

# Psalm 58:1–12

## Translation, Logoprosodic Analysis, and Observations

### Lament: Prophetic Judgment Speech

Ps 58:1–12

#### A. *You Do Works of Wickedness Rather Than Justice* (58:1–3) [6.5]

58:1	For the music director, “Do Not Destroy” / a <i>Miktam</i> of David //	<u>  16  2_</u>	<u>  5  5  0</u>
		57:10–58:1	27 17 10
58:2	Is it true / that by default <sup>a</sup> you render righteousness? //	<u>  16  2_</u>	<u>  4  4  0</u>
		57:12–58:2a	17 13 4
	With equity do you judge / human beings? //	<u>  17  2_</u>	<u>  4  0  4</u>
		57:6–58:2	68 45 23
58:3	No, in your heart / you work wickedness //	13 2	5 5 0
	in the earth / the violence of your hands / you deal out //	<u>  17  3</u>	<u>  3  3  0</u>
		58:1–3	21 17 4

#### B. *The Wicked Who Speak Lies are Loathsome from Birth* (58:4) [2.2]

58:4	The wicked are loathsome / <sup>a</sup> from the womb //	<u>  14  2_</u>	<u>  3  3  0</u>
		57:12–58:4a	32 24 8
	They go astray from birth / speaking lies //	<u>  16  2</u>	<u>  4  0  4</u>
		57:10–58:4	50 32 18

#### C. *They Are Like Venomous Snakes Ignoring the Voice of Charmers* (58:5–6) [4.4]

58:5	Their venom / is like the venom of a serpent //	<u>  15  2_</u>	<u>  5  5  0</u>
		57:11–58:5a	49 34 15
	Like that of a deaf adder / that stops its ear //	<u>  15  2</u>	<u>  5  0  5</u>
		58:4–5	17 8 9
58:6	Which does not hear / the voice of charmers //	<u>  14  2_</u>	<u>  5  5  0</u>
		57:12–58:6a	51 34 17
	Who are skilled / weavers of spells //	<u>  13  2</u>	<u>  3  0  3</u>
		58:1–6	46 30 16



Scansion in SAS Units: (6.5).(2.2) . (4.4).(2.2).(4.4) . (2.2).(5.6)  
 $(11 + 4) + (8 + 4 + 8) + (4 + 11) = 15 + 16 + 15 = 46$

Concentric Compositional Formula:  $100 = 50 + 0 + 50$  [word count—with heading]

### Notes:

- 58:2<sup>a</sup> Reading *dehī* here in BHS as conjunctive.
- 58:4<sup>a</sup> Reading *munaḥ* here in BHS as disjunctive.
- 58:8<sup>a-a</sup> Reading the plural form *yidrākū* (“may they shoot [their arrows]”) here in place of *yidrōk* in BHS, with the sense of stretching the bow to shoot arrows.
- 58:8<sup>b-b</sup> Interpreting the word *יתמללו* in the sense of “headless”, i.e., without arrow-heads, from the root *מלל* (“circumcise, cut off”).
- 58:10<sup>a</sup> Reading *munaḥ* preceded immediately by *gaʿya* (= *meteg*) in BHS as disjunctive.
- 58:11<sup>a</sup> Reading *munaḥ* preceded immediately by *gaʿya* (= *meteg*) in Letteris as disjunctive; BHS omits *gaʿya* (= *meteg*).
- 58:12<sup>a</sup> Reading *munaḥ* here in BHS as disjunctive.
- 58:12<sup>b</sup> Reading *merka* preceded immediately by *gaʿya* (= *meteg*) in Letteris as disjunctive; BHS omits *gaʿya* (= *meteg*).

## Summary of the Logoprosodic Analysis

1. Psalm 58 has seven strophes: 58:1–3, 4, 5–6, 7, 8–9, 10 and 11–12

A	58:1–3	2 balanced dyads + pivot:	$[16 + 16] + 17 + [18 + 14]$	=	$32 + 17 + 32$	morae
B	58:4	balanced dyad:	$[14 + 16]$	=	$14 + 16$	morae
C	58:5	balanced dyad:	$[15 + 15]$	=	$15 + 15$	morae
	58:6	balanced dyad	$[14 + 13]$	=	$14 + 13$	morae
X	58:7	balanced dyad:	$[18 + 17]$	=	$18 + 17$	morae
C	58:8	balanced dyad:	$[20 + 18]$	=	$20 + 18$	morae
	58:9	balanced dyad:	$[13 + 14]$	=	$13 + 14$	morae
B	58:10	balanced dyad:	$[20 + 18]$	=	$49 + 51$	morae
A	58:11–12	balanced dyad:	$[15 + 15]$	=	$15 + 15$	morae
		balanced dyad:	$[16 + 18]$	=	$16 + 18$	morae

2. The 1<sup>st</sup> strophe (58:1–3) is a single part with five subdivisions: 58:1, 2a, 2b, 3a and 3b.

- 57:10–58:1      **17** words before *atnach*
- 57:6–58:2      **23** words after *atnach*
- 58:1–3          **17** words before *atnach*

