

Psalm 115:1–18

Translation, Logoprosodic Analysis, and Observations

Trust in YHWH—He Is Your Help and Your Shield

Psalm 115:1–18

A. *Not to Us but to Your Name Give Glory, O YHWH* (115:1–2)

[5.4]

| | | | | | | |
|-------|---|--------------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| 115:1 | Not to us YHWH / not to us // | 16 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| | but to your name ^a give glory // | <u>11</u> | <u>1</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>0</u> |
| | | 114:7–115:1b | | 23 | 17 | 6 |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|-------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | For the sake of your covenant-love / (and) for your fidelity // | <u>9</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>0</u> | <u>4</u> |
| | | 114:7–115:1 | | 27 | 17 | 10 |

| | | | | | | |
|-------|---------------------------------|-------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 115:2 | Why / should the nations say // | 14 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| | where now / is their God? // | <u>11</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>0</u> | <u>3</u> |
| | | 114:8–115:2 | | 26 | 16 | 10 |

B. *Our God Is in the Heavens and He Does What He Pleases* (115:3)

[2.2]

| | | | | | | |
|-------|--|--------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 115:3 | Indeed our God / ^a is in the heavens // | <u>14</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>0</u> |
| | | 113:8–115:3a | | 87 | 53 | 34 |

| | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|-------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | Whatever / he pleases he does // | <u>12</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>0</u> | <u>4</u> |
| | | 114:8–115:3 | | 32 | 18 | 14 |

C. *The Gods of the Nations are Senseless Idols of Silver and Gold* (115:4–6)

[4.8]

| | | | | | | |
|-------|--------------------------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 115:4 | Their idols / are silver and gold // | <u>12</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>0</u> |
| | | 115:1–4a | | 28 | 17 | 11 |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|-------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | (They are) the work / of human hands // | <u>11</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>0</u> | <u>3</u> |
| | | 114:8–115:4 | | 38 | 21 | 17 |

| | | | | | | |
|-------|---|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 115:5 | They have mouths / but they do not speak // | 13 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| | they have eyes / but they do not see // | <u>13</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>0</u> | <u>4</u> |
| | | 115:2–5 | | 26 | 12 | 14 |

| | | | | | | |
|-------|--|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 115:6 | They have ears / but they do not hear // | 14 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| | they have noses / but they do not smell // | <u>12</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>0</u> | <u>4</u> |
| | | 115:2–6 | | 34 | 16 | 18 |

D. *These Idols Have No Hands or Feet and Make No Verbal Sounds* (115:7–8)

[4.6]

| | | | | | | |
|-------|--|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 115:7 | They have hands / but they do not feel / | 12 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| | they have feet / but they do not walk // | <u>13</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>0</u> |
| | | 115:4–7b | | 28 | 17 | 11 |

