

Psalm 120:1–7

Translation, Logoprosodic Analysis, and Observations

A Pilgrim Song for Peace among Those Who Want War

Ps 120:1–7

A. *I Cried to YHWH in My Distress and He Answered Me* (120:1–2) [4.4]

120:1	A song / of ascents //	7 2	2 2 0
	directed to YHWH ^a in my distress //	<u>14 1</u>	<u>4 4 0</u>
		119:174–120:1b	25 17 8
	I cried out /	<u>6 1</u>	<u>1 0 1</u>
		119:172–120:1c	26 17 9
	And he answered me //	<u>7 1</u>	<u>1 0 1</u>
		119:176–120:1	17 11 6
120:2	“O YHWH / deliver my soul ^a from lying lips //	16 2	5 5 0
	from a deceitful tongue” //	<u>10 1</u>	<u>2 0 2</u>
		119:174–120:2	34 22 12

B. *The Arrows of Divine Retribution are Directed against the Enemy* (120:3–5) [5.5]

120:3	What will be given to you /	6 1	3 3 0
	and what will be added to you / O false tongue //	<u>18 2</u>	<u>5 5 0</u>
		120:1–3	23 19 4
120:4	The arrows of the Mighty One / ^a are sharpened //	<u>11 2</u>	<u>3 3 0</u>
		120:1–4a	26 22 4
	{Together} ^b with / the coals of juniper //	<u>10 2</u>	<u>3 0 3</u>
		119:169–120:4	78 51 27
120:5	Woe is me ^a that I sojourn in Mesech //	13 1	5 5 0
	(that) I dwell / with the tents of Kedar //	<u>12 2</u>	<u>4 0 4</u>
		120:3–5	23 16 7

C. *I Have Dwelt Too Long with Those Who Hate Peace* (120:6–7) [4.4]

120:6	For too long / my soul has dwelt //	12 2	4 4 0
	with / the ^a one who hates ^a peace //	<u>9 2</u>	<u>3 0 3</u>
		119:171–120:6	83 51 32
120:7	I am for peace / yet when I speak //	13 2	4 4 0
	they / are for war //	<u>10 2</u>	<u>2 0 2</u>
		120:1–7	51 35 16

Scansion in Accentual Stress Units: (4.4) . (5.5) . (4.4) = 8 + 10 + 8 = **26**

Concentric Compositional Formula: **51** = 25 + 1 + 25 [word count (with heading)]

Notes:

120:1^a Reading the *dəḥî* in BHS as conjunctive.

120:2^a Reading the *dəḥî* in BHS as conjunctive.

120:4^a Reading the sequence of two consecutive occurrences of *munaḥ* here in BHS as disjunctive.

120:4^b The preposition *ʿim* (“with”) is marked in BHS with the disjunctive accent *rəḥîa‘ mūḡraš*. Dahood translates the phrase, “like glowing coals of broom,” and cites other “instances of double-duty prepositions placed in the second colon” in Pss 33:7; 79:6 and 105:30 (see Observation 2 below).

120:5^a Reading the *dəḥî* in BHS as conjunctive.

120:6^{a-a} Many scholars read the plural form <^>נַנְנָו with a few Hebrew Mss, LXX, Symmachus, Syriac and Jerome. Dahood retains the singular form in MT as part of a characteristic shift to and from the pl. in passionate laments and identifies this sg. with the sg. of v. 3.

Summary of the Logoprosodic Analysis

1. Psalm 120 has three strophes: 120:1–2, 3–5 and 6–7.

A	120:1–2	2 balanced dyads + pivot:	$[(7 + 14) + 6] + 7 + [10 + 16]$	=	27 + 7 + 26	morae
X	120:3–5	2 balanced triads:	$[6 + 18 + 11] + [10 + 13 + 12]$	=	35 + 35	morae
A'	120:6–7	2 balanced dyads:	$[12 + 9] + [13 + 10]$	=	21 + 23	morae

2. The first strophe (120:1–2) is a single part arranged in four subdivisions: 120:1a, 1bc, 1d and 2.

- 119:176–120:1 **17** words
- 119:174–120:2 **17** words

3. The second strophe (120:3–5) is a single part arranged in four subdivisions: 120:3, 4a, 4b and 5.

- 120:1–3 **23** words
- 119:169–120:4 **78** (= **26** x 3) words and **51** (= **17** x 3) words before *atnach*
- 120:3–5 **23** words

4. The third strophe (120:6–7) is a single part arranged in two subdivisions: 120:6 and 7.

- 119:171–120:6 **51** (= **17** x 3) words before and **32** words after *atnach*
- 120:1–7 **51** (= 3x17) words

Observations

1. The three strophes in Psalm 120 may be outlined in a menorah pattern, which is determined primarily on prosodic grounds, as follows:

A	I cried to YHWH in my distress	[4]	120:1a–c
B	He answered my prayer to be delivered from lying lips	[4]	120:1d–2
C	What will be your recompense, O false tongue?	[3]	120:3
X	The arrows of divine retribution are sharpened	[4]	120:4
C'	I sojourn among hostile foreigners (Mesech / tents of Kedar)	[3]	120:5
B'	For too long I have dwelt with those who hate peace	[4]	120:6
A'	I am for peace but they want war	[4]	120:7

2. At the beginning of 120:4b, the word *ʿim* (“with”) has the accent *revia mugrash*, which suggests that the word carries a disjunctive force and thus marks the turning point in the second strophe (120:3–5). In one sense it completes the thought introduced in the first half of 120:4a—“The arrows of the Mighty One are sharpened *with* the coals of juniper.” At the same time, however, this word also introduces a prepositional phrase that is closely tied to verse 5 from a prosodic point of view: “Along with (or because of) the coals of juniper, woe is me ...”

