

# Psalm 97:1–12

## Translation, Logoprosodic Analysis and Observations

### Eschatological Hymn on YHWH as Universal Judge

### Psalm 97:1–12

#### A. *Let the World Rejoice in YHWH's Righteous Rule* (97:1–2)

[4.3]

97:1 YHWH reigns / let the earth rejoice // 17 2 4 4 0  
let them be glad / the many coastlands // 10 2\_ 3 0 3  
96:5–97:1 87 53 **34**

97:2 Cloud and thick darkness surround him // 14 1 3 3 0  
righteousness and judgment / the foundation of his throne // 13 2 4 0 4  
96:12–97:2 37 **23** 14

#### B. *YHWH's Fire Burns Up His Adversaries and Lights Up the World* (97:3–4)

[4.2]

97:3 A fire / goes before him // 11 2\_ 3 3 0  
97:1–3a **17** 10 7

And it burns up / his enemies all around (him) // 13 2 3 0 3  
96:12–97:3 **43 26 17**

97:4 His flashes of lightning light up the world // 15 1\_ 3 3 0  
97:1–4a **23** 13 10

the earth sees and trembles // 14 1 3 0 3  
97:1–4 **26** 13 13

#### C. *The Universe Bears Witness to YHWH's Righteous Glory* (97:5–6)

[4.6]

97:5 Mountains / are like wax / 8 2 2 2 0  
they melt / before YHWH // 21 2\_ 3 3 0  
97:3–5a **17** 11 6

Before / the Lord of all the earth // 13 2\_ 4 0 4  
97:1–5 **35** 18 **17**

97:6 The heavens declare /<sup>a</sup> his righteousness // 13 2 3 3 0  
and all the peoples see /<sup>b</sup> his glory // 16 2 4 0 4  
97:2–6 **35** **17** 18

<b>D. <i>May All Who Worship Worthless Idols Be Humiliated</i> (97:7)</b>		[2.2.2]
97:7	They are put to shame / all who serve graven images /	$\begin{array}{r} \_14 \ 2\_ \\ \hline 4 \ 4 \ 0 \\ \hline 32 \ 18 \ 14 \end{array}$
	Those who make their boast / <sup>a</sup> <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">in worthless idols</span> //	$\begin{array}{r} \_12 \ 2\_ \\ \hline 2 \ 2 \ 0 \\ \hline 34 \ 20 \ 14 \end{array}$
	They bow down before him / (together with) all gods //	$\begin{array}{r} \_13 \ 2 \\ \hline 4 \ 0 \ 4 \\ \hline 26 \ 14 \ 12 \end{array}$
<b>E. <i>Zion Has Heard and Is Glad for YHWH Is Exalted Above All Gods</i> (97:8–9)</b>		[6.4]
97:8	Zion has heard / and was glad /	$\begin{array}{r} 12 \ 2 \\ \hline 3 \ 3 \ 0 \\ \hline \_16 \ 2\_ \\ \hline 3 \ 3 \ 0 \\ \hline 32 \ 20 \ 12 \end{array}$
	and the daughters of Judah / rejoiced //	
	Because of / your judgments, O YHWH //	$\begin{array}{r} \_14 \ 2\_ \\ \hline 3 \ 0 \ 3 \\ \hline 26 \ 15 \ 11 \end{array}$
97:9	For you are YHWH / the Most High above all the earth //	$\begin{array}{r} 15 \ 2 \\ \hline 7 \ 7 \ 0 \\ \hline 15 \ 2 \\ \hline 5 \ 0 \ 5 \\ \hline 59 \ 33 \ 26 \end{array}$
	you are exalted above / all gods //	
<b>F. <i>YHWH Delivers the Righteous from the Wicked</i> (97:10)</b>		[2.4]
97:10	You who love YHWH / hate evil /	$\begin{array}{r} \_14 \ 2\_ \\ \hline 4 \ 4 \ 0 \\ \hline 25 \ 17 \ 8 \end{array}$
	He preserves / the souls of his devoted ones //	$\begin{array}{r} \_12 \ 2\_ \\ \hline 3 \ 3 \ 0 \\ \hline 38 \ 26 \ 12 \end{array}$
	From the hand of the wicked / he delivers them //	$\begin{array}{r} \_12 \ 2 \\ \hline 3 \ 0 \ 3 \\ \hline 57 \ 34 \ 23 \end{array}$
<b>G. <i>Let the Righteous Give Thanks for the Memory of His Holiness</i> (97:11–12)</b>		[3.4]
97:11	Light / is sown <sup>a</sup> for the righteous //	$\begin{array}{r} \_11 \ 2\_ \\ \hline 3 \ 3 \ 0 \\ \hline 25 \ 17 \ 8 \end{array}$
	and for the upright in heart there is gladness //	$\begin{array}{r} \_11 \ 1 \\ \hline 3 \ 0 \ 3 \\ \hline 37 \ 23 \ 14 \end{array}$
97:12	Rejoice, O righteous ones / in YHWH //	$\begin{array}{r} \_14 \ 2\_ \\ \hline 3 \ 3 \ 0 \\ \hline 40 \ 26 \ 14 \end{array}$
	and give thanks / for the memory of his holiness //	$\begin{array}{r} \_12 \ 2 \\ \hline 3 \ 0 \ 3 \\ \hline 43 \ 26 \ 17 \end{array}$