| | | | |
|---|---|--------------------|----------------------------|
| | <And> ^a they cannot make any sounds / in their throats // | <u>11</u> <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> <u>0</u> <u>3</u> |
| | | 115:6-7 | 17 10 7 |
| 115:8 | Like them / those will be who make them // | 12 2 | 3 3 0 |
| | anyone / who trusts in them // | <u>12</u> <u>2</u> | <u>4</u> <u>0</u> <u>4</u> |
| | | 115:1-8 | 63 34 29 |
| E. Israel and the House of Aaron, Trust in YHWH: "He Is Their Help" (115:9-10) [4.4] | | | |
| 115:9 | O Israel / trust in YHWH // | 12 2 | 3 3 0 |
| | their help and their shield / ^a he is // | <u>12</u> <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> <u>0</u> <u>3</u> |
| | | 115:1-9 | 69 37 32 |
| 115:10 | O house of Aaron / trust in YHWH // | 14 2 | 4 4 0 |
| | their help and their shield / ^a he is // | <u>12</u> <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> <u>0</u> <u>3</u> |
| | | 115:6-10 | 37 20 17 |
| F. Trust YHWH—He Will Bless Israel and the House of Aaron (115:11-12) [4.6] | | | |
| 115:11 | You who fear YHWH / trust in YHWH // | 15 2 | 4 4 0 |
| | their help and their shield / ^a he is // | <u>12</u> <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> <u>0</u> <u>3</u> |
| | | 115:5-11 | 52 28 24 |
| 115:12 | YHWH has been mindful of us / he will bless us // | <u>15</u> <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> <u>3</u> <u>0</u> |
| | | 115:10-12a | 17 11 6 |
| | He will bless / the house of Israel // | 13 2 | 4 4 0 |
| | he will bless / the house of Aaron // | <u>12</u> <u>2</u> | <u>4</u> <u>0</u> <u>4</u> |
| | | 115:8-12 | 38 21 17 |
| G. YHWH Will Bless Those Who Fear Him—May You be Blessed (115:13-15) [8.4] | | | |
| 115:13 | YHWH will bless / ^a those who fear him ^a // | <u>14</u> <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> <u>3</u> <u>0</u> |
| | | 115:9-13a | 34 21 13 |
| | The small / together with the great // | <u>12</u> <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> <u>0</u> <u>3</u> |
| | | 115:12-13 | 17 10 7 |
| 115:14 | May YHWH add / ^a unto you // | <u>12</u> <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> <u>3</u> <u>0</u> |
| | | 115:11-14a | 27 17 10 |
| | Unto you / and unto your children // | <u>10</u> <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> <u>0</u> <u>3</u> |
| | | 115:12-14 | 23 13 10 |
| 115:15 | May you be blessed / of YHWH // | <u>12</u> <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> <u>3</u> <u>0</u> |
| | | 115:12-15a | 26 16 10 |
| | Maker / of heaven and earth // | <u>13</u> <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> <u>0</u> <u>3</u> |
| | | 115:8-15 | 56 30 26 |

Summary of the Logoprosodic Analysis

1. Psalm 115:1–18 has nine strophes: 115:1–2, 3, 4–6, 7–8, 9–10, 11–12, 13–15, 16 and 17–18.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---------|---------------------------|------------------------------|---|----------------|-------|
| A | 115:1–2 | 2 balanced dyads + pivot: | $(16 + 11) + 9 + (14 + 11)$ | = | $27 + 9 + 25$ | morae |
| B | 115:3 | balanced dyad: | $(14 + 12)$ | = | $14 + 12$ | morae |
| C | 115:4 | balanced dyad: | $(12 + 11)$ | = | $12 + 11$ | morae |
| | 115:5–6 | 2 balanced dyads: | $(13 + 13) + (14 + 12)$ | = | $26 + 26$ | morae |
| D | 115:7–8 | 2 balanced dyads + pivot: | $(12 + 13) + 11 + (12 + 12)$ | = | $25 + 11 + 24$ | morae |

| | | | | | | |
|---|----------|-------------------|-------------------------|---|-----------|-------|
| X | 115:9–10 | 2 balanced dyads: | $(12 + 12) + (14 + 12)$ | = | $24 + 26$ | morae |
|---|----------|-------------------|-------------------------|---|-----------|-------|

| | | | | | | |
|----|-----------|--------------------------|------------------------------|---|----------------|-------|
| D' | 115:11–12 | 2 balanced dyad + pivot: | $(15 + 12) + 15 + (13 + 12)$ | = | $27 + 15 + 25$ | morae |
| C' | 115:13 | balanced dyad: | $(14 + 12)$ | = | $14 + 12$ | morae |
| | 115:14 | balanced dyad: | $(12 + 10)$ | = | $12 + 10$ | morae |
| | 115:15 | balanced dyad: | $(12 + 13)$ | = | $12 + 13$ | morae |
| B' | 115:16 | balanced dyad: | $(14 + 16)$ | = | $14 + 16$ | morae |
| A' | 115:17–18 | 2 balanced dyads: | $(14 + 13) + (12 + 17)$ | = | $27 + 29$ | morae |