3. In terms of the **51** words in Psalm 120, the **arithmological center** falls on the word **שְׁנוּנִים** (“sharpened”) in 120:4a with 25 words on either side. The initial **concentric compositional formula** is:

$$51 = 25 + 1 + 25 \quad [\text{word count—with heading}]$$

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

שְׁנוּנִים	חֲצִי גִבּוֹר	The arrows of the Mighty One are sharpened.
	עִם גַּחְלִי	with coals (of juniper).

The **concentric compositional formula** becomes:

$$51 = 23 + 5 + 23 \quad [\text{word count—with heading}]$$

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

	מִלְשׁוֹן רְמִיָּה	From a deceitful tongue
3	מָה יִתֵּן לָךְ	What will be given to you
	וּמָה יִסִּיף לָךְ לְשׁוֹן רְמִיָּה	And what will be added to o you, O false tongue
4	שְׁנוּנִים	The arrows of the Mighty One are sharpened.
	עִם גַּחְלִי רִתְמִים	With coals of juniper.
5	אוּיָהּ לִי כִּי גִרְתִּי מִשֶּׁךְ	Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesech
	שְׁכַנְתִּי עִם אֹהֲלֵי קֶדָר	That I dwell with the tents of Kedar

The **concentric compositional formula** becomes:

$$51 = 13 + 25 + 13 \quad [\text{word count—with heading}]$$

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

	קראתי ויענני	I cried out and he answered me
2	יהוה הצילה נפשי משפת שקר מלשון רמיה	O YHWH, deliver my soul from lying lips From a deceitful tongue
3	מה יתן לך ומה יסף לך לשון רמיה	What will be given to you And what will be added to you, O false tongue
4	חצי גבור שנונים עם גחלי רתמים	The arrows of the Mighty One are sharpened. With coals of juniper.
5	אוייה לי כי גרתי משך שכנתי עם אהלי קדר	Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesech That I dwell with the tents of Kedar
6	רבת שכנה לה נפשי עם שונא שלום	Too long has my soul dwelt with itself With those who hate peace.

The **concentric compositional formula** becomes:

$$51 = 6 + 39 + 6 \quad [\text{word count—with heading}]$$

4. The 26-word “nested framework” (with the 12-word framework underlined) reads as follows:

1	<u>שיר המעלות</u> <u>אל־יהוה בצרתה לי</u> קראתי ויענני	<u>A song of ascents.</u> <u>Directed to Yhwh in my distress:</u> I cried out and he answered me.
2	יהוה הצילה נפשי משפת־שקר	O Yhwh, deliver my soul from lying lips, From a deceitful tongue.
6	רבת שכנה־לה נפשי עם שונא שלום	For too long my soul has dwelt, With the one who hates peace.
7	<u>אני־שלום וכי אדבר</u> <u>המה למלחמה</u>	<u>I am for peace, and yet when I speak,</u> <u>They are for war.</u>

5. Summary of the concentric compositional formulae:

51	=	23	+	5	+	23	word-count
51	=	13	+	25	+	13	
51	=	6	+	39	+	6	
26	=	8	+	10	+	8	SAS units
17	=	5	+	7	+	5	briques (primary SAS units)

SAS units), 7 versets, and 3 strophes. The **arithmological center** in verse 5 is in the middle **strophe**, the middle **verset**, the middle **brique**, and the middle two SAS units.

9. Terrien finds 3 strophes in Psalm 120 (*The Psalms* [2003], pp. 766–67.) The analysis presented here, which is based on the balance in mora-count and the concentric pattern in the distribution of syntactic accentual stress units, also finds three **strophes**.

Christensen	Terrien
A 120:1–2	1 120:1–2
X 120:3–5	2 120:3–4
A' 120:6–7	3 120:5–7

10. The evidence from the logoprosodic analysis supports the inclusion of the two-word heading as an integral part of Psalm 120 at the point of the numerical composition of this text, as shown in the following list of significant compositional numbers at the boundaries of the verses counting from the beginning:

120:1–3	23 words	
120:1–6	43 words (without heading)	[43 = 17 + 26]
120:1–7	51 (= 17 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 five possible boundaries to work with. In 2 out of 5 of these boundaries (or 40% 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 120.

11. Determining the details of the musical and literary structures of Psalm 120 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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