

Psalm 85:1–14

Translation, Logoprosodic Analysis, and Observations

Prayer for YHWH's Help: Revive Us Again

Psalm 85:1–14

A. Declaration: YHWH, You Brought Us Back from Captivity! (85:1–3) [6.4]

85:1	To the music director / belonging to the sons of Korah, a psalm //	<u> 14 2</u>	<u> 4 4 0</u>
		84:9–85:1	51 32 22
85:2	You have shown favor / ^a O YHWH to your land //	<u> 13 2</u>	<u> 3 3 0</u>
		84:8–85:2a	62 39 23
	You have brought back / the captivity of Jacob //	<u> 10 2</u>	<u> 3 0 3</u>
		84:8–85:2	65 39 26
85:3	You have forgiven / the iniquity of your people //	12 2	3 3 0
	you have covered all their sins / ^a Selah //	<u> 14 2</u>	<u> 4 0 4</u>
		85:1–3	17 10 7

B. You Withdrew Your Wrath; So Return to Us Again! (85:4–5) [3.4]

85:4	You have withdrawn all your wrath //	11 1	3 3 0
	you have turned away / the fierceness of your anger //	<u> 16 2</u>	<u> 3 0 3</u>
		85:1–4	23 13 10
85:5	Return to us again / O God of our salvation //	16 2	3 3 0
	and banish your indignation / ^a from us //	<u> 13 2</u>	<u> 3 0 3</u>
		84:13–85:5	35 18 17

C. If You Revive Us Again, Your People Will Rejoice in You (85:6–7) [3.4]

85:6	Will you be angry forever / ^a with us? //	12 1	3 3 0
	will you prolong your wrath / from generation to generation //	<u> 13 2</u>	<u> 4 0 4</u>
		85:1–6	36 19 17
85:7	Will you not / revive us again? //	16 2	4 4 0
	and your people / they will rejoice in you //	<u> 10 2</u>	<u> 3 0 3</u>
		85:4–7	26 13 13

D. Show Us Your Covenant-Love and Grant Us Salvation! (85:8) [3]

85:8	Show us, O YHWH your covenant-love //	<u> 12 1</u>	<u> 3 3 0</u>
		85:6–8a	17 10 7
	And your salvation / grant to us //	<u> 10 2</u>	<u> 3 0 3</u>

E. YHWH Promised Shalom When His People Turn from Their Folly (85:9) [4.3]

85:9	Let me announce ^a / what the God ^b has spoken /	<u> 14 2_</u>	<u> 3 3 0</u>
		85:6-9a	23 13 10
	(It is) YHWH //	4 1	2 2 0
	indeed ^c he has promised well-being (<i>shalom</i>) /	<u> 10 1</u>	<u> 3 3 0</u>
		85:5-9c	34 21 13
	To the devoted ones of his people //	<u> 11 1_</u>	<u> 4 4 0</u>
		85:6-9d	32 22 10
	And they will not return / ^d to their folly //	<u> 11 2</u>	<u> 3 0 3</u>
		85:3-9	54 31 23

F. Salvation is Near—Righteousness and Shalom Have Kissed (85:10-11) [4.3]

85:10	Surely / his salvation is near to those who fear him //	<u> 14 2_</u>	<u> 4 4 0</u>
		85:7-10a	26 20 96
	That glory may inhabit / ^a our land //	<u> 13 2</u>	<u> 3 0 3</u>
		85:6-10	36 23 13
85:11	Covenant-love and truth have met together //	<u> 10 1_</u>	<u> 3 3 0</u>
		85:7-11a	32 23 9
	Righteousness and peace / ^a have kissed each other //	<u> 13 2</u>	<u> 3 0 3</u>
		85:8-11	34 22 12

