

# Psalm 82:1–8

## Translation, Logoprosodic Analysis and Observations

### Prophetic Liturgy of Judgment against Pagan Gods

### Psalm 82:1–8

#### A. *God Is Judging in the Divine Assembly: Charge against the Gods* (82:1–2) [5.4]

82:1	A psalm / belonging to Asaph //	<u>8 2</u>	<u>2 2 0</u>
		81:13–82:1a	<b>34 19 15</b>
		81:10–82:1a	<b>60 34 26</b>
	God / stands in the divine council //	13 2	4 4 0
	in the midst of the gods he holds judgment //	<u>11 1</u>	<u>3 0 3</u>
		81:13–82:1	<b>41 23 18</b>
82:2	How long / <sup>a</sup> will you judge unjustly? //	11 2	4 4 0
	and to the wicked / show partiality, <b>Selah</b> //	<u>15 2</u>	<u>4 0 4</u>
		82:1–2	<b>17 10 7</b>

#### B. *Charge Violated by the Gods* (82:3–4) [3.2]

82:3	Defend the poor and fatherless //	9 1	3 3 0
	to the afflicted and to the needy / <sup>a</sup> do justice //	<u>13 2</u>	<u>3 0 3</u>
		82:1–3	<b>23 13 10</b>
82:4	Rescue the poor and the needy //	9 1	3 3 0
	from the hand of the wicked deliver (them) //	<u>12 1</u>	<u>3 0 3</u>
		81:16–82:4	<b>42 23 19</b>

#### C. *Failure of the Gods: “They Do Not Know and Do Not Understand”* (82:5ab) [2.2]

82:5	<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">They know</span> nothing / and they do not understand /	16 2	4 4 0
	in darkness / <sup>a</sup> they wander about //	<u>12 2</u>	<u>2 2 0</u>
		82:2–5a	<b>26 16 10</b>

#### D. *Proclamation of the Gods’ Former Status* (82:5c–6) [2.3]

	They are shaken / all the foundations of the earth //	<u>14 2</u>	<u>4 0 4</u>
		82:1–5	<b>39 22 17</b>
82:6	I had thought / “You are gods //	15 2	4 4 0
	and the children of the Most High all of you” //	<u>11 1</u>	<u>3 0 3</u>
		82:5–6	<b>17 10 7</b>

E. *Sentence of Judgment on the Gods and Prayer for God to Rise Up* (82:7–8) [4.5]

<p>82:7 But / like mere mortals you will die // and like any prince /<sup>a</sup> you will fall //</p>	<p>14 2 _14 2_</p>	<p>3 3 0 3 0 3</p>	<p>82:5–7 82:1–7</p>	<p><b>23</b> 13 10 <b>52</b> 29 <b>23</b></p>
<p>82:8 Rise up O God / judge /<sup>a</sup> the earth // for to you belong / all the nations //</p>	<p>17 3 13 2</p>	<p>4 4 0 5 0 5</p>	<p>82:5–7 82:1–8</p>	<p><b>32</b> 27 15 <b>61</b> 33 28</p>

Scansion in Accentual Stress Units: (5.4) . (3.2).(2.2).(2.3) . (4.5) = 9 + 14 + 9 = **32** or: **23 // 23**

Concentric Compositional Formula: 61 = 30 + 1 + 30 [with 2-word heading]

**Notes:**

- 82:2<sup>a</sup> Reading the sequence of *mērəkā* here in BHS as disjunctive.
- 82:3<sup>a</sup> Reading the sequence of *mērəkā* followed by *munaḥ* in BHS as disjunctive.
- 82:5<sup>a</sup> Reading the sequence of *mērəkā* here in BHS as disjunctive.
- 82:7<sup>a</sup> Reading the sequence of *mērəkā* followed by *munaḥ* in BHS as disjunctive.
- 82:8<sup>a</sup> Reading *munaḥ* here in BHS as disjunctive.

## Summary of the Logoprosodic Analysis

1. Psalm 82 has five strophes: 82:1–2, 3–4, 5ab, 5c–6 and 7–8.

A	82:1 $\alpha$ 2-word heading—stands outside prosodic structure of Psalm 82				
	82:1 $\beta$ –2 2 balanced triads:	[13 + 11] + [11+15]	=	24 + 26	morae
B	82:3–4 2 balanced dyads:	[9 + 13] + [9 + 12]	=	22 + 21	morae
X	82:5ab dyad with enjambment:	[16 + 12] +	=		morae
B	82:5c–6 2 balanced dyads + pivot:	[16 + 12] + 14 + [15 + 11]	=	28 + 14 + 26	morae
A	82:7–8 read with 2 <sup>nd</sup> bicolon as pivot:	(14 + 14) + (17+13)	=	28 + 30	morae

2. The first strophe (82:1–2) has two parts arranged in three subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 82:1a (2-word heading), 1bc and 2.
  - 81:13–82:1 **23** words before *atnach*
  - 82:2–2 **17** words
3. The second strophe (82:3–4) is a single part arranged in two subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 82:3 and 4.
  - 82:1–3 **23** words
  - 81:16–82:4 **23** words before *atnach*