3. The 2<sup>nd</sup> strophe (58:4) is a single part with two subdivisions: 58:4a and 4b.

- 57:10–58:4      **32** words after *atnach*

4. The 3<sup>rd</sup> strophe (58:5–6) has two parts with six subdivisions: 58:4a, 4b, 5a, 5b, 6a and 6b.
  - 58:4–5                **17** words
  - 58:1–6                **46** (= 23 x 2) words
5. The 4<sup>th</sup> strophe (58:7), which constitutes the structural center of Psalm 58, is a single bicolon:
  - 58:4–7                **17** words before *atnach*
6. The 5<sup>th</sup> strophe (58:8–9) has two parts with four subdivisions: 58:8a, 8b, 9a and 9b.
  - 58:7–8                **17** words
  - 58:7–9                **26** words
7. The 6<sup>th</sup> strophe (58:10) is a single part with two subdivisions: 58:10a and 10b.
  - 58:7–10               **17** words before *atnach*
8. The 7<sup>th</sup> strophe (58:11–12) has two parts with four subdivisions: 58:11a, 11 b, 12a and 12b.
  - 58:4–11               **34** (= 17 x 2) words after *atnach*
  - 58:8–12               **46 = 23 + 23**               [compositional formula]

## Observations

1. The seven strophes in Psalm 58 may be outlined in a menorah pattern, which is determined primarily on prosodic grounds, as follows:

A	Do you really judge people with equity [צדק]?	[6.5] 58:1–3
B	The wicked [רשעים] go astray from birth speaking lies	[2.2] 58:4
C	They are like venomous snakes who ignore the voice of charmers	[4.4] 58:5–6
X	<b>Smash their great teeth in their mouth, O YHWH!</b>	[2.2] 58:7
C'	Let them vanish like slugs that melt away to slime, like an aborted fetus	[4.4] 58:8–9
B'	Before the pot feels the heat of the fuel they are swept away in the storm	[2.2] 58:10
A'	The righteous [צדיק] will humiliate the wicked [רשע] / [לצדיק]	[5.6] 58:12

2. In terms of the 100 words in Psalm 58, the **arithmological center** falls between the words **מלתעות בפימו** (“in their mouth are great teeth”) in v. 7, with 50 words on either side. The initial *Concentric Compositional Formula* is:

$$100 = 50 + 0 + 50 \quad [\text{word-count—including heading in 58:1}]$$

Though the words **מלתעות בפימו** (“in their mouth are great teeth”) in v. 7 are a candidate for the **meaningful center**, they pose a “riddle in the middle” in that the meaning is not clear.

Whose mouth is the text referring to and what is the meaning of these “great teeth”? In this instance, the **concentric compositional formula** becomes:

$$100 = 49 + 2 + 49 \quad [\text{word-count—including heading in 58:1}]$$

The **meaningful center** may be enlarged to include four words on either side of the **arithmological center**, as follows:

אלהים הרס שנימו בפימו	O God, smash their teeth in their mouth;
מלתעות כפירים נתץ יהוה	Break off (their) lion-fangs, O YHWH.

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

$$100 = 46 + 8 + 46 \quad [\text{word-count—including heading in 58:1}]$$

The **meaningful center** may be enlarged further to include seven words on either side of the **arithmological center**, as follows:

חובר חברים מחכם	(They are) skilled weavers of spells.
אלהים הרס שנימו בפימו	O God, smash their teeth in their mouth;
מלתעות כפירים נתץ יהוה	Break off (their) lion-fangs, O YHWH.
ימאסו כמורמים	Let them vanish like water.

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

$$100 = 43 + 14 + 43 \quad [\text{word-count—including heading in 58:1}]$$

3. The 34-word **meaningful framework** (with the 10-word framework highlighted in gray and the 18-word framework in yellow) reads as follows:

1	למנצח אל־תשחת לדוד	For the music director, “Do Not Destroy”, for David—
	מכתם	a <i>Miktam</i> .
2	האמנם אלם צדק תדברון	Is it true this righteousness of which you speak?
	מישרים תשפטו בני אדם	With equity do you judge human beings?
3	אף־בלב עולת תפעלון	Indeed in your heart you work wickedness.
11	כי־חזה נקם	For he sees his vindication—
	פעמיו ירחץ בדם הרשע	His feet he will wash in the blood of the wicked.
12	ויאמר אדם אף־פרי לצדיק	People say, “Surely there is a reward for the righteous”;
	אף־יש־אלהים שפטים בארץ	Surely there is a God who governs on the earth.”

