

Psalm 99:1–9

Translation, Logoprosodic Analysis, and Observations

A Hymn in Praise of God’s Kingship and Holiness

Psalm 99:1–9

A. *YHWH Reigns in Zion—Let Them Praise Your Name; for YHWH Is Holy* (99:1–3) [6.6]

99:1 **YHWH** reigns / let the peoples tremble // 15 2 4 4 0
 he sits upon the cherubim / let the earth quake // 18 2_ 4 0 4
 98:4–99:1 **51** 29 22

99:2 **YHWH** / in Zion is the Great One // 12 2_ 3 3 0
 98:7–99:2a **34** 22 12

And he indeed is exalted / over all peoples // 12 2_ 5 0 5
 98:7–99:2 **39** 22 **17**

99:3 Let them praise your name / O Great /^a and Awesome One // 15 3 4 4 0
holy is he // 6 1 2 2 0
 98:7–99:3b **46** 28 **17**

B. *The King Loves Justice and Does Acts of Righteousness in Jacob* (99:4) [4.3]

99:4 The strongest king / the lover of justice // 12 2 4 4 0
 you yourself / established equity // 13 2_ 3 3 0
 98:8–99:4b **46** **32** 14

(Deeds of) justice and (acts of) righteousness / 10 1 2 0 2
 in Jacob / you have done // 13 2 3 0 3
 99:2–4 **26** 16 10

C. *Worship YHWH with Moses, Aaron and Samuel; for YHWH Is Holy* (99:5–6b) [4.4]

99:5 Exalt / **YHWH** our God / 16 2 3 3 0
 and worship ^a at his footstool / 13 1_ 3 3 0
 99:2–5a **32** 22 10

Holy is he // 6 1_ 2 2 0
 99:3–5 **26** 21 5

99:6 Moses and Aaron / were among his priests / 14 2 3 3 0
 and Samuel / was among those who called on his name // 16 2 3 3 0
 99:3–5 **32** 27 5

D. Leaders in Times Past Called To YHWH and He Spoke to Them (99:6c–7) [3.4]

	They called to YHWH / and he himself answered them //	99:1–6	<u>16</u> <u>2</u>	<u>5</u> <u>0</u> <u>5</u>	
				53	34 19
99:7	From the pillar of cloud /	99:4–7a	<u>8</u> <u>1</u>	<u>2</u> <u>2</u> <u>0</u>	
				33	23 10
	He spoke to them //	99:5–7b	<u>8</u> <u>1</u>	<u>2</u> <u>2</u> <u>0</u>	
				23	18 5
	They obeyed his commands /		11 1	2 0 2	
	and the statutes / ^a he gave them //	99:3–7	<u>11</u> <u>2</u>	<u>3</u> <u>0</u> <u>3</u>	
				46	31 15

E. Exalt YHWH and Worship at His Holy Mountain; for He Is Holy (99:8–9) [6.6]

99:8	YHWH our God / you yourself answered them //		19 2	4 4 0	
	a forgiving God ^a you were to them //		14 1	4 4 0	
	though punishing / their wrongdoings //	99:1–8	<u>13</u> <u>2</u>	<u>3</u> <u>0</u> <u>3</u>	
				73	46 27
99:9	Exalt / YHWH our God /		16 2	3 3 0	
	and worship / at his holy mountain //		11 2	3 3 0	
	for holy / is YHWH our God //	99:4–9	<u>17</u> <u>2</u>	<u>4</u> <u>0</u> <u>4</u>	
				61	35 26
		99:1–9		83	52 31

Scansion in Accentual Stress Units: (6.6) . (4.3).(4.4).(3.4) . (6.6)
 (12 + 22 + 12) = 46
 or: 34 // 34 {46 = 23 x 2 and 34 = 17 x 2}

Concentric Compositional Formula: 83 = 41 + 1 + 41 [no heading]
 or: 42 // 42

Notes:

- 99:3^a Reading *mērəkā* in BHS as disjunctive.
- 99:5^a Reading *deḥi* in BHS as conjunctive.
- 99:7^a Reading *munaḥ* followed immediately by *gaʿya* (= *meteg*) in BHS as disjunctive.
- 99:8^a Reading *deḥi* in BHS as conjunctive.