Scansion in Accentual Stress Units: (4.3).(4.2).(4.6) . (2.2.2) . (6.4).(2.4).(3.4)  
 $(7 + 6 + 10) + 6 + (10 + 6 + 7) = 23 + 6 + 23 = 52$   
 or: 39 // 39 {52 = 26 x 2}

Concentric Compositional Formula: 95 = 47 + 1 + 47 [word count—no heading]  
 or: 48 // 48 [with “pivot” counted in each half]

### Notes:

- 97:6<sup>a</sup> Reading the sequence of two occurrences of *munah* as disjunctive.  
 97:6<sup>b</sup> Reading *munah* preceded immediately by *ga'ya* (= *meteg*) in Letteris as disjunctive; BHS omits the *ga'ya* (= *meteg*).  
 97:7<sup>a</sup> Reading *merka* preceded immediately by *ga'ya* (= *meteg*) in BHS as disjunctive; Letteris puts the *ga'ya* (= *meteg*) after *merka* [in the next word].  
 97:11<sup>a</sup> The suggested emendation of זרע, “to sow,” in BHS to read זרר, “to rise, come forth [like dawn],” with one Hebrew manuscript, Old Greek, Syriac, Targum and Vulgate [so also JB, NAB, NRSV] is attractive; but this is the sort of change one expects in a text like this. The principle of *lectio difficilior* suggests that the MT reading be accepted as it stands.

## Summary of the Logoprosodic Analysis

1. Psalm 97 has seven strophes: 97:1–2, 3–4, 5–6, 7, 8–9, 10 and 11–12.

A 97:1–2	2 balanced dyads:	(17 + 10) + (14 + 13)	= 27 + 27	morae
B 97:3	balanced dyad:	(11 + 13)	= 11 + 13	morae
97:4	balanced dyad:	(15 + 14)	= 15 + 14	morae
C 97:5–6	2 balanced dyads + pivot:	(8 + 21) + 13 + (13 + 16)	= 29 + 13 + 29	morae

X 97:7	balanced triad:	(14 + 12 + 13)	= 14 + 12 + 13	morae
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C' 97:8–9	2 balanced dyads + pivot:	(12 + 16) + 14 + (15 + 15)	= 28 + 14 + 30	morae
B' 97:10	balanced triad:	(14 + 12 + 12)	= 14 + 12 + 12	morae
A' 97:11	balanced dyad:	(11 + 11)	= 11 + 11	morae
97:12	balanced dyad:	(14 + 12)	= 14 + 12	morae

2. The first strophe (97:1–2) is a single part arranged in two subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 97:1 and 2
- 96:5–97:1      **34** (= 17 x 2) words after *atnach*
  - 96:12–97:2    **23** words before *atnach*
3. The second strophe (97:3–4) has two parts arranged in four subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 97:3a, 3b, 4a and 4b

- 96:5–97:3      **43 = 26 + 17**                      [compositional formula]
  - 97:1–4            **26** words
4. The third strophe (97:5–6) is a single part arranged in three subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 97:5ab, 5c and 6.
    - 97:1–5            **17** words after *atnach*
    - 97:2–6            **17** words before *atnach*
  5. The fourth strophe (97:7) is a single part arranged in three subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 97:7a, 7b and 7c.
    - 97:1–7            **52** (= **26** x 2) words
    - 97:5–7            **26** words
  6. The fifth strophe (97:8–9) is in a single part arranged in three subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 97:8ab, 8c and 9.
    - 97:6–8            **26** words
    - 97:2–9            **26** words after *atnach*
  7. The sixth strophe (97:10–12) has three parts: 97:10, 11 and 12.
    - 97:5–10          **34** words before *atnach* and **23** words after *atnach*
  8. The seventh strophe (97:11–12) has two parts arranged in four subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 97:11a, 11b, 12a and 12b.
    - 97:8–11          **23** words before *atnach*
    - 97:5–11          **26** words after *atnach*
    - 97:8–12          **43 = 26 + 17**                      [composition formula]