4. The third strophe (82:5ab) is a single part arranged in two subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 82:5a and 5b, which is structurally combined with the next strophe [by enjambment].
  - 82:2–5a      **26** words
  
5. The fourth strophe (82:5c–6) is a single part arranged in two subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 82:5a and 5b, which is structurally combined with the preceding strophe [by enjambment].
  - 82:1–5      **17** words after *atnach*
  - 82:5–6      **17** words
  - 82:4–6      **23** words
  - 82:2–6      **17** words after *atnach*
  - 82:1–6      **46** (= **23** x 2) words and **26** words before *atnach*
  
6. The fifth strophe (82:7–8) is a single part arranged in two sub-divisions on the basis of word-count: 82:7 and 8.
  - 82:5–7      **23** words
  - 82:2–7      **23** words before *atnach*
  - 82:1–7      **52** (= **26** x 2) words and **23** words after *atnach*
  - 82:5–8      **32** words
  - 82:2–8      **52** (= **26** x 2) words

## Observations

1. Marvin Tate observes what he calls “a familiar chiasmic type literary structure of ABCDCBA” in Psalm 82, with verse 5 in the center [*Psalms 51–100*, WBC 20 (1990), p. 334]. Tate concludes that, “The ‘darkness’ in which the gods wander about (walk back and forth) may be either (1) the darkness they have brought to the lands because of their malfeasance in judgment . . . or (2) the darkness may be what they use to cloak their deeds from the scrutiny of their sovereign . . . or (3) it may reflect their benighted nature which has resulted from their refusal to ‘know’ and understand the ways of God—or all three!” (p. 337).

### ***Psalm 82 in a Menorah Pattern according to Marvin Tate: Death of Pagan Gods***

A	God is judging in the divine assembly	[2.3]	82:1
B	Charge against the gods	[2.2]	82:2
C	Charge violated by the gods	[3.2]	82:3–4
X	<b>Failure of the gods: “They do not know and do not understand”</b>	[2.2]	82:5ab
C'	Proclamation of the gods' former status	[2.3]	82:5c–6
B'	Sentence of judgment on the gods	[2.2]	82:7
A'	Prayer for God to rise and judge the earth	[3.2]	82:8

Though the menorah pattern suggested by Tate is provocative, Psalm 82 appears to be too short to justify a seven-part literary structure in terms of strophes. Nonetheless, the logoprosodic analysis presented supports the boundary divisions in Tate’s outline better than the five-part concentric structure proposed by Terrien:

A	The council of the gods	82:1
B	The indictment of the gods	82:2–4
X	<b>The stupidity of the gods</b>	82:5
B'	The death of the gods	82:6–7
A'	Prayer for peace in the whole world	82:8

The logoprosodic analysis presented here suggests that the “center within the center” from a prosodic point of view is 82:5ab taken alone rather than the whole of v. 5. Nonetheless the prosodic structure itself is in five strophic units.

2. In terms of the 61 words in Psalm 82 (including the 2-word heading and the word *Selah* in verse 2), the **arithmological center** is the word ידעו in 82:5a, with 30 words on either side. The initial *Concentric Compositional Formula* is thus:

$$61 = 30 + 1 + 30 \quad [\text{word count—with 2-word heading in Psalm 82}]$$

$$\text{or: } 31 // 31 \quad [\text{word count—with “pivot” included in each half}]$$

The most likely **meaningful center** is found by including four words on either side, which function in a pivot pattern, with **26** words on either side (82:4b–5a):

מיד רשעים הצילו	From the hand of the wicked deliver (them).
לא ידעו ולא יבינו	They do not know and they do not understand;
בחשכה יתהלכו	In darkness they wander about.

When these nine words are read as part of each half of Psalm 82 [including the 2-word heading], the *Concentric Compositional Formula* becomes:

$$61 = 26 + 9 + 26 \quad [\text{word count—with 2-word heading in Psalm 82}]$$

$$\text{or: } 35 // 35 \quad [\text{word count—with “pivot” included in each half}]$$

It is possible that a further **meaningful center** may be expanded further by counting eight words on either side, which function in a pivot pattern, with 22 words on either side:

הצילו פלטו דל ואביון	Do justice, rescue the poor and the needy,
מיד רשעים הצילו	From the hand of the wicked deliver (them).
לא ידעו ולא יבינו	They do not know and they do not understand;
בחשכה יתהלכו	In darkness they wander about.
ימוטו כל מוסדי ארץ	All the foundations of the earth are shaken.