G. Righteousness Goes Before Him and YHWH Gives What Is Good (85:12-14) [4.6]

85:12	Truth / from the earth will spring forth //	<u> 9 2_</u>	<u> 3 3 0</u>
		85:7-12a	38 26 12
	And righteousness / from heaven looks down //	<u> 11 2</u>	<u> 3 0 3</u>
		85:9-12	34 22 12
85:13	Indeed YHWH / will give what is good //	11 2	4 4 0
	and our land / it will give its produce //	<u> 14 2_</u>	<u> 3 0 3</u>
		85:10-13	26 14 12
85:14	Righteousness / before him it will go //	11 2	3 3 0
	and it will make into a way / ^a his footsteps //	<u> 13 1</u>	<u> 3 0 3</u>
		85:10-14	32 27 15
		85:1-14	96 55 41

Scansion in Accentual Stress Units: (6.4).(3.4) . (3.4).(3).(4.3) . (4.3).(4.6)
 $(10 + 7) + (7 + 3 + 7) + (7 + 10) = 17 + 17 + 17 = 51$
 or: **34 // 34** [with pivot counted in each half]
 {**34 = 17 x 2** and **52 = 26 x 2**}

Concentric Compositional Formula: 96 = 48 + 0 + 48 [word-count—with heading]

Notes:

- 85:2^a Reading the sequence of two successive occurrences of *munaḥ* before ²*atnāḥ* here in BHS as disjunctive.
- 85:3^a Reading the sequence of *tarḥā* followed by *munaḥ* before *selāḥ* (and *soph pasuq* at end of the verse) in BHS as disjunctive.
- 85:5^a Reading the sequence of *tarḥā* followed by *munaḥ* before *soph pasuq* at end of the verse in BHS as disjunctive.
- 85:6^a Reading *merkā* preceded immediately by *ga'yā* (= *meteg*) in Letteris as disjunctive; BHS omits *ga'yā* (= *meteg*).
- 85:9^a Repeating the word to read ²*ašmī'āḥ* ("let me announce"), the hiphil cohortative first person singular [with Dahood, Psalms II (1968), p. 288].
- 85:9^b Reading the *šinnôr* here in BHS as conjunctive.
- 85:9^c Reading *məhuppāk ləḡarmēḥ* in BHS as conjunctive.
- 85:9^d Reading *merkā* preceded by *ga'yā* (= *meteg*) in BHS as disjunctive.
- 85:10^a Reading the sequence of *tarḥā* followed by *munaḥ* before *soph pasuq* at end of the verse in BHS as disjunctive.
- 85:11^a Reading the sequence of *tarḥā* followed by *munaḥ* before *soph pasuq* at end of the verse in BHS as disjunctive.
- 85:14^a Reading the sequence of *tarḥā* followed by *munaḥ* before ²*atnāḥ* in BHS as disjunctive.

Summary of the Logoprosodic Analysis

1. Psalm 85 has seven strophes: 85:1–3, 4–5, 6–9, 10–11 and 12–14.

A 85:1–3	2 balanced dyads + pivot:	[14 + 13] + 10 + [12 + 14]	= 27 + 10 + 26	morae
B 85:4–5	2 balanced dyads:	[11 + 16] + [16 + 13]	= 27 + 29	morae
C 85:6–7	2 balanced dyads:	[12 + 13] + [16 + 10]	= 25 + 26	morae
X 85:8	balanced dyad:	[12 + 10]	= 12 + 10	morae
C 85:9	balanced dyad:	[14 + (4 + 10)]	= 14 + 14	morae
	balanced dyad:	[11 + 11]	= 11 + 11	morae
B 85:10–11	balanced dyad:	[14 + 13]	= 14 + 13	morae
	balanced dyad:	[10 + 13]	= 23 + 20	morae
A 85:12–14	balanced dyad:	[9 + 11]	= 9 + 11	morae
	2 balanced dyads:	[11 + 14] + [11+13]	= 25 + 24	morae

2. The first strophe (85:1–3) is a single part arranged in four subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 85:1, 2a, 2b and 3.

