<b>34 18 16</b>
56:5	<b>In God</b> / whose word I praise //	<u>15 2</u>	<u>3 3 0</u>
		56:2–5a	<b>26 14 12</b>
	<b>In God</b> / <sup>a</sup> <b>in whom I trust</b> /	<u>11 2</u>	<u>2 2 0</u>
		56:1–5b	<b>39 23 16</b>
	I shall not be afraid //	<u>6 1</u>	<u>2 2 0</u>
		55:17–56:5c	<b>116 84 32</b>
	<b>What can a (mere) mortal do</b> / <sup>b</sup> to me? //	<u>10 2</u>	<u>4 0 4</u>
		56:2–5	<b>34 18 16</b>

**D. They Twist My Words and Conspire to Take My Life (56:6–7) [4.5]**

56:6	All day long / my words they twist //	14 2	4 4 0
	against me / <sup>a</sup> they are all plotting evil //	<u>14 2</u>	<u>4 0 4</u>
		56:3–6	33 17 16
56:7	They conspire /	<u>6 1</u>	<u>1 1 0</u>
		56:3–7a	34 18 16
	They lurk about / they watch my heels //	18 2	4 4 0
	as / <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">they wait hoping to take my life</span> //	<u>9 2</u>	<u>3 0 3</u>
		56:2–7	50 27 23

**E. Deliver Us from Their Malice, O God—Bring These People Down (56:8–9) [5.4]**

56:8	From their malice deliver us //	10 1	4 4 0
	in anger / bring (these) people <sup>a</sup> down O God //	<u>14 2</u>	<u>4 0 4</u>
		56:1–8	69 38 31
56:9	My lament / record it yourself /	<u>13 2</u>	<u>3 3 0</u>
		56:5–9a	38 23 15
	List my tears / <sup>a</sup> on your bottle //	14 2	3 3 0
	is that not / in your reckoning? //	<u>9 2</u>	<u>2 0 2</u>
		56:6–9	32 19 13

**F. By God's Help, Whose Word I Praise, I Will Not Fear (56:10–12) [5.6]**

56:10	Then / <sup>a</sup> my enemies will turn back /	<u>16 2</u>	<u>4 4 0</u>
		56:3–10	36 23 13
	<b>Whenever</b> I call (for help) //	6 1	2 2 0
	by this I will know / that God is for me //	<u>9 2</u>	<u>5 0 5</u>
		56:3–10	60 34 26
56:11	<b>In God</b> <sup>a</sup> will I praise (his) word //	14 1	3 3 0
	<b>in YHWH</b> / will I praise (his) word //	<u>13 2</u>	<u>3 0 3</u>
		56:10–11	17 9 8
56:12	<b>In God I trust</b> / I am not afraid //	17 2	4 4 0
	what can a (mere) human / <sup>a</sup> do to me //	<u>10 1</u>	<u>4 0 4</u>
		56:6–12	54 32 22



# Summary of the Logoprosodic Analysis

1. Psalm 56 has eight strophes: 56:1–2, 3, 4–5, 6–7, 8–9, 10–12, 13 and 14.

A	56:1–2	2 balanced dyads + pivot:	$[17 + 7] + 14 + [21 + 15]$	=	24 + 14 + 26	morae
B	56:3	balanced dyad:	$[13 + 15]$	=	13 + 15	morae
C	56:4a–5a	balanced dyad:	$[16 + 15]$	=	16 + 15	morae
	56:5b–d	balanced dyad + pivot:	$[11 + 6 + 10]$	=	11 + 6 + 10	morae

D	56:6–7	2 balanced dyads + pivot:	$[14 + 14] + 6 + [18 + 9]$	=	28 + 6 + 37	morae
D	56:8–9	2 balanced dyads + pivot:	$[10 + 14] + 13 + [14 + 9]$	=	24 + 13 + 23	morae