2. The first strophe (115:1–2) is a single part arranged in three subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 115:1ab, 1c and 2.
- 114:7–115:1 **17** words before *atnach*
 - 114:8–115:2 **26** words
3. The second strophe (115:3) is a single part arranged in two subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 115:3a and 3b.
- 114:7–115:1 **17** words before *atnach*
 - 114:8–115:2 **26** words
 - 114:8–115:3 **32** words
4. The third strophe (115:4–6) has two parts arranged in four subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 115:4a, 4b, 5 and 6.
- 115:1–4 **17** words before *atnach*
 - 115:2–5 **26** words
 - 115:2–6 **34** (= **17** x 2) words
5. The fourth strophe (115:7–8) is a single part arranged in three subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 115:7ab, 7c and 8.
- 115:4–7b **17** words before *atnach*
 - 115:6–7 **17** words
 - 115:5–8 **32** words and **17** words before *atnach*
 - 115:1–8 **34** (= **17** x 2) words before *atnach*

6. The fifth strophe (115:9–10) is a single part arranged in two subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 115:9 and 10.
 - 115:4–9 **23** words before *atnach*
 - 115:1–9 **32** words after *atnach*
 - 115:6–10 **17** words after *atnach*

7. The sixth strophe (115:11–12) is a single part arranged in three subdivisions on the basis of word-count patterns: 115:11, 12a and 12bc.
 - 115:5–11 **52** (= **26** x 2) words
 - 115:8–12 **17** words after *atnach*

8. The seventh strophe (115:13–15) has three parts arranged in six subdivisions on the basis of word-count: 115:13a, 13b, 14a, 14b, 15a and 15b.
 - 115:12–13 **17** words
 - 115:12–14 **23** words
 - 115:11–14 **17** words before *atnach*
 - 115:8–14 **23** words after *atnach*
 - 115:8–15 **26** words after *atnach*

9. The eighth strophe (115:16) is a single part arranged in two subdivisions on the basis of word-count patterns: 115:16a and 16b.
 - 115:12–16 **17** words after *atnach*
 - 115:10–16 **23** words after *atnach*
 - 115:9–16 **26** words after *atnach*
 - 115:11–16 **23** words before *atnach*

10. The ninth strophe (115:17–18) is a single part arranged in two subdivisions on the basis of word-count patterns: 115:17 and 18.
 - 115:12–16 **17** words after *atnach*
 - 115:10–16 **23** words after *atnach*
 - 115:9–16 **26** words after *atnach*
 - 115:11–16 **23** words before *atnach*
 - 115:13–17 **17** words after *atnach*
 - 115:12–17 **23** words before *atnach*
 - 115:16–18 **23** words
 - 115:13–18 **17** words after *atnach*

Observations

1. The nine strophes in Psalm 115 may be outlined in a menorah pattern, which is determined primarily on prosodic grounds, as follows:

| | | | |
|----|---|-------|-----------|
| A | To your name give glory, O YHWH —Our God is in the heavens | [9.4] | 115:1–3 |
| B | The gods of the nations are senseless idols of silver and gold | [4.8] | 115:4–6 |
| C | Such idols have no hands or feet and make no aural sounds | [4.6] | 115:7–8 |
| X | Trust in YHWH, Israel & the house of Aaron: He is their help | [4.4] | 115:9–10 |
| C' | YHWH will bless those who fear him—may you be blessed! | [6.4] | 115:11–12 |
| B' | The heavens belong to YHWH and the earth to Adam's children | [8.4] | 115:13–15 |
| A' | The dead do not praise Yah but we will praise him forever | [4.9] | 115:16–18 |

2. Psalms 114 and 115 are combined in a single psalm in many Hebrew Mss (including Codex L), LXX, Theodotion, Syriac, and the Latin Vulgate. It is interesting to note that in BHL (*Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia*) Aron Dotan follows normal Jewish practice along with Van der Hooght [1850], M. Letteris [1870], C. D. Ginsburg [1896], N. Snaith [1970] and others before him in presenting Psalms 114 and 115 as two separate psalms even though this is not the case in Codex L (*Leningradensia*) itself.