- 84:9–85:1 **51** (= **17** x 3) words and **32** words before *atnach*
 - 84:8–85:2 **26** words after *atnach*
 - 85:1–3 **17** words
3. The second strophe (85:4–5) is a single part arranged in two subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 85:4 and 5.
- 85:1–4 **23** words
 - 84:13–85:5 **17** words after *atnach*
4. The third strophe (85:6–7) is a single part arranged in two subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 85:6, 7a and 7b.
- 85:3–6 **26** words before *atnach*
 - 85:2–6 **32** words and **17** words after *atnach*
 - 85:4–7 **26** words
5. The fourth strophe (85:8) is a single part arranged in two subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 85:8a and 8b.
- 85:5–8 **26** words
 - 85:4–8 **32** (= 2x2x2x2x2) words
 - 85:2–8 **23** words after *atnach*
 - 85:1–8 **49 = 26 + 23** [compositional formula]
6. The fifth strophe (85:9) is a single part arranged in four subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 85:9a, 9bc, 9d and 9e.
- 85:3–9 **23** words after *atnach*
 - 85:2–9 **34** (= **17** x 2) words before and **26** words after *atnach*
 - 85:1–9 **64** (= 2x2x2x2x2x2) words
7. The sixth strophe (85:10–11) has two parts arranged in four subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 85:10a, 10b, 11a and 11b.
- 85:7–10 **23** words before *atnach*
 - 85:6–10 **26** words
 - 85:4–10 **32** (= 2x2x2x2x2) words
 - 85:3–10 **26** words after *atnach*
 - 85:7–11 **26** words before *atnach*
 - 85:1–11 **32** (= 2x2x2x2x2) words after *atnach*
8. The seventh strophe (85:12–14) has two parts arranged in four subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 85:12a, 12 b, 13 and 14.
- 85:6–12 **32** (= 2x2x2x2x2) words before *atnach*
 - 85:10–13 **26** words
 - 85:9–13 **26** words before *atnach*
 - 85:10–14 **32** (= 2x2x2x2x2) words before *atnach*

Observations

1. The seven strophes of Psalm 85 may be outlined in a menorah pattern, which is determined primarily on prosodic grounds, as follows:

Prayer for YHWH's Help: Revive Us Again! (Psalm 85:1–14)

A	Declaration: YHWH, you brought us back from captivity	[6.4]	85:1–3
B	You withdrew your wrath; so return to us again	[3.4]	85:4–5
C	If you revive us again, your people will rejoice in you	[3.4]	85:6–7
X	Show us your covenant-love and grant us salvation	[3]	85:8
C'	YHWH promised <i>shalom</i> when his people turn from their folly	[4.3]	85:9
B'	His salvation is near—righteousness and <i>shalom</i> have kissed	[4.3]	85:10–11
A'	Righteousness goes before him and YHWH gives what is good	[4.6]	85:12–14

2. In terms of the 96 words in Psalm 85, the **arithmological center** falls between the words **לתן לנו** (“and he will give to us”) in 85:8b, with 48 words on either side. The *Concentric Compositional Formula* is:

$$96 = 48 + 0 + 48 \quad \text{[word count—with heading]}$$

These two words may be considered a **meaningful center** so that the *Concentric Compositional Formula* becomes:

$$96 = 47 + 2 + 47 \quad \text{[word count—with heading]}$$

or: $49 // 49$ [word count with pivot in each half]

The **meaningful center** is found by including five words on either side of the **arithmological center**, as follows:

הֲרֵאֵנוּ יְהוָה חֶסֶדְךָ	Show us, YHWH, your covenant-love;
תִּתֵּן לָנוּ וַיִּשְׁעֶךָ	And your salvation give to us.
אֲשַׁמְעָה מִה יִדְבַר הָאֱלֹהִים	Let me hear what the God will say.

In this instance, the *Concentric Compositional Formula* becomes:

$$96 = 43 + 10 + 43 \quad \text{[word count—with heading]}$$

or: $53 // 53$ [word count with pivot in each half]

An expanded **meaningful center** is found by adding sixteen words on either side of the **arithmological center**, as follows:

תִּמְשַׁךְ אַפְּךָ לְדָר וּדָר	You will prolong your wrath from generation to generation.
הֲלֹא אֶתָּה תִּשְׁבַּח תַּחֲיִינוּ	Will you not revive us again?
וְעַמְּךָ יִשְׂמְחוּ בְּךָ	And your people will rejoice in you.
הֲרֵאֵנוּ יְהוָה חֶסֶדְךָ	Show us, O YHWH, your covenant-love;

ווישעך תתן לנו	And your salvation give to us.
אשמעה מה ידבר האל יהוה	Let me hear what the God YHWH will say;
כי ידבר שלום	For he will speak peace
אל עמו ואל חסידיו	To his people and to his saints;
ואל ישובו לכסלה	And they will not return to their folly.