C'	56:10	balanced dyad:	$[16 + (6 + 9)]$	=	16 + 15	morae
	56:11–12	2 balanced dyads:	$[14 + 13] + [17 + 10]$	=	27 + 27	morae
B'	56:13	balanced dyad:	$[14 + 14]$	=	14 + 14	morae
A'	56:14	2 balanced dyads:	$[13 + 9] + [13 + 7]$	=	22 + 20	morae

- The 1<sup>st</sup> strophe (56:1–2) is a single part with two subdivisions: 56:1 and 2.
  - 55:13–56:1      **119** (= **17** x 7) words and **32** words after *atnach*
  - 55:24–56:2      **34** (= **17** x 2) words and **23** words before *atnach*
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> strophe (56:3) is a single part with two subdivisions: 56:3a and 3b.
  - 55:21–56:3      **64** (= **32** x 2) words and **51** (= **17** x 3) words before *atnach*
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> strophe (56:4–5) has two parts with five subdivisions: 56:4, 5a, 5b, 5c and 5d.
  - 56:2–4            **23** words
  - 56:1–4            **34** (= **17** x 2) words
  - 56:2–5            **34** (= **17** x 2) words
- The 4<sup>th</sup> strophe (56:6–7) is a single part with three subdivisions: 56:6, 7a and 7bc.
  - 56:3–6            **17** words before *atnach*
  - 56:2–7            **23** words after *atnach*
- The 5<sup>th</sup> strophe (56:8–9) is a single part with three subdivisions: 56:8, 9a and 9bc.
  - 56:1–8            **69** (= **23** x 3) words
  - 56:6–9            **32** words
- The 6<sup>th</sup> strophe (56:10–12) has two parts, with four subdivisions: 56:10a, 10bc, 11 and 12.
  - 56:3–10           **34** (= **17** x 2) words before *atnach* and **26** words after *atnach*
  - 56:10–11         **17** words
  - 56:6–12           **32** words before *atnach*
- The 7<sup>th</sup> strophe (56:13) is a single part with two subdivisions: 56:13a and 13b.
  - 56:8–13           **26** words before *atnach*
  - 56:9–13           **17** words after *atnach*
- The 8<sup>th</sup> strophe (56:14) is a single part with two subdivisions: 56:14ab and 14cd.
  - 56:10–14         **43** = **26** + **17** [compositional formula]

## Observations

1. The five strophes in Psalm 56 may be outlined in a menorah pattern, which is determined primarily on prosodic grounds, as follows:

A	Have mercy on me, O God, for they press their attack against me	[4.4]	56:1–2
B	My slanderers hound me continually, attacking me haughtily	[2.2]	56:3
C	When I am afraid I trust God whose word I praise	[6.5]	56:4–5
X	<b>They conspire to take my life—deliver us, O God</b>	[5.4.4.5]	56:6–9
C'	By God's help, whose word I praise, I am not afraid	[5.6]	56:10–12
B'	I bind myself to God with vows—I present you my thank-offerings	[2.2]	56:13
A'	You rescued me from death so that I may walk before God	[4.4]	56:14

2. In terms of the 120 words in Psalm 56 (including the heading of 11 words in 56:1), the **arithmological center** falls between the words קוֹן נַפְשִׁי (“they wait [hoping to take] my life”) in 56:7b, with 60 words on either side. The initial **concentric compositional formula** is:

$$120 = 60 + 0 + 60 \quad [\text{word-count—including heading in 56:1}]$$

The two words קוֹן נַפְשִׁי (“they wait [hoping to take] my life”) constitute a **meaningful center**:

$$120 = 59 + 2 + 59 \quad [\text{word-count—including heading in 56:1}]$$

The **meaningful center** may be expanded to include five words on each side of the **arithmological center**, as follows:

המזה עקבי ישמרו	They watch my heels,
קוֹן נַפְשִׁי כאשר	As they wait hoping to take my life.
על און פלט למו	From their malice deliver us.