Summary of the Logoprosodic Analysis

1. Psalm 99:1–9 has five strophes: 99:1–3, 4, 5–6b, 6c–7 and 8–9.

A 99:1–3	3 dyads read as: dyad & triad in balance + pivot:	[15 + 18] + 12 + [12 + 15 + 6]	= 33 + 12 + 33	morae
B 99:4	2 balanced dyads:	[12 + 13] + [10 + 13]	= 25 + 23	morae
X 99:5–6b	2 balanced dyads plus pivot:	[16 + 13] + 6 + [14 + 16]	= 29 + 6 + 30	morae
B' 99:6c–7	2 balanced dyads plus pivot:	[16 + 8] + 8 + [11 + 11]	= 24 + 8 + 22	morae
A' 99:7–9	2 balanced triads:	[19 + 14 + 13] + [16 + 11 + 17]	= 46 + 44	morae

2. The first strophe (99:1–3) is a single part arranged in four subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 99:1, 2a, 2b and 3.

- 98:4–99:1 **51** (= **17** x 3) words
- 98:7–99:2 **17** words after *atnach*
- 98:7–99:3 **46** (= **23** x 2) words and **17** words after *atnach*

3. The second strophe (99:4) is a single part arranged in four subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 99:4ab and 4cd.

- 99:2–4 **26** words
- 99:1–4 **34** (= **17** x 2) words

4. The third strophe (99:5–6b) is as single part arranged in three subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 99:5ab, 5c and 6ab.

- 99:3–5 **26** words
- 99:2–5 **34** (= **17** x 2) words

5. The fourth strophe (99:6b–7) is as single part arranged in four subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 99:6c, 7a, 7b and 7c.

- 99:1–6 **34** (= **17** x 2) words before *atnach*
- 99:3–7 **46** (= **23** x 2) words
- 99:1–7 **34** (= **17** x 2) words before *atnach*

6. The fifth strophe (99:8–9) is as single part arranged in four subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 99:8 and 9.

- 99:5–8 **26** words before *atnach*
- 99:1–8 **46** (= **23** x 2) words before *atnach*
- 99:4–9 **26** words after *atnach*
- 99:1–9 **52** (= **26** x 2) words before *atnach*

Observations

1. The five strophes in Psalm 99 may be outlined in a menorah pattern, as follows:

A	YHWH reigns in Zion from his throne on the cherubim	[4.2]	98:1–2a
B	He is exalted so let the peoples praise your name, for he is holy	[2.4]	98:2b–3
C	The king loves justice and does acts of righteousness in Jacob	[4.3]	98:4
X	Worship YHWH with Moses, Aaron & Samuel; for He is holy	[4.4]	98:5–6b
C'	Leaders in times past called to YHWH and he spoke to them	[3.4]	98:6c–7
B'	You answered them and disciplined them for their faults	[4.2]	98:8
A'	Exalt YHWH and worship at his holy mountain, for he is holy	[2.4]	98:9

2. In terms of the 83 words in Psalm 99, the **arithmological center** falls on the word הוּא (“he”) in 99:5b, with 41 words on either side. The *Concentric Compositional Formula* is:

$$83 = 41 + 1 + 41 \quad \text{[word count—there is no heading]}$$

$$\text{or: } 42 // 42 \quad \text{[with pivot counted in each half]}$$

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

והשתחוּוּ לְהֵדָם רַגְלָיו	And worship at his footstool.
קְדוֹשׁ הוּא	He is holy.
מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן בְּכֹהֲנָיו וְשַׁמּוּאֵל	Moses and Aaron were among his priests, and Samuel.