When these nine words are read as part of each half of Psalm 82 [including the 2-word heading], the *Concentric Compositional Formula* becomes:

$$61 = 22 + 17 + 22 \quad [\text{word count—with 2-word heading in Psalm 82}]$$

$$\text{or: } 39 // 39 \quad [\text{word count—with “pivot” included in each half}]$$

$$\{39 = 13 \times 3\}$$

3. Summary of the concentric compositional formulae:

61 = 26 + 9 + 26 or: 35 // 35

61 = 22 + 17 + 22 or: 39 // 39

{with others in between}

61 = 15 + 31 + 15 or: 46 // 46

61 = 9 + 43 + 9 or: 52 // 52 {v. 1 || v. 8}

32 = 9 + 14 + 9 or: 23 // 23 SAS (syntactic accentual-stress) units

21 = 5 + 11 + 5 or: 16 // 16 **briques** (primary SAS units)

4. In the prosodic structure of Psalm 81, 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*.
- **Ole 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 in the translation (above), the presence of these three markers is indicated with a double slash (//). Psalm 82 has 21 **briques**, 17 of which are marked by: *soph pasuq* (8 times, at the end of each verse), *atnach* (8 times, in each verse) and *ole weyored* (v. 1). The remaining four boundaries are marked by: *rəḥîa<sup>c</sup>* (v. 5), *rəḥîa<sup>c</sup> muğraš* (v. 5), *ʔazlâ ləḡarmeh* (v. 5), and *dəḥî* (v. 8).

5. The prosodic structure of Psalm 82 may be displayed as follows [^ represents *atnach*; : represents *soph pasuq*; † represents *ole weyored*, and † represents other accents ]:

I A <sup>1</sup> *mizmôr ləʕāsāp* † *ʔəlōhîm niššāb baʕādat ʔəl* ^ *bəqereḥ ʔəlōhîm yišpōt* :

<sup>2</sup> *ʕad māṭay tišpəṭû ʕāwel* ^ *ûpānê rəšāʕîm tišʔû* **selāh** :

II B <sup>3</sup> *šîpṭû dal wəyāṭôn* ^ *ʕānî wārās hašdîqû* :

<sup>4</sup> *palləṭû dal wəʕəbyôn* ^ *miyyad rəšāʕîm haššîlû* :

X	<sup>5</sup> <i>lōʔ</i>	<i>yādəʕû</i> †	<i>wəlōʔ yābînû</i> †	<i>baḥšəkāh yithallākû</i> ^
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B *yimmôṭû*<sup>†</sup> *kol môṣəḏê ʾāreṣ* :  
<sup>6</sup> *ʾānî ʾāmartî ʾēlōhîm ʾattem* ^ *ûḅəné ʿelyôn kulləkem* :

III A <sup>7</sup> *ʾāḵēn kəʾāḏām təmûṭûn* ^ *ûḵəʾaḥaḏ hasśārîm tippōlû* :  
<sup>8</sup> *qûmāh ʾēlōhîm*<sup>†</sup> *šəpṭāh hāʾāreṣ* ^  
*kî ʾattāh tînhāl bəkol haggôyîm* :

6. The 20 **briques** (primary accentual stress units) are distributed within three strophes in Psalm 82 as follows: 21 = [5 + (4 + 3 + 4) + 5] = 5 + 11 + 5. The **concentric compositional formula** (on the basis of primary stress units) is 16 // 16, with the central pivot (vv 3–6) included in each half.

The **arithmological center** of Psalm 82 falls on the word *yāḏəʿû* (“they know”) in 82:7b, with 30 words on either side. Psalm 82 has 32 SAS units, 21 **briques**, 9 versets, 5 strophes and 3 cantos. The **arithmological center** is in the middle canto, the middle strophe, the middle verset, the middle three **briques**, and the middle four SAS units.

7. Terrien finds 3 strophes framed by a “Prologue” (v. 1) and an “Epilogue” (v. 8) in Psalm 82 (*The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* [Eerdmans, 2003], pp. 586–91). Van der Lugt, Labuschagne, and Fokkelman all find 5 strophes. The analysis presented here, which is based on balance in mora-count and the concentric pattern in the distribution of syntactic accentual-stress units, indicates that there are 5 strophes arranged in 3 cantos.

Christensen	Terrien	Van der Lugt / Labuschagne
I A 3:1–2	Prologue (v. 1)	I 1 3:1–2
B 3:3–4	1 3:2–4	2 3:3–4
II X 3:5–6	2 3:5	II 3 3:5
III B' 3:7–8b	3 3:6–7	4 3:6–7
A' 3:8c–9	Epilogue (v. 8)	5 3:8

8. Once again, the evidence from the logoprosodic analysis supports the inclusion of the two-word heading and the one usage of *selah* in the following list of compositional formulae counting from the beginning of Psalm 82:

82:1–2 **17** words  
82:1–3 **23** words  
82:1–4 13 words after *atnach*  
82:1–5 **17** words after *atnach*  
82:1–6 **46** (= **23** x 2) words and **26** words before *atnach*  
82:1–7 **23** words after *atnach*  
82:1–8 28 words after *atnach* [28 = triangular 7]

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 only seven possible boundaries to work with. In 5 out of 7 of these boundaries (or more than 71% of the time) a multiple of one of these compositional numbers is present.

- Determining the details of the larger musical and literary structure(s) of Psalm 82 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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