In this instance, the **concentric compositional formula** becomes:

$$120 = 55 + 10 + 55 \quad [\text{word-count—including heading in 56:1}]$$

3. The 36-word **meaningful framework**, with the 10-word framework highlighted in gray and the 24-word framework in yellow, reads as follows:

1	למנצח על־יונת אלם רחקים	To the music director, on <i>yonath-elim rechoqim</i> ,
	לרוד מכתם	belonging to David, a <i>Miktam</i> .
	באחו אתו פלשתים בנת	When the Philistines seized him in Gath.
2	הננן אלהים כִּי־שאפני אנוש	Have mercy on me, O God, for men hound me;
	כל־היום	all day long.
13	עלי אלהים נדריק	I have bound myself, O God with vows to you;
	אשלם תודת לך	I will present my thank-offerings to you.

כי הצלת נפשי ממות	For you have rescued my soul from death.
הלא רגלי מרחי	Have you not kept my feet from stumbling?
להתהלך לפני אלהים	That I may walk before God.
באור החיים	In the light of life.

4. Summary of the concentric compositional formulae:

$$120 = 55 + 10 + 55 \quad \text{word-count}$$

$$120 = 45 + 30 + 45$$

{with others in between}

$$120 = 12 + 96 + 12$$

$$120 = 5 + 110 + 5$$

$$64 = 23 + 18 + 23 \quad \text{SAS units}$$

$$34 = 12 + 10 + 12 \quad \text{briques (primary SAS units)}$$

5. In the prosodic structure of Psalm 56, the basic building blocks (**briques**) in each poetic **verset** are the **primary SAS (syntactic accentual stress) units**. These sub-units are delineated by the Masoretes, who marked most of the boundaries with one of the following:

- **Soph Pasuq** A large colon following a word signifies the end of a verse, which does not always coincide with the end of a sentence.
- **Atnach** A small caret-like mark (like ^) beneath the consonantal text, pointing upward, is used to divide most verses. Its primary importance for our purposes concerns its use in the matter of numerical composition—i.e., the total word-count in each line is divided into the number of words before and after *atnach*.
- **Oleh weyored** A combination of two accentual signs: a caret-like mark above the consonantal text, pointing to the left, used together with the accent *merka* (an upright line beneath the consonantal text slanting to the right). These two marks usually appear on the same word, but when that word is monosyllabic the *merka* falls on the following word. This major divider is usually considered to be a stronger disjunctive accent than *atnach*.

In the prosodic analysis presented with the translation (above), the presence of these three primary disjunctive markers is indicated with a double slash (/). Psalm 56 has 34 **briques** (primary SAS units), 31 of which are marked by:

- *soph pasuq* 14 times, at the end of each verse
- *atnach* 14 times, in each verse
- *oleh weyored* 3 times, in vv. 5, 9, 14).

The boundaries of the remaining **briques** are marked by:

- *rəḥîa<sup>c</sup>* 1 times (vv. 7)
- *šinnôr* 1 times (vv. 14)
- *dəḥî* 1 time (v. 5)

6. The prosodic structure of Psalm 56, in terms of its **briques** (primary SAS units), may be displayed as follows: ^ represents *atnach*; : represents *soph pasuq*; † represents *oleh weyored*; and † represents all other accent markers.

I A <sup>1</sup> *lamnaššēah ʿal yōnat ʿelem rəḥōqīm ləḏāwīd miqtām ^*  
*beʿəḥōz ʾōtō pəlištīm bəḡat :*  
<sup>2</sup> *honnēnī ʾəlōhīm kī šəʾāpānī ʾənōš ^ kol hayyôm lōḥēm yilḥāšēnī :*

B <sup>3</sup> *šāʾāpû šōrəray kol hayyôm ^ kī rabbīm lōḥāmīm lī mārôm :*

C <sup>4</sup> *yôm ʾīrāʾ ^ ʾānī ʾəlēkā ʾeḥtāḥ :*  
<sup>5</sup> *bēʾlōhīm ʾāhallēl dəbārō † bēʾlōhīm bātaḥtī †*  
*lōʾ ʾīrāʾ ^ mah yaʿāšeh bāsār lī :*

