

Psalm 123:1–4

Translation, Logoprosodic Analysis, and Observations

Our Eyes Look to YHWH Our God

Psalm 123:1–4

A. *I Lift Up My Eyes to YHWH as a Servant to the Hand of His Master* (123:1–2b) [6.4]

123:1	A song / of ascents //	<u>7</u> 2_	<u>2</u> 2 0
		122:6–123:1a	26 15 11
	To you / I lift up my eyes //	15 2	4 4 0
	(for you) dwell / in the heavens //	<u>12</u> 2_	<u>2</u> 0 2
		122:6–123:1	32 19 13
123:2	Behold as the eyes of servants / to the hand of their masters /	21 2	6 6 0
	as the eyes of a maiden / to the hand of her mistress //	<u>14</u> 2	<u>5</u> 5 0
		123:1–2b	19 17 2

B. *Our Eyes are Toward YHWH Our God until He Graces Us* (123:2c–e) [2.2.2]

	So / ^a are our eyes []	<u>8</u> 2_	<u>2</u> 2 0
		122:9–123:2c	28 23 5
	Toward YHWH / ^b our God //	<u>12</u> 2_	<u>3</u> 3 0
		122:9–123:2d	31 26 5
	Until / he graces us //	<u>8</u> 2	<u>2</u> 0 2
		123:1–2	26 22 4

C. *Grace Us, YHWH, For We Have Had Our Fill of Scorn and Contempt* (123:3–4) [6.4]

123:3	Grace us, O YHWH / ^a grace us //	<u>14</u> 2_	<u>3</u> 3 0
		122:8–123:3a	43 32 11
	For far too long / we have had our fill of scorn //	<u>10</u> 2_	<u>4</u> 0 4
		122:8–123:3	47 32 15
123:4	For far too long / our soul itself is filled //	<u>14</u> 2	<u>4</u> 4 0
		123:2–4a	29 23 6
	With the contempt / ^a of those at ease //	<u>9</u> 2_	<u>2</u> 2 0
		122:9–123:4b	46 35 11
	With the scorning / ^b of proud oppressors ^b //	<u>10</u> 2	<u>3</u> 0 3
		122:3–123:4	91 58 32
		123:1–4	42 31 11

Scansion in Accentual Stress Units: (6.4).(2.2.2).(6.4) = 10 + 6 + 10 = **26**

Concentric Compositional Formula: 42 = 21 + 0 + 21 [word count—with heading]

Notes:

- 123:1^a Reading *dehi* in BHS as conjunctive.
 123:2^a Reading *munah* here in BHS as disjunctive.
 123:2^b Reading *munah* here in BHS as disjunctive.
 123:4^a Reading *mērākā* followed immediately by *ga'ya* (= *meteg*) in Ginsburg and Letteris as disjunctive. BHS omits the *ga'ya* (= *meteg*).
 123:4^{b-b} The *qere'* reading in BHS divides the word *liḡ'êwōnîm* ("of the arrogant") into two words, *liḡ'ê yōnîm* ("proudest oppressors"). We have chosen to follow the *qere'* reading, which adds one word (see Observations 2 through 5 below).

Summary of the Logoprosodic Analysis

1. In terms of balance in mora-count, Psalm 123:1–4 has 3 strophes: 123:1–2b, 2c–e and 3–4.

A	123:1–2a	2 balanced dyads + pivot:	[7 + 15] + 12 + [13 + 8]	=	22 + 12 + 21	morae
X	123:2bc	2 balanced dyads:	[14 + 8] + [12 + 8]	=	22 + 20	morae
A'	123:3–4	balanced dyad + pivot:	[14 + 10 + 14]	=	14 + 10 + 14	morae
		balanced dyad:	[9 + 10]	=	9 + 10	morae

2. The first strophe (123:1–2b) is a single part with three subdivisions: 123:1a, 1bc and 2ab.
- 122:6–123:1 **32** words
 - 122:6–123:2b **17** words before *atnach*
3. The second strophe (123:2b) is a single part with three subdivisions: 123:2c, 2d and 2e.
- 123:1–2 **26** words
4. The third strophe (123:3–4) has two parts, with 5 subdivisions: 123:3a, 3b, 4a, 4b and 4c.
- 123:1–3 **23** words (without heading) before *atnach*
 - 122:3–123:4 **32** words after *atnach*

Observations

1. The three strophes in Psalm 123 may be outlined in a 5-part concentric pattern, which is determined primarily on prosodic grounds, as follows:

A	I lift up my eyes to you, the one who dwells in the heavens	[6]	120:1
B	Behold, it is as the eyes of a servant to the hand of his master	[4]	120:2ab
X	Our eyes are toward YHWH our God until he graces us	[2.2.2]	120:2c–e
B'	Grace us, O YHWH, for have had our fill of scorn	[4]	120:3
A'	For too long our soul has been filled with contempt and scorning	[6]	120:4

