

Psalm 121:1–8

Translation, Logoprosodic Analysis, and Observations

YHWH Is Your Keeper

Ps 121:1–8

A. *I Lift Up My Eyes to the Hills for My Help Comes from YHWH* (121:1–2) [5.4]

121:1	A song / of ascent //		<u>7 2</u>	<u>2 2 0</u>
		120:3–121:1a		38 26 12
	I will lift up my eyes ^a to the hills //		12 1	4 4 0
	from whence / comes my help //		<u>11 2</u>	<u>3 0 3</u>
		120:2–121:1		52 35 17
121:2	My help / is from YHWH //		10 2	3 3 0
	maker / of heaven and earth //		<u>13 2</u>	<u>3 0 3</u>
		120:6–121:2		26 15 11

B. *YHWH Will Not Allow Your Foot to Stumble* (121:3) [2.2]

121:3	He will not allow your foot / ^a to stumble //		<u>10 2</u>	<u>4 4 0</u>
		120:7–121:3a		25 17 8
	He will not slumber / the one who keeps you //		<u>10 2</u>	<u>3 0 3</u>
		120:7–121:3		28 17 11

C. *YHWH Is Israel's Guardian and He Does Not Slumber* (121:4–5) [4.4]

121:4	Behold he will not slumber / and he will not sleep //		16 2	5 5 0
	the one who keeps / Israel //		<u>9 2</u>	<u>2 0 2</u>
		120:4–121:4		42 26 16
121:5	YHWH / ^a is your keeper //		9 2	2 2 0
	YHWH is your shade / on your right hand //		<u>14 2</u>	<u>5 0 5</u>
		120:1–121:5		87 55 32

D. *The Sun Will Not Smite You by Day Nor the Moon by Night* (121:6) [2.2]

121:6	By day / the sun shall not smite you /		<u>13 2</u>	<u>4 4 0</u>
		120:6–121:6a		53 32 21
	Nor the moon / ^a by night //		<u>11 2</u>	<u>2 2 0</u>
		121:1–6		42 26 16

E. **YHWH Protects You from Evil at All Times and Forever** (121:7–8) [4.5]

121:7 **YHWH** / will keep you from all evil // 11 2 4 4 0
 he shall keep / your soul // 7 2 3 0 3
 121:4–7 27 17 10

121:8 It is **YHWH** / 4 1 1 1 0
 120:5–121:8a 72 44 **32**

He will keep your going out /^a and your coming in // 12 2 3 3 0
 from now on / and until forever // 11 2 3 0 3
 121:1–8 56 **34** 22

Scansion in Accentual Stress Units: (5.4) . (2.2).(4.4).(2.2) . (4.5) = 9 + 16 + 9 = **34**

Concentric Compositional Formula: 56 = 28 + 0 + 28 [word count (with heading)]

Notes:

- 121:1^a Reading the *dāḥî* here in BHS as conjunctive.
- 121:3^a Reading two successive occurrences of *munah* here in BHS as disjunctive.
- 121:5^a Reading the *mêrəkâ* here in BHS as disjunctive.
- 121:6^a Reading the *mêrəkâ* followed immediately by *ga'ya* (= *meteg*) here in BHS as disjunctive.
- 121:8^a Reading *munah* preceded immediately by *ga'ya* (= *meteg*) in Letteris as disjunctive. BHS omits the *ga'ya* (= *meteg*).

Summary of the Logoprosodic Analysis

1. Psalm 121:1–8 has 5 strophes: 121:1–2, 3–6 and 7–8.

A	121:1α	{the 2-word heading stands outside the prosodic structure of the poem that follows}		
	121:1β–2	2 balanced dyads + pivot: [12 + 11] + [10 + 13]	= 23 + 23	morae
B	121:3	balanced dyad [10 + 10]	= 10 + 10	morae

X	121:4–5	2 balanced dyads: [16 + 9] + [9 + 14]	= 25 + 23	morae
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B'	121:6	balanced dyad: [13 + 11]	= 13 + 11	morae
A'	121:7–8	2 balanced dyads: [12 + (7 + 4)] + [12 + 11]	= 23 + 23	morae

2. The first strophe (121:1–2) is a single part with four subdivisions: 121:1a, 1bc, 1d and 2.

- 120:2–121:1 **17** words after *atnach*
- 120:6–121:2 **26** words

3. The second strophe (121:3) is a single part with two subdivisions: 121:3a and 3b.

- 120:7–121:3 **17** words before *atnach*

4. The third strophe (121:4–5) is a single part with two subdivisions: 121:4 and 5.
 - 120:4–121:4 **26** words before *atnach*
 - 120:1–121:5 **32** words after *atnach*
5. The fourth strophe (121:6) is a single part with two subdivisions: 121:6a and 6b.
 - 121:1–6 **26** words before *atnach*
6. The fifth strophe (121:7–8) is a single part with 3 subdivisions: 121:7, 8a and 8bc.
 - 121:4–7 **17** words before *atnach*
 - 121:1–8 **34** (= 2x17) words

Observations

1. The five strophes in Psalm 121 may be outlined in a menorah pattern, which is determined primarily on prosodic grounds, as follows:

A	I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from whence comes my help	[5] 121:1
B	My help comes from YHWH maker of heaven and earth	[4] 121:2
C	YHWH will not allow your foot to stumble	[4] 121:3
X	YHWH is Israel's guardian and he does not slumber	[4.4] 121:4–5
C'	The sun will not smite you by day nor the moon by night	[4] 121:6
B'	YHWH will protect you from all evil	[4] 121:7
A'	He will keep your going out and coming in forever	[5] 121:8

The opening strophe of Psalm 121 is similar to that of Psalm 120. At the beginning of 121:1b (immediately after *atnach*), the word *mē'ayin* (“from whence”) has the accent *revia mugrash*, which suggests that the word carries a disjunctive force and marks the turning point in the first strophe (121:1–2). In one sense the word in question completes the thought of the first half of this poetic unit and stands by itself—“I will lift up my eyes to the hills / from whence comes my help.” At the same time, however, the word *mē'ayin* (“from whence”) functions as an interrogative posing the question that is answered in v. 2.