II X	<sup>6</sup> <i>kol hayyôm dəbāray yəʿaššēbū ^ ʿalay kol maḥšəḇōtām lārāʿ :</i>
	<sup>7</sup> <i>yāḡūrū yašpīnū † hēm māh ʿāqəḇay yišmōrū ^</i>
	<i>kaʾāšer qīwwū napšī :</i>
	<sup>8</sup> <i>ʿal ʾāwen pallet lāmō ^ bəʾāp ʿammīm hōrēd ʾəlōhīm :</i>
	<sup>9</sup> <i>nōdī sāpartāh ʾattāh † sīmāh dimʿatī ḥənōʾdekā ^</i>
	<i>hālōʾ bəsiḗrāteḡā :</i>

III C' <sup>10</sup> *ʾāz yāšūbū ʾōyəḇay ʾāḥōr bəyôm ʾeqrāʾ ^ zeh yādaʿtī kī ʾəlōhīm lī :*  
<sup>11</sup> *bēʾlōhīm ʾāhallēl dəbār ^ ba-yhwh ʾāhallēl dəbār :*  
<sup>12</sup> *bēʾlōhīm bātaḥtī lōʾ ʾīrāʾ ^ mah yaʿāšeh ʾādām lī :*

B' <sup>13</sup> *ʿalay ʾəlōhīm nəḏārēḡā ^ ʾāšallēm tōdōt lāk :*

A' <sup>14</sup> *kī hišsaltā napšī mimmāwet † hālōʾ raḡlay middeḥī †*  
*ləḥiḥallēḡ lipnē ʾəlōhīm ^ bəʾōr haḡayīm :*

7. The 34 **briques** are distributed within 16 strophes in Psalm 55 as follows:

$$(4 + 2 + 6) + (5 + 5) + (6 + 2 + 4) = 12 + 10 + 12 = 34$$

The **arithmological center** of Psalm 56 falls between the words *qīwwū napšī* (“they wait [hoping to take] my life”) in 56:6b, with a total of 59 words on either side. Psalm 56 has 64 SAS units, 34 **briques** (primary SAS units), 14 versets, and 7 strophes. The **arithmological center** is in the middle strophe, the middle two versets, the middle two **briques**, and the middle two SAS units. There are xxx morae in Psalm 56—with xxx morae before the **arithmological center** in 56:7b and xxx morae after it.

8. Terrien finds 2 parallel strophes [= cantos] in Psalm 56, each with a mirror-like structure and a refrain in its center, (*The Psalms* [2003], pp. 428–32). Van der Lugt, Labuschagne and Fokkelman all find 6 strophes. The logoprosodic analysis indicates that there are eight strophes; for this appears to be one of the few psalms without a single central strophe.

Christensen	Terrien	Van der Lugt	Fokkelman
I A 56:1–2	heading (v. 1)	heading (v. 1)	heading (v. 1)
B 56:3	I 56:2–8	I 1 56:2–3	1 56:2–3
C 56:4–5		2 56:4–5	2 56:4–5
II D 56:6–7		3 56:6–8	3 56:6–8
D' 56:8–9	II 56:9–14	II 4 56:9–10b	4 56:9–10
III C' 56:10–12		5 56:10c–12	5 56:11–12
B' 56:13		6 56:13–14	6 56:13–14
A' 56:14			

9. Note the following list of compositional numbers at the boundaries of the verses counting from the beginning:

56:1–4      **34** (= **17** x 2) words  
 56:1–7      **34** (= **17** x 2) words before *atnach*  
 56:1–8      **69** (= **23** x 3) words  
 56:1–12     **102** (= **17** x 6) words

It is not possible to utilize any of the four compositional numbers (**17**, **23**, **26** and **32**) until the end of verse 2, which leaves 13 possible boundaries to work with. In 4 out of 13 of these boundaries (or 31.8% of the time) a multiple of one of these four compositional numbers is present.

10. Determining the details of the musical and literary structures of Psalm 146 as a whole calls for input on the part of others in the BIBAL Forum, as we consider the rhetorical features in greater depth and further information contained in the *te'amim* of this particular text.

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