2. Terrien calls attention to “The shortness of this Song of Ascents and the strangeness of its form” (*Psalms*, p. 818). His strophic analysis is similar to what is presented here (see Observation 9 below). Terrien’s opening strophe, which compares the Lord to a master of servants, is in the plural. His second strophe, which compares the Lord to the mistress of a handmaid, shifts to the singular. In his third strophe, we find a further shift to a communal address to YHWH our God—anticipated by the introduction of the first person plural form (“our eyes”) in the structural center of Psalm 123. Note how the poem opens with reference to “my eyes” (v. 1), then “the eyes of servants” (v. 2a), “the eyes of a maiden” (v. 2b), and to the climax at the center—“our eyes” (v. 2c). The reference to “eyes” appears at the beginning, twice in the middle part (in successive cola of v. 2a), and at the very end of the first half of Psalm 123—in words number 6, 10, 15 and 21 (out of a total of 42 words).
3. In terms of the 41 words in Psalm 123 (with the 2-word heading included and the *kethiv* reading at the end of v. 4), the **arithmological center** falls on the word עֵינֵינוּ (“our eyes”) in the second half of verse 2. The initial **concentric compositional formula** is:

$$41 = 20 + 1 + 20 \quad [\text{word count—with heading}]$$

or: 21 // 21

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

כְּעֵיני שְׂפַחַה אֵל יַד גַּבְרַתָּהּ	As the eyes of a maiden to the hand of her mistress;
כֵּן עֵינֵינוּ אֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ	So our eyes look to YHWH our God,
עַד שִׂיחַנְנוּ חַנּוּן	Until he has mercy on us—have mercy on us!

The **concentric compositional formula** becomes:

$$41 = 14 + 13 + 14 \quad [\text{word count—with heading}]$$

The **meaningful center** may be expanded by including twelve words on either side of the **arithmological center** (with the 2-word heading included), as follows:

2	הִנֵּה כְּעֵיני עַבְדִּים	Behold, as the eyes of servants
	אֵל יַד אַדְוֹנֵיהֶם	To the hand of their masters.
	כְּעֵיני שְׂפַחַה אֵל יַד גַּבְרַתָּהּ	As the eyes of a maiden to the hand of her mistress;
	כֵּן עֵינֵינוּ אֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ	So our eyes look to YHWH our God,

הלעגן השאננים With the contempt of those at ease,

הבוז לנאינים With the contempt of proud oppressors.

6. Summary of the concentric compositional formulae:

42 = 19 + 4 + 19 word-count

42 = 14 + 14 + 14

42 = 8 + 26 + 8

26 = 10 + 4 + 10 SAS units

13 = 5 + 3 + 5 **briques** (primary SAS units)

7. In the prosodic structure of Psalm 123, 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 123 has 13 **briques** (primary SAS units), 11 of which are marked by *soph pasuq* (4 times, at the end of each verse), *atnach* (4 times, in each verse), and *oleh weyored* (3 times, in vv. 1, 2 and 4). The boundaries of the remaining two **brique** are marked by *revia* (v. 2) and *dəḥî* (v. 2)

8. The prosodic structure of Psalm 123, 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]

A ¹ *šîr hammaʿlôṭ†* *ʿēlēka nāsāʾtî ʾeṭ ʿēnay ^* *hayyōhəbî baššāmāyim :*

² *ḥinnēh kəʿēnay ʿābādîm ʾel yaq ʾādonêhem †* *kəʿēnê šipḥāh ʾel yaq gəḥbirtāh †*

X	<i>kēn</i>	ʿēnēnû †	ʾel	<i>yhwh</i>	<i>ʾēlōhēnû</i> ^	<i>ōd šeyyāḥonnēnû</i> :
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A' ³ *ḥonnēnû yhwh ḥonnēnû* ^ *kī rab sābaʿnū ḥûz* :

⁴ *rabbat sābāʿāh lāh napšēnû ‡* *hallaʿag̃ haššaʾānannîm* ^ *habbûz* lig̃ʾê yônîm :

9. The 12 **briques** are distributed in 3 **strophes** in Psalm 123 as follows: 13 = 5 + 3 + 5.

The **arithmological center** of Psalm 123 falls between the words ʿēnēnû ʾel (“our eyes / to”) in the middle of v. 2, with 20 words on either side. Psalm 123 has 24 SAS units, 12 **briques**, 5 versets, and 3 strophes. The **arithmological center** is in the middle strophe, the middle verset, the middle two **briques**, and the middle two SAS units. There are 154 morae in Psalm 123—with a total of 77 morae before and after the **arithmological center**.

10. Terrien finds 3 strophes in Psalm 123 (*The Psalms*, pp. 766–67.) His conclusions are similar to what we find in 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.

Christensen	Terrien
I 123:1–2b	I 123:1–2a
II 123:2c–e	II 123:2b–e
III 123:3–4	III 123:3–4

There is little difference between my analysis and that of Terrien in spite of the fact that he assumes that the three strophes must be equal in length and fails to locate the **meaningful center** and to observe the symmetrical inverse structural pattern of Psalm 123 as a whole.

11. If Book 2 (Psalms 42–72) was added to an original Deuteronomiac Psalter to form the Pentateuchal Psalter as we now have it that numbered **119** (= **17 x 7**) psalms, then Psalm 123 was originally Psalm 92 (123 less 31).
12. Determining the details of the musical and literary structures of Psalm 123 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 *teʿamim* of this particular text.

13. Bibliography:

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