When these nine words are read as part of each half of Psalm 99, the *Concentric Compositional Formula* becomes:

$$83 = 37 + 9 + 37 \quad \text{[word count—there is no heading in Psalm 99]}$$

$$\text{or: } 46 // 46 \quad \text{[word count—with “pivot” included in each half]}$$

$$\{46 = 23 \times 2\}$$

It is possible to read a “riddle in the middle” here, by focusing on a center within the center, which is made up of three words, as follows:

מֹשֶׁה הוּא קְדוֹשׁ	Holy is he, namely Moses.
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When the text is read in this manner, the *Concentric Compositional Formula* becomes:

$$83 = 40 + 3 + 40 \quad \text{[word count—there is no heading in Psalm 99]}$$

$$\text{or: } 43 // 43 \quad \text{[word count—with “pivot” included in each half]}$$

In Leviticus 19:1–2, “YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: **You shall be holy, for I YHWH your God am holy.**’” We can assume then that Moses obeyed this injunction; and so, indeed, he also *is holy*. Within

the context of Psalm 99:6, we learn that Aaron and Samuel take their places alongside Moses—“among those who called on the name of YHWH, and he answered them.”

The **meaningful center** may be expanded by including six words on either side of the **arithmological center** as follows:

יהוה אלהינו	YHWH is our God,
והשתחויו להדם רגליו	So worship at his footstool.
הוא קדוש	He is holy.
משה ואהרן בכהניו	Moses and Aaron were among his priests,
ושמואל בקראי שמו	And Samuel was among those who called on his name.

When the text is read in this manner, the *Concentric Compositional Formula* becomes:

83 = 35 + 13 + 35 [word count—there is no heading in Psalm 99]
 or: 48 // 48 [word count—with “pivot” included in each half]

The **meaningful center** may be expanded by including eleven words on either side of the **arithmological center** as follows:

וצדקה ביעקב אתה עשית	And righteous deeds in Jacob you have done.
רוממו יהוה אלהינו	Exalt YHWH our God;
והשתחויו להדם רגליו	And worship at his footstool.
הוא קדוש	He is holy.
משה ואהרן בכהניו	Moses and Aaron were among his priests,
ושמואל בקראי שמו	And Samuel was among those who called on his name;
קראים אל יהוה והוא יענם	They called to YHWH and he answered them.

When the text is read in this manner, the *Concentric Compositional Formula* becomes:

83 = 30 + 23 + 30 [word count—there is no heading in Psalm 99]
 or: 53 // 53 [word count—with “pivot” included in each half]

YHWH’s holiness is highlighted in the first, third and fifth strophes.

3. The 26-word “nested framework” (with the 4-word framework underlined) reads as follows:

1	<u>יהוה מלך ירגזו עמים</u>	YHWH reigns, <u>let the peoples tremble.</u>
	ישב כרובים תנוט הארץ	He sits upon the cherubim, let the earth quake.
	יהוה בציון גדול	YHWH in Zion is the Great One
	ורם הוא על-כל-העמים	And he indeed is exalted over all peoples.
2	יודו שמך גדול ונורא	Let the praise you name O Great and Awesome One
	קדוש הוא	Holy is he.

ועז מלך משפט אהב And the might of the king who loves justice

- שמרו עדתיו וחק נתן־למו They obeyed his commands, and the statutes he gave them.
- 8 יהוה אלהינו אתה עניתם YHWH our God you yourself answered them
אל נשא היית להם A forgiving God you were to them
ונקם על־עלילותם Though punishing their wrongdoings.
- 9 רוממו יהוה אלהינו Exalt YHWH our God;
והשתחוו להר קדשו And worship at his holy mountain.
כי־קדוש יהוה אלהינו For holy is YHWH our God.

4. Summary of the concentric compositional formulae:

83 = 35 + 13 + 35 or: 48 // 48

83 = 30 + 23 + 30 or: 53 // 53

{with others in between}

83 = 26 + 31 + 26 or: 57// 57

83 = 4 + 75 + 4 or: 79 // 79

46 = 12 + 22 + 12 or: **34 // 34** SAS (syntactic accentual-stress) units
{46 = 23 x 2}

23 = 6 + 11 + 6 or: **17 // 17** *briques* (primary SAS units)

5. In the prosodic structure of Psalm 99, 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 99 has 23 **briques** (primary SAS units), 18 of which are marked by: *soph pasuq* (9 times, at the end of each verse), *atnach* (7 times, in each verse except vv. 3 and 5), and *ole weyored* (2 times, in vv. 4 and 8). The remaining five occurrences are marked by *revia* (four times, in vv. 3, 4, 5, and 9) and *revia mugrash* (v. 6).

