

Psalm 117:1–2

Translation, Logoprosodic Analysis, and Observations

Doxology: Praise YHWH All People

Psalm 117:1–2

Strophic Structure (in SAS units):

[4.4]

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| <p>117:1 Praise YHWH / all nations // laud him / all people-groups //</p> | <p>14 2 _12 2_</p> | <p>5 5 0 3 0 3</p> | <p>116:16–117:1 35 23 12</p> |
| <p>117:2 For his covenant-love is mighty / over us / and YHWH's fidelity is forever /</p> | <p>14 2 _11 1_</p> | <p>4 4 0 3 3 0</p> | <p>116:17–117:2 36 26 10</p> |
| <p>Praise Yah! (<i>Hallelujah</i>) //</p> | <p>6 1</p> | <p>2 2 0</p> | <p>117:1–2 17 14 3</p> |

Scansion in SAS Units: (4.4) (4 + [3 + 1]) = 8

Concentric Compositional Formula: 17 = 8 + 1 + 8 [word count—no heading]

Summary of the Logoprosodic Analysis

- In terms of balance in mora-count, Psalm 117:1–2 is a single strophe, the shortest psalm in the Psalter.

| | | | | |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------|
| 117:1–2c | 2 balanced dyads: | [14 + 12] + [14 + 11] | = 26 + 25 | morae |
| 117:2d | {rubric that stands outside the poetic structure} | | = 6 | morae |

- Psalm 117 is a single part arranged in four subdivisions: 117:1, 2a, 2bd and 2d.
 - 116:16–117:1 **23** words before *atnach*
 - 117:1–2 **17** words

Observations

- The single strophe in Psalm 117 may be outlined in a 5-part concentric structure, which is determined primarily on prosodic grounds, as follows:

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------|
| A Praise YHWH all nations! | [2] 117:1a |
| B Laud him all people-groups! | [2] 117:1b |
| X For his covenant-love is mighty over us. | [2] 117:2a |
| B' YHWH's fidelity is forever. | [1] 117:2b |
| A' Praise YHWH (<i>Hallelu-Yah</i>)! | [1] 117:2c |

2. In terms of the 15 words in the main body of Psalm 117, the **arithmological center** is the word האמים (“the people-groups”), at the end of verse 1. The initial **concentric compositional formula** is:

$$15 = 7 + 1 + 7 \quad \text{[word count—without postlude]}$$

How appropriate to put the “people-groups” of the world at the center of this simple statement of praise! That was God’s intention from the beginning, when he called Abram to leave home on a journey to the “Promised Land” to become Abraham and thus to be a blessing to “all the families of the earth.” We have here a marvelous example of the “riddle in the middle”—calling the “rabbi-teacher” in various times and settings to rise to the occasion by way of explication.

3. In terms of the Psalm 117 as a whole, however, the **arithmological center** is the word כי (“for”) at the beginning of verse 2. The initial concentric compositional formula is:

$$17 = 8 + 1 + 8 \quad \text{[word count—with postlude]}$$

A **meaningful center** is found by including three words on either side, as follows:

שְׁבַחְהוּ כָּל הָאֲמִים Laud him, all people-groups;
 כִּי גִבֹר עָלֵינוּ חֶסֶדוֹ For his covenant-love is mighty over us.

The **concentric compositional formula** becomes:

$$17 = 5 + 7 + 5 \quad \text{[word count]}$$

The **meaningful center** may be expanded further to include five words on either side, as follows:

כָּל גּוֹיִם שְׁבַחְהוּ All nations laud him,
 כָּל הָאֲמִים (Namely) all the peoples;
 כִּי גִבֹר עָלֵינוּ חֶסֶדוֹ For his covenant-love is mighty over us,
 וְאֵמֶת יְהוָה Yea, the fidelity of YHWH.

The **concentric compositional formula** then becomes:

$$17 = 3 + 11 + 3 \quad \text{[word count]}$$

4. The 8-word “nested framework” (with the 5-word framework underlined) reads as follows:

- 1 הַלְלוּ אֶת־יְהוָה כָּל־גּוֹיִם Praise YHWH all nations!
 שְׁבַחְהוּ כָּל־הָאֲמִים Laud him all people-groups!
- 2 גִּבֹר עָלֵינוּ חֶסֶדוֹ His covenant-love is over us;
 וְאֵמֶת־יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם And YHWH’s fidelity is forever.
 הַלְלוּ־יָהּ Praise Yah (Hallelu-Yah)!

5. Summary of the concentric compositional formulae:

$$17 = 8 + 1 + 8$$

$$17 = 5 + 7 + 5$$

$$17 = 4 + 9 + 4$$

$$17 = 3 + 11 + 3$$

$$9 = 4 + 1 + 4 \quad \text{SAS units}$$

$$5 = 2 + 1 + 2 \quad \text{briques (primary SAS units)}$$

6. In the prosodic structure of Psalm 117, 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 SAS markers is indicated with a double slash (/). Psalm 117 has 5 **briques** (primary SAS units), 3 of which are marked by *soph pasuq* (2 times, at the end of each verse), and *atnach* (v. 1). The remaining two **briques** are marked by *revia* (in v. 2).

7. The prosodic structure of Psalm 117, in terms of its primary SAS units (**briques**), may be displayed as follows [^ represents *atnach*; : represents *soph pasuq*; † represents *oleh weyored*, and † represents all other accent markers]: as follows:

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ¹ <i>haləlû ʿet yhw̄h kol gôyîm ^</i> | <i>šabbəḥûḥû kol hāʿummîm :</i> |
| ² kî <i>gāḇar ʿālênû ḥasḏô †</i> <i>wəʿēmeṭ yhw̄h ləʿôlām †</i> | <i>haləlû yāh :</i> |

8. The five **briques** are distributed in Psalm 117 as follows: $5 = 2 + 1 + 2$.

The **arithmological center** of Psalm 117 falls on the word כִּי (“for”), the first word in verse 2, with 8 words on either side. Psalm 117 has 8 SAS units, 5 **briques** (primary SAS units), 2 versets, and 1 strophe. The **arithmological center** is in the middle **brique** and the middle two SAS units. There are 58 morae in Psalm 117—with 26 morae before the word כִּי (“for”) at the beginning of v. 2, and 30 morae after it.

9. If Book 2 (Psalms 42–72) was added to an original Deuteronomistic Psalter to form the Pentateuchal Psalter as we now have it that numbered **119** (= 17×7) psalms, then Psalm 117 was originally Psalm 86 (117 less 31).

10. Determining the details of the musical and literary structures of Psalm 117 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.

11. David Crookes (private communication) points out that Psalm 117 contains 62 letters and 37 syllables. Its total value in 400 gematria is $2294 = 62 \times 37$.

12. John Wheeler argues that *mehuppakh* with or without the so-called *tsinnorit* (as on the word גִּבּוֹר, “be mighty”) is never disjunctive. Otherwise, and especially when *tsinnorit* is also present, one would be putting on the brakes melodically just as one’s momentum had been brought into full play. In such a grand, slow and short psalm as this, that’s the one thing a poet-composer or conductor would not want to do. Moreover, the so-called *`azla*, which presents a lift here, is not disjunctive when so combined with *mehuppakh*.

13. Bibliography:

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