2. In terms of the **56** words in Psalm 121, the **arithmological center** falls between the words **שומר ישראל** (“the keeper of Israel”) at the end of v. 4, which may be considered a **meaningful center**. The initial **concentric compositional formula** is:

$$56 = 28 + 0 + 28 \quad [\text{word count—with heading included}]$$

The **meaningful center** may be expanded to include three words on either side of the **arithmological center**, as follows:

שומר ישראל ולא יישן And he will not sleep, the one who keeps Israel;
 יהוה שמרֶךְ YHWH is your keeper.

The **concentric compositional formula** becomes:

$$56 = 25 + 6 + 25 \quad [\text{word count—with heading}]$$

The center may be extended to include five words on either side of the **arithmological center**:

לא ינום ולא יישן He will not sleep and he will not slumber
 שומר ישראל The one who keeps Israel.
 יהוה שמרך יהוה צלך YHWH is your keeper; YHWH is your shade.

In this instance, the **concentric compositional formula** becomes:

$$56 = 23 + 10 + 23 \quad [\text{word count—with heading}]$$

3. The 24-word “nested framework” (with the 12-word framework underlined) reads as follows:

1 שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת A song of ascents—
 אֲשָׂא עֵינַי אֶל-הַהַרִים I will lift up my eyes to the hills.
 מֵאֵין יבֹא עֲזָרִי From whence comes my help.
 2 עֲזָרִי מֵעַם יְהוָה My help comes from YHWH,
 מִכָּל-רָע יִשְׁמַר אֶת-נַפְשְׁךָ From all evil he shall keep your soul.
 8 יְהוָה (As for) YHWH—
 יִשְׁמַר-צֵאתְךָ וּבֹאֶךָ He will keep your going out and your coming in.
 מֵעַתָּה וְעַד-עוֹלָם From now on and until forever.

4. Summary of the concentric compositional formulae:

$$56 = 25 + 6 + 25 \quad \text{word-count}$$

$$56 = 23 + 10 + 23$$

$$56 = 15 + 26 + 15$$

$$56 = 12 + 32 + 12$$

$$56 = 6 + 44 + 6$$

$$34 = 9 + 16 + 9 \quad \text{SAS units}$$

$$17 = 5 + 8 + 4 \quad \text{briques (primary SAS units)}$$

5. In the prosodic structure of Psalm 121, 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 121 has **17 briques** (primary SAS units), 16 of which are marked by *soph pasuq* (8 times, at the end of each verse), *atnach* (7 times, in each verse except v. 6), and *oleh weyored* (v. 1). The boundary of the additional **brique** in v. 6 is marked by *revia*. Note that treating the heading as a separate **brique** disturbs the perfect symmetry in the arrangement of these units. At the same time, however, it places the **brique** containing the **arithmological center** in the structural center of the poem and brings the total number of **briques** to the primary compositional number **17**.

6. The prosodic structure of Psalm 121, 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:

I — ¹ *šîr lamma[˘]ālô†*[†]

A ² *ʔeśśā[˘] ʕenay ʔel hehārîm* ^ *mēʔayin yāḥō[˘] ʕezrî* :

² *ʕezrî mēʕim yhw^h* ^ *ʕōšēh šāmayim wāʔāreš* :

II B ³ *ʔal yittēn lammô† raḡleka* ^ *ʕal yānûs šōmāreka* :

X ⁴ <i>hinnēh lô[˘] yānûs wəlō[˘] yîšan</i> ^ <i>šōmēr yisrāʔēl</i> :
⁵ <i>yhw^h šōmāreka</i> ^ <i>yhw^h šillaka ʕal yaḍ yamîneka</i> :

B' ⁶ *yômām haššemeš lô[˘] yakkekāh* † *wəyārēaḥ ballāylāh* :

III A' ⁷ *yhw^h yîšmārēka mikkol rā[˘]* ^ *yîšmōr ʔet napšeka* :

⁸ *yhw^h yîšmor sēʔtaka ûḥōʔeka* ^ *mēʕattah wəʕaḍ ʕólām* :

7. The 17 **briques** (primary SAS units) are distributed in three strophes in Psalm 121 as follows: **17** = 1 + [4 + (2 + 4 + 2) + 4] = 5 + 8 + 4.

The **arithmological center** of Psalm 121 falls between the two words *šōmēr yisrāʔēl* (“keeper of Israel”) in 121:4b, with 28 words on either side. Psalm 121 has 34 SAS units, 17 **briques** (primary SAS units), 8 versets, 5 strophes and 3 cantos—plus the 2-word heading as a rubric. The **arithmological center** is in the middle canto, the middle strophe, the

middle two versets, the middle **brique**, and the middle two SAS units. There are 192 morae in Psalm 121—with 93 morae before the **arithmological center** and 97 morae after it.

8. Terrien finds 4 **strophes** in Psalm 121 (*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, indicates that there are five **strophes**.

Christensen	Terrien
I A 121:1–2	1 121:1–2
II B 121:3–6	2 121:3–4
X 121:4–5	
B' 121:6	3 121:5–6
III A' 121:7–8	4 121:7–8

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 x 7**) psalms, then Psalm 121 was originally Psalm 90 (121 less 31).
10. Determining the details of the musical and literary structures of Psalm 121 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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