3. In terms of the 135 words in Psalm 115, the **arithmological center** falls on the word הוּא ("he") in 115:9b with 67 words on either side. The initial **concentric compositional formula** is:

$$135 = 67 + 1 + 67 \quad [\text{word count—with heading}]$$

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

| | |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| בטח ביהוה | Trust in YHWH — |
| הוא עזרם ומגנם | He is their help and their shield. |
| בית אהרן בטחו ביהוה | O house of Aaron, trust in YHWH. |

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

$$135 = 63 + 9 + 63 \quad [\text{word count—with 2-word heading}]$$

The **meaningful center** may be expanded to include 21 words on either side of the **arithmological center**, which comprises 115:7–12a. The *Concentric Compositional Formula* then becomes:

$$135 = 46 + 43 + 46 \quad [\text{word count—with 2-word heading}]$$

4. The 16-word “nested framework” (with the 5-word framework underlined) reads as follows:

| | | |
|---|----------------------------|---|
| 1 | <u>לא לנו יהוה ולא לנו</u> | <u>Not to us, YHWH, not to us;</u> |
| | כי־לשמך תן כבוד | But to your name give glory. |
| | על־חסדך על־אמתך | For the sake of your covenant-love and your fidelity. |

| | | |
|----|--|--|
| 2 | למה יאמרו הגוים | Why should the nations say? |
| 17 | לא המתים יהללו־יה ולא כל־ירדי דומה | The dead do not praise YHWH; Nor do any who go down into silence. |
| 18 | ואנחנו נברך יה <u>מעתה ועד־עולם</u> <u>הללו־יה</u> | But as for us, we will praise Yah, <u>From this time forth and forever,</u> <u>Praise Yah (Hallelu-Yah).</u> |

5. Summary of the concentric compositional formulae:

$$135 = 63 + 9 + 63$$

$$135 = 46 + 43 + 46$$

{with others in between}

$$135 = 16 + 103 + 16$$

$$135 = 5 + 125 + 5$$

$$78 = 35 + 8 + 35 \quad \text{SAS (syntactic accentual-stress) units}$$

$$\{78 = 26 \times 3\}$$

$$40 = 18 + 4 + 18 \quad \text{briques (primary SAS units)}$$

6. In the prosodic structure of Psalm 115, 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 115 has 40 **briques** (primary accentual-stress units), 37 of which are marked by *soph pasuq* (18 times, at the end of each verse), *atnach* (17 times, in each verse except v. 18), and *oleh weyored* (2

times, in vv. 1 and 12). The boundaries of the remaining three **briques** are marked by *revia* (3 times, in vv. 7 and 18 [twice]).

7. The prosodic structure of Psalm 115, in terms of its **briques** (primary syntactic accentual-stress units), may be displayed as follows: ^ represents *atnach*; : represents *soph pasuq*; † represents *oleh weyored*; and † represents all other accent markers.

I A ¹ *lō' lānū yhw h lō' lānū* † *kī ləšimkā tēn kābôd* ^
‘al ḥasdəkā ‘al ‘āmittekā :
² *lāmmāh yō'mərū haggōyīm* ^ *‘ayyēh nā' ‘əlōhēhem :*

B ³ *wē'lōhēnū ḥaššāyīm* ^ *kōl ‘āšer ḥāpēs ‘āsāh :*

II C ⁴ *‘āšabbēhem keseḇ wəzāhāḇ* ^ *ma‘āsēh yəḏē ‘ādām :*
⁵ *peh lāhem wəlō' yəḏabbērū* ^ *‘ēnayīm lāhem wəlō' yir'ū :*
⁶ *‘oznayīm lāhem wəlō' yisīmā'ū* ^ *‘ap lāhem wəlō' yərīḥūn :*