In this instance, the *Concentric Compositional Formula* becomes:

$$96 = 32 + 32 + 32 \quad \text{[word count—with heading]}$$

$$\text{or: } 64 // 64 \quad \text{[word count with pivot in each half]}$$

$$\{64 = 32 \times 2 = 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2\}$$

3. Summary of the concentric compositional formulae (with heading):

$$96 = 43 + 10 + 43 \quad \text{or: } 53 // 53$$

$$96 = 32 + 32 + 32 \quad \text{or: } 64 // 64$$

{with others in between}

$$96 = 13 + 70 + 13 \quad \text{or: } 83 // 83$$

$$96 = 4 + 88 + 4 \quad \text{or: } 92 // 92$$

$$51 = 17 + 17 + 17 \quad \text{or: } 34 // 34 \quad \text{syntactic accentual-stress units}$$

$$\{51 = 17 \times 3 \text{ and } 34 = 17 \times 2\}$$

$$30 = 10 + 10 + 10 \quad \text{or: } 20 // 20 \quad \text{briques (primary accentual-stress units)}$$

4. In the prosodic structure of Psalm 85, the basic building blocks in each poetic verset are the *briques* (primary SAS 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 85 has 30 **briques**, 28 of which are marked by: *soph pasuq* (14 times, at the end of each verse), *atnach* (13 times, in each verse, except v. 3), and *ole weyored* (v. 9). The remaining two boundaries are marked by *ʿillûy plus pāsēq* [*ʿillûy ləḡarmēh*] (v. 1) and *galgal plus pāsēq* [*galgal ləḡarmēh*] (v. 9).

5. The prosodic structure of Psalm 85 may be displayed as follows [^ represents *atnach*; ; represents *soph pasuq*; † represents *ole weyored*, and † represents other accents]:

I	A	¹ <i>lamnaṣēah</i> †	<i>liḥnē qōrah mizmôr :</i>
		² <i>rāšîṭā yhw̄h ʾarṣekā</i> ^	<i>šabtā šəḥîṭ yaʿāqōb :</i>
		³ <i>nāsāʾṭā ʿāwōn ʿammeḱā</i> ^	<i>kissîṭā ḱol haṭṭāʾṭām selāh :</i>
	B	⁴ <i>ʾāsap̄tā ḱol ʿebrāteḱā</i> ^	<i>həšîḥōṭā mēḥārôn ʾappeḱā :</i>
		⁵ <i>šûḥēnû ʾəlōhē yišʿenû</i> ^	<i>wəḥāpēr kaʿaskā ʿimmānû :</i>
II	C	⁶ <i>halʿôlām teʾenap̄ bānû</i> ^	<i>timšōḱ ʾappəḱā ləḍōr wādōr :</i>
		⁷ <i>hālōʾ ʾattāh tāsûḥ təḥayyēnû</i> ^	<i>wəʿammʾəḱā yiśməḥû ḥəḱ :</i>