4. Summary of the concentric compositional formulae:

$$100 = 49 + 2 + 49 \quad \text{word-count}$$

$$100 = 46 + 8 + 46$$

{with others in between}

$$100 = 17 + 66 + 17$$

$$100 = 5 + 90 + 5$$

$$46 = 15 + 16 + 15 \quad \text{SAS units}$$

$$26 = 8 + 10 + 8 \quad \text{briques (primary SAS units)}$$

5. In the prosodic structure of Psalm 58, 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 58 has 26 **briques** (primary SAS units), 23 of which are marked by:

- *soph pasuq* 12 times, at the end of each verse
- *atnach* 10 times, in each verse except vv. 1 and 3
- *oleh weyored* 1 times, in v. 3

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

- *rəḥîa<sup>c</sup>* 1 time (v. 1)
- *dəḥî* 2 times (vv. 11 and 12)

6. The prosodic structure of Psalm 58, 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	1	<i>lamnaṣṣēah ‘al tašḥēt†</i>		<i>ləḏāwīd miktām :</i>
		2	<i>haʿūmnāh ʿelem ṣedeq təḏabbērûn ^</i>		<i>mēšārīm tišpəṭû bənē ʿāḏām :</i>
		3	<i>ʿap-bələḥ ʿólōṭ tipʿālûn ‡</i>		<i>bāʿareṣ ḥāmas yəḏēkem təpallēsûn :</i>
	B	4	<i>zōrû rəšāʿîm mērāšem ^</i>		<i>tāʿû mibbeten dōḇarē ḵāzāb :</i>

II C <sup>5</sup> ḥāmaṭ-lāmō kiḏmūt ḥāmaṭ-nāḥās̄<sup>ʿ</sup> ^ kəmə-ḫēten ḥērēs̄ yašṭēm ʾoznō :  
<sup>6</sup> ʾāšer lō<sup>ʾ</sup>-yišma<sup>ʿ</sup> laqōl məlaḥāšim ^ ḥōḇēr ḥāḇārim məḥukkām :

X <sup>7</sup> ʾēlohīm ḥārās-sinnēmō **bəp̄imō ^** **maltə<sup>ʿ</sup>ōt** kəp̄irim nətōs yhw̄h :

C' <sup>8</sup> yimmā<sup>ʾ</sup>āsū kəmə-mayim yiḥalləkū-lāmō ^ yidrək<ū> ḥiṣṣāw kəmə yiṭmōlālū :  
<sup>9</sup> kəmə šabbəlūl temes yahālōk ^ nēḫel ʾēšet bal-ḥāzū šāmēs̄ :

III B' <sup>10</sup> bəterem yāḥinū sīrōtēkem ʾātād ^ kəmə-ḥay kəmə-ḥārōn yis̄<sup>ʿ</sup>ārennū :

A' <sup>11</sup> yišmah ṣaddīq<sup>†</sup> kī-ḥāzāq nāqām ^  
pə<sup>ʿ</sup>ānāyw yirḥaṣ bədam ḥārāsā<sup>ʿ</sup> :  
<sup>12</sup> wəyō<sup>ʾ</sup>mar ʾādām<sup>†</sup> ʾak-pərī laṣṣaddīq ^  
ʾak yēs̄-ʾēlohīm šōpəṭim bā<sup>ʾ</sup>āreṣ :

7. The 26 **briques** are distributed in 8 strophes in Psalm 58 as follows:

$$(6 + 2) + (4 + 2 + 4) + (2 + 6) = 8 + 10 + 8 = 26$$

The **arithmological center** of Psalm 58 falls between the words **bəp̄imō ^** **maltə<sup>ʿ</sup>ōt** (“in their mouth / the great teeth”) in v. 7, with a total of 50 words on either side. Psalm 58 has 46 SAS units, 26 **briques** (primary SAS units), 11 versets, and 3 strophes. The **arithmological center** is in the middle strophe, the middle verset, the middle two **briques**, and the middle two SAS units.

8. Terrien finds 2 strophes [= cantos] in Psalm 58, which are “orderly, mirror-like, and symmetrical with a central “Core Verse” (*The Psalms* [2003], pp. 433–34). Van der Lugt, Labuschagne, and Fokkelman all find 5 strophes. The logoprosodic analysis indicates that there are 7 strophes arranged in 3 cantos (vv. 1–4, 5–9 and 10–12).

Christensen	Terrien	Van der Lugt	Fokkelman
I A 58:1–3	heading (v. 1)	heading (v. 1)	heading (v. 1)
B 58:4	I 1 58:2–4	I 1 58:2–3	
II C 58:5–6	2 58:5–6	2 58:4–6	
<b>X 58:7</b>	<b>3 58:7</b>	II 3 58:7–8	
C' 58:8–9	II 4 58:8–9	4 58:9–10	
III B' 58:10	5 58:10–12		
A' 58:11–12		III 5 58:11–12	

9. Counting from the beginning of Psalm 58 (including the 5-word heading in 58:1) we find the following list of compositional numbers at the verse boundaries:

58:1–3    **17** words before *atnach*  
58:1–6    **46** (= **23** x 2) words  
58:1–7    **34** (= **17** x 2) words before *atnach*  
58:1–10   **34** (= **17** x 2) words after *atnach*  
58:1–11   **52** (= **26** x 2) words before *atnach*

It is not possible to utilize any of the four compositional numbers (**17**, **23**, **26** and **32**) until the end of v. 3, which leaves 10 possible boundaries to work with. In 5 out of 10 (50% of the time) a multiple of one of these four compositional numbers is present.

10. Determining the details of the larger musical and literary structure(s) of Psalm 58 as a whole calls for input on the part of others in the BIBAL Forum, as we consider further information contained in the *te'amim* and the rhetorical features of the text.

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