D ⁷ *yəḏēhem wəlō' yəmīšūn* † *raḡlēhem wəlō' yəhallēkū* ^ *lō' yehgū biḡrōnām :*
⁸ *kāmōhem yihyū 'ōsēhem* ^ *kōl ‘āšer bōtēah bāhem :*

| |
|--|
| III X ⁹ <i>yisrā'ēl bəṭah ba-yhw h</i> ^ <i>‘ezrām ūmāḡinnām</i> hū' : |
| ¹⁰ <i>bēt 'ahārōn biṭhū ba-yhw h</i> ^ <i>‘ezrām ūmāḡinnām hū' :</i> |

IV D' ¹¹ *yir'ē yhw h biṭhū ba-yhw h* ^ *‘ezrām ūmāḡinnām hū' :*
¹² *yhw h zəkorānū yəḇārēk* † *yəḇārēk 'et bēt yisrā'ēl* ^ *yəḇārēk 'et bēt 'ahārōn :*

C' ¹³ *yəḇārēk yir'ē yhw h* ^ *ḥaqqəṭannīm 'im haggəḏōlīm :*
¹⁴ *yōsēḇ yhw h 'ālēkem* ^ *‘ālēkem wə'al bənēkem :*
¹⁵ *bərūkīm 'attem la-yhw h* ^ *‘ōsēh šamayīm wā'āreḥ :*

V B' ¹⁶ *ḥaššāmayīm sāmāyīm la-yhw h* ^ *wəhā'āreḥ nāṭan liḇnē 'ādām :*

A' ¹⁷ *lō' hammētīm yəhaləlū yāh* ^ *wəlō' kol yōrəḏē ḏūmāh :*
¹⁸ *wa'ānahnu nəḇārēk yāh* † *mē'attāh wə'ad 'ōlām* † *haləlū yāh :*

According to the analysis presented here, the 40 **briques** are distributed within 7 strophes in Psalm 115 as follows: 40 = (7 + 6 + 5) + 4 + (5 + 6 + 7) = 18 + 4 + 18.

The **arithmological center** of Psalm 115 falls on the word **hû²** (“he”) in 115:9b, with 67 words on either side. Psalm 115 has 78 SAS units, 40 **briques** (primary SAS units), 18 versets, 7 strophes and 5 cantos. The **arithmological center** is in the middle **canto**, the middle strophe, the middle two versets, the middle two **briques**, and the middle two SAS units. There are 498 morae in Psalm 115—with 244 morae before the word **hû²** (“he”) in 115:9b and 252 morae after it.

8. Terrien finds 3 strophes plus what he calls a “Preamble.” in Psalm 115 (*The Psalms* [2003], pp. 770–74.)—i.e., four strophic units, which more or less correspond to the “cantos” found here. 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 nine strophes within five cantos: vv. 1–3, 4–8, 9–10, 11–15 and 16–18.

| Christensen | Terrien |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| I A 115:1–2 B 115:3 | Preamble (vv. 1–3) |
| II C 115:4–6 D 115:7–8 | I 115:4–8 |
| III X 115:9–10 | II 115:9–13 |
| IV D' 115:11–12 C' 115:13–15 | III 115:14–18 |
| V B' 115:16 A' 115:17–18 | |

The concentric structure of Psalm 115 is observed by R. Meynet (*Rhetorical Analysis*, 153–55) and Fretlöh (*EvT* 56 [1996] 487–88).

9. Note the following list of significant compositional numbers at the boundaries of the verses counting from the beginning:

115:1–4 **17** words before *atnach*
 115:1–8 **34** (= **17** x 2) words before *atnach*
 115:1–9 **69** (= **23** x 3) words and **32** words after *atnach*
 115:1–12 **52** (= **26** x 2) words before *atnach*
 115:1–15 **51** (= **17** x 3) words after *atnach*
 115:1–16 **119** = **64** + **55** [compositional formula]
 115:1–17 **68** (= **17** x 4) 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 2, which leaves 17 possible boundaries to work with. In 7 out of 17 of these boundaries (or 41.2% 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 115.

10. Determining the details of the musical and literary structures of Psalm 115 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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