6. The prosodic structure of Psalm 99, in terms of its primary syntactic accentual stress units (**briques**), may be displayed as follows [^ represents *atnach*; : represents *soph pasuq*; † represents *ole weyored*, and † represents all other accent markers]:

I A ¹ *yhwh mālāk yirgəzû ‘ammîm* ^ *yōšēḅ kərûḅîm tānûṭ ḥāʾāreṣ* :
² *yhwh bəšîyôn gādôl* ^ *wərām ḥûʾ ‘al kol ḥā‘ammim* :
³ *yôḏû šimka gādôl wənôra* † *qādôš ḥûʾ* :

II B ⁴ *wəʿōz meleḵ mišpāt ʾāhēḅ* † ʾattāḥ kônanta mēšārîm ^
mišpāt ûšəḏāqāḥ bəyaʿāqōḅ ʾattāḥ ʿāsîta :

X ⁵ *rôməmû yhwh ʾēlōhênû* *wəhištaḥwû lahəḏôm raglāyw* †
qādôš ḥûʾ :
⁶ *mōšeh wəʾahārôn bəḵōḥānāyw* *ûšəmûʾēl bəqōraʾē šəmô* ^

B' *qōraʾîm ʾel yhwh wəḥûʾ yaʿānēm* : ⁷ *bəʿammûḏ ʿānān yəḏabbēr ʾālêhem* ^
šāmərû ʿēḏōṭāyw wəḥōq nātan lāmô :

III A' ⁸ *yhwh ʾēlōhênû ʾattāḥ ʿānîtam* † ʾēl nōšēʾ ḥāyîta lāhem ^
wənōqēm ʿal ʿālîlōtām :
⁹ *rôməmû yhwh ʾēlōhênû* † *wəhištaḥwû ləhar qoḏšô* ^
kî qādôš yhwh ʾēlōhênû :

7. The 23 **briques** (primary SAS units) are distributed in five strophes in Psalm 99 as follows: **23** = 6 + (3 + 5 + 3) + 6 = 6 + 11 + 6. The concentric compositional formula is **17 // 17**, with the central pivot counted in each half.

The **arithmological center** of Psalm 99 falls on the word ḥûʾ (“he”) in the second half of verse 5, with 41 words on either side. Psalm 99 has 46 SAS units, 23 **briques**, 11 versets, 5 strophes, and 3 cantos. The **arithmological center** is in the middle canto, the middle strophe, the middle verset, the middle **brique**, and the middle two SAS units.

Note that the poet appears to be playing with the number 14 within the central strophe (verse 5):

99:1–5 42 = 28 + 14 (compositional formula: all three numbers divisible by 14)

8. Evidence from the logoprosodic analysis suggests that the numerical composition of Psalm 99, 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:

99:1–4 **34** (= 17 x 2) words
 99:1–6 **34** (= 17 x 2) words before *atnach*
 99:1–8 **46** (= 23 x 2) words before *atnach*
 99:1–9 **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 verse 3, which leaves seven possible boundaries to work with. In 4 out of 9 of these boundaries (or more than 44% of the time) a multiple of one of these four compositional numbers is present. This evidence suggests the possibility of deliberate design at the point of the numerical composition of Psalm 99.

9. Terrien finds three strophes in Psalm 99:1–8 followed by an Envoi in v. 9 (*The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Eerdmans, 2003), p. 681–82. David Howard divides Psalm 99 into two sections subdivided into four parts (vv. 1–3, 4–5, 6–7 and 8–9). Van der Lugt, Labuschagne, and Fokkelman all find five 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 five strophes and 3 cantos (vv. 1–3, 4–7 and 8–9).

Christensen	Terrien	David Howard	Van der Lugt
I A 99:1–3	1 99:1–3	1 99:1–3	I 1 99:1–3
II B 99:4	2 99:4–5	2 99:4–5	2 99:4–5
X 99:5–6b			
B' 99:6c–7	3 99:6–8	3 99:6–7	II 3 99:6–7
III A' 99:8–9	Envoi (v. 9)	4 99:8–9	4 99:8–9

The primary difference in terms of strophic structure observed here stems from the fact that the others assume a linear prosodic structure.

10. Determining the details of the musical and literary structures of Psalm 99 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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