## Observations

1. The seven strophes in Psalm 97 may be outlined in a menorah pattern, as follows:
 

A	Let the world rejoice in YHWH's righteous rule	[4.3] 97:1–2
B	YHWH's fire burns up his adversaries and lights up the world	[4.2] 97:3–4
C	The universe bears witness to YHWH's righteous glory	[4.6] 97:5–6
X	<b>May all who worship worthless idols be humiliated</b>	[2.2.2] 97:7
C'	Zion has heard and is glad for YHWH is exalted above all gods	[6.4] 97:8–9
B'	YHWH delivers the righteous from the wicked	[2.4] 97:10
A'	Let the righteous give thanks for the memory of his holiness	[3.4] 97:11–12
2. In terms of the 95 words in Psalm 97, the **arithmological center** falls on the word **בְּאֵלִילִים** ("in worthless idols") in 97:7a, with 47 words on either side. The fact that verse 7 highlights the meaning of the psalm as a whole is noted by Pieter van der Lugt, who says, "In v. 7 as a whole we find an important theological message (all who serve images are humiliated and gods have to bow down." The initial *Concentric Compositional Formula* is:

95 = 47 + 1 + 47 [word count—no heading]  
 or: 48 // 48 [word count—with “pivot” included in each half]

One candidate for the **meaningful center** is found by adding one word on either side of the **arithmological center** in verse 7, as follows:

השתחוּוּ **באלילים** המתהללים Those who boast in worthless idols bow down

The riddle-like quality of the words in 97:7b is reflected in the diversity of attempts to translate the text at this particular point:

- an indicative: D. M. Howard [*The Structure of Psalms 93–100*. Biblical and Judaic Studies 5 (Eisenbrauns, 1997), p. 70] translates, “All gods have worshiped him!” [so also NJPSV, NAB, NRSV, Anderson, Kraus, Gunkel, Delitzsch]
- an imperative: M. Dahood [Anchor Bible 17 (1968), p. 360], translates it, “Bow down to him, all you gods!” [so also JB, NASB, NEB, NIV]
- a precative “perfect”: [suggested by D. N. Freedman, “May all the heavenly beings bow down to him” (reference taken from D. M. Howard, p. 70)]

The *Concentric Compositional Formula* for this particular reading is:

95 = 46 + 3 + 46 [word count—no heading]  
 or: 49 // 49 [word count—with “pivot” included in each half]  
 {46 = 23 x 2 and 49 = 17 + 32 = 23 + 26}

Another candidate for the **meaningful center** is found by enlarging the “meaningful context” to include nine words in verse 7, as follows:

כל עבדי פסל All who serve graven images,  
**באלילים** המתהללים Those who boast in worthless idols,  
 השתחוּוּ לוֹ כל אלהים They bow down before him, namely all gods.

When these words are read as part of each half of Psalm 97, the *Concentric Compositional Formula* becomes:

95 = 43 + 9 + 43 [word count—no heading]  
 or: 52 // 52 [word count—with “pivot” included in each half]  
 {43 = 17 + 26 and 52 = 26 x 2}

The **meaningful center** may be enlarged further by including twelve words on either side of the **arithmological center** as follows:

הגידו השמים צדקו The heavens declare his righteousness;  
 וראו כל העמים כבודו And all the peoples see his glory.  
 יבשו כל עבדי פסל They are put to shame, all who serve graven images,  
**באלילים** המתהללים Those who boast in worthless idols,

השתחוּוּ לוֹ כָּל אֱלֹהִים	May all gods bow down to him.
שָׁמְעָה וּתְשִׂמַח צִיּוֹן	Zion has heard and was glad;
וּתְגַלְּנָה בְּנוֹת יְהוּדָה	And the daughters of Judah rejoiced,
לְמַעַן מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ	Because of your judgments.

