

Psalm 124:1–8

Translation, Logoprosodic Analysis, and Observations

Without YHWH We would have Perished in the Torrent

Ps 124:1–8

A. *If YHWH Had Not Been for Us When Enemies Rose Up Against Us* (124:1–2) [5.4]

124:1	A song of ascents / belonging to David /	<u> 12 2_</u>	<u> 3 3 0</u>
		123:1–124:1a	45 34 11
	If it had not been YHWH / who was for us //	<u> 18 2_</u>	<u> 4 4 0</u>
		123:3–124:1b	23 16 7
	Let Israel now repeat //	<u> 10 1_</u>	<u> 3 0 3</u>
		123:3–124:1	26 16 10
124:2	If it had not been YHWH / who was for us //	18 2	4 4 0
	when humans rose up / against us //	<u> 13 2</u>	<u> 3 0 3</u>
		124:1–2	17 11 6

B. *They Would Have Swallowed Us Alive* (124:3) [2.2]

124:3	Then / alive they would have swallowed us //	<u> 13 2_</u>	<u> 3 3 0</u>
		123:3–124:1a	36 23 13
	When their anger / burned against us //	<u> 13 2</u>	<u> 3 0 3</u>
		124:1–3	23 14 9

C. *The Torrent of Waters Would Have Overwhelmed Us* (124:4–5) [4.4]

124:4	Then / the waters would have flowed over us //	<u> 13 2_</u>	<u> 3 3 0</u>
		124:1–4a	26 17 9
	The torrent / would have passed over our soul //	<u> 12 2</u>	<u> 4 0 4</u>
		124:1–4	30 17 13
124:5	Then / it would have passed over our soul //	<u> 11 2_</u>	<u> 4 4 0</u>
		124:3–5a	17 10 7
	The waters / which are raging //	<u> 10 2</u>	<u> 2 0 2</u>
		124:2–5	26 14 12

D. **Blessed Is YHWH Who Did Not Give Us as Prey to Their Teeth** (124:6) [2.2]

124:6 Blessed is YHWH //	_8 1_	_2 2 0	
	124:1-6a	38 23 15	
Who did not give us / ^a	_10 1_	_2 0 2	
	124:1-6b	40 23 17	
(As) prey / to their teeth //	_7 2	_2 0 2	
	124:1-6	42 23 19	

E. **Our Help Is In the Name of YHWH Maker of Heaven and Earth** (124:7-8) [4.5]

124:7 Our soul / like a bird escaped / from the snare of the fowlers //	20 3	5 5 0	
the snare is broken /	_5 1_	_2 2 0	
	124:4-7b	26 16 10	
And we escaped //	_11 1_	_2 2 0	
	124:1-7	51 32 19	
124:8 Our help / is in the name of YHWH //	12 2	3 3 0	
maker / of heaven and earth //	13 2	3 0 3	
	124:1-8	57 35 22	

Scansion in Accentual Stress Units: (5.4).(2.2) . (4.4) . (2.2).(4.5) = 13 + 8 + 13 = 34

Concentric Compositional Formula: 57 = 28 + 1 + 28 [word count—with heading]

Notes:

124:6^a Reading two consecutive occurrences of *mērəka* in BHS as disjunctive.

Summary of the Logoprosodic Analysis

1. Psalm 124:1-8 has 5 strophes: 124:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6 and 7-8.

A	124:1-2	2 balanced dyads + pivot:	[12 + 18] + 10 + [18 + 13]	= 30 + 10 + 31	morae
B	124:3	balanced dyad:	[13 + 13]	= 13 + 13	morae
X	124:4	balanced dyad:	[13 + 12]	= 13 + 12	morae
	124:5	balanced dyad:	[11 + 10]	= 11 + 10	morae
B'	124:6	2 balanced dyads + pivot:	[8 + 17] + 13 + [7 + 16]	= 25 + 13 + 23	morae
A'	124:7-8	balanced dyad:	[12 + 13]	= 11 + 10	morae

2. The first strophe