X	⁸	<i>harʿenû yhw̄h ḥasdeḱā</i> ^	<i>wəyešʿəḱā tittēn lānû :</i>
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	C'	⁹ <i>ʾəšmāʿāh mah yaḍabbēr hāʾēl</i>	<i>yhw̄h ḱî yaḍabbēr šālôm</i>
		<i>ʾel ʿammô wəʾel ḥəsîḍāyw</i> ^	<i>wəʾal yāsûḥû ləḱislāh :</i>
III	B'	¹⁰ <i>ʾaḱ ʿammô wəʾel ḥəsîḍāyw</i> ^	<i>wəʾel yāsûḥû ləḱislāh :</i>
		¹¹ <i>ḥesed̄ weʾemet̄ niḡgāšû</i> ^	<i>ṣedeq̄ wəšālôm nāsāqû :</i>
	A'	¹² <i>ʾemet̄ mēʾereṣ̄ tiśmāḥ</i> ^	<i>wəṣedeq̄ miššamayim nišqāp̄ :</i>
		¹³ <i>gam yhw̄h yittēn haṭṭōḥ</i> ^	<i>wəʾarṣenû tittēn yaḥûlāh :</i>
		¹⁴ <i>ṣedeq̄ ləḡānāyw yaḥallēḱ</i> ^	<i>wəyāsēm̄ ləḍereḱ̄ pəʿāmāyw :</i>

6. The 30 **briques** (primary SAS units) are distributed in five strophes in Psalm 85 as follows: 30 = (6 + 4) + (4 + 2 + 4) + (4 + 6) = 10 + 10 + 10). The **concentric compositional formula** (on the basis of primary SAS units) is 20 // 20, with the central pivot included in each half.

The **arithmological center** of Psalm 85 falls between the words tittēn lānû (“he will give to us”) at the end of v. 8, with 48 words on either side. Psalm 85 has 51 SAS units, 30 **briques**, 15 versets, 7 strophes and 3 cantos. The **arithmological center** is in the middle canto, the middle strophe, the middle verset, the middle two **briques**, and the middle three SAS units.

7. Terrien finds 2 strophes in Psalm 85, which he subdivides into 5 sub-strophes plus an “Envoi” (vv. 13–14) (*The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* [Eerdmans, 2003], pp. 603–10). Van der Lugt, Labuschagne, and Fokkelman all find 6 strophes though they differ in matters of detail. The analysis presented here, which is based on balance in mora-count and the concentric pattern in the distribution of SAS units, indicates that there are 7 strophes arranged in 3 cantos (vv. 1–5, 6–9 and 19–13).

Christensen	Terrien	Van der Lugt	Labuschagne
I A 85:1–3	Heading (v. 1)	Heading (v. 1)	Heading (v. 1)
B 85:4–5	I 85:2–3	I 1 85:2–4	I 1 85:2–3
	85:4		2 85:4–6
II C 85:6–7	85:5–6	2 85:5–6	
X 85:8	II 85:7–8	II 3 85:7–8	II 3 85:7–8
C' 85:9	85:9–12	4 85:9	4 85:9
III B' 85:10–11		5 85:10–12	5 85:10–12
A' 85:12–13	Envoi (13–14)	6 85:13–14	6 85:13–14

8. Once again, the evidence from the logoprosodic analysis supports the inclusion of the four-word heading and the one usage of the word *selah*, as shown in the following list of significant compositional numbers at the boundaries of the verses counting from the beginning of Psalm 85:

85:1–3	17 words	
85:1–4	23 words	
85:1–6	17 words after <i>atnach</i>	
85:1–7	43 words before <i>atnach</i>	[43 = 17 + 26]
85:1–8	49 = 26 + 23	[compositional formula]
85:1–9	64 (= 32 x 2) words	
85:1–11	32 words after <i>atnach</i>	
85:1–13	52 (= 26 x 2) words before <i>atnach</i>	
85:1–14	96 (= 32 x 3) words	

It is not possible to utilize any of the four compositional numbers (**17**, **23**, **26** and **32**) until the end of verse 3, which leaves twelve possible boundaries to work with. In 8 out of 11 of these boundaries (or more than 72% of the time) a multiple of one of these four compositional numbers is present. If we include the number **43** (= **17** + **26**) at the end of verse 7 in the count, the percentage is more than 81% of the time. Moreover, one of these boundaries is marked by multiple numbers in which all three numbers in the compositional formula are significant. This evidence suggests rather strongly the possibility of deliberate design at the point of the numerical composition of Psalm 85 including the 4-word heading and the word *Selah* in verse 3; for all of these numbers disappear if these five words are not considered as integral to the psalm at the point of its numerical composition.

9. Determining the details of the musical and literary structures of Psalm 85 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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