When these words are read as part of each half of Psalm 97, the *Concentric Compositional Formula* becomes:

95 = 35 + 25 + 35 [word count—no heading]  
 or: 60 // 60 [word count—with “pivot” included in each half]

1. The 12-word “nested framework” (with the 5-word framework underlined) reads as follows:

1	<u>יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ תִּגְלֵה אֶרֶץ</u>	YHWH reigns, let the earth rejoice;
	<u>יִמְשִׁחוּ אִיִּם רַבִּים</u>	Let the many coastlands be glad.
2	עֲנַן וְעֹרֶפֶל סָבִיבוּ	Cloud and thick darkness surround him --
	צְדָק וּמִשְׁפָּט	Righteousness and judgment.
11	אֹר זֶרַע לְצַדִּיק	Light is sown for the righteous
	וּלְיֹשְׁרֵי־לֵב שִׂמְחָה	And for the upright in heart there is gladness
12	<u>שִׂמְחוּ צְדִיקִים בִּיהוָה</u>	Rejoice, O righteous ones, in YHWH
	<u>וְהוֹדוּ לִזְכֹּר קִדְשׁוֹ</u>	And give thanks for the memory of his holiness.

2. Summary of the concentric compositional formulae:

95 = 43 + 9 + 43 or: **52 // 52** {52 = 26 x 2}  
 95 = 35 + 25 + 35 or: 60 // 60

{with others in between}

95 = 12 + 71 + 12 or: 83// 83  
 95 = 5 + 85 + 5 or: 90 // 90

**52 = 23 + 6 + 23** or: 39 // 39 SAS (syntactic accentual-stress) units  
 {52 = 26 x 2}

31 = 14 + 3 + 14 or: **17 // 17** *briques* (primary SAS units)

3. In the prosodic structure of Psalm 97, 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.



A' <sup>11</sup> ʔôr zārūa<sup>c</sup> laṣṣaddîq<sup>^</sup>                      ûlāyišrê lēb šimḥāh :  
<sup>12</sup> ʔsimḥû ṣaddîqîm ba-yhwh<sup>^</sup>                      wəhōdû<sup>†</sup>                      ləzēker qodšô :

5. The 31 **briques** (primary SAS units) are distributed in seven strophes in Psalm 97 as follows: 31 = (5 + 4 + 5) + 3 + (5 + 4 + 5) = 14 + 3 + 14. The concentric compositional formula on the basis of **briques** is **17 // 17**, with the central pivot included in each half.

The **arithmological center** of Psalm 97 falls on the word *bāʔēlîlîm* (“in worthless idols”) in 97:7a, with 47 words on either side. Psalm 97 has 54 SAS units, 31 **briques** (primary SAS units), 13 versets, 7 strophes, and 3 cantos. The **arithmological center** in v. 7 is in the middle canto, the middle strophe, the middle verset, the middle **brique** (primary SAS units), and the middle two SAS units. There are 198 morae before the word *bāʔēlîlîm* (“in worthless idols”) in 97:7a and 171 morae after it.

6. Terrien finds three strophes in Psalm 97 framed by a Prelude (v. 1) and an Postlude (vv. 11–12) (*The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Eerdmans, 2003), p. 679–80. David Howard divides Psalm 97 into two major sections (vv. 1–9 and 10–12), which he subdivides into five parts (i.e., strophes). Van der Lugt finds four strophes. The analysis presented here, which is based on the balance in mora-count and the concentric pattern in the distribution of SAS units, indicates that there are seven strophes arranged in three cantos (vv. 1–4, 5–9 and 10–12).

Christensen	Terrien	David Howard	V.d. Lugt / CJL / JF
I A 97:1–2	Prelude (v.1)	I 1 97:1–3	I 1 97:1–3
B 97:2–4	I 97:2–4	2 97:4–6	2 97:4–6
II C 97:5–6	2 97:5–7		
<span style="border: 1px dashed black; padding: 2px;">X 97:7</span>		3 97:7	II 3 97:7–9
C' 97:8–9	3 97:8–10	4 97:8–9	
III B' 97:10		II 5 97:10–12	4 97:10–12
A' 97:11–12	Postlude (vv.11–12)		

The primary differences in terms of strophic structure observed here stem from the fact that the others assume a linear prosodic structure (though Terrien calls attention to a “chiasmus” that “closes the poem with thematic coherence” (p. 681).

7. Evidence from the logoprosodic analysis suggests that the numerical composition of Psalm 97, which is without a heading or any occurrence of the word *selah*, is similar to that of other psalms which include these so-called “extra” words. Note the following list of significant compositional numbers at the boundaries of the verses counting from the beginning:

97:1–4        **26** words  
97:1–5        **17** words after *atnach*

97:1–7      **52** (= **26** x 2) words  
97:1–9      **40** words before *atnach*

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 ten possible boundaries to work with. In 3 out of 10 of these boundaries (or 30% of the time) a multiple of one of these four compositional numbers is present. If the number **40** is included, the percentage increases to 40%. This evidence suggests the possibility of deliberate design at the point of the numerical composition of Psalm 97.

8. Determining the details of the musical and literary structures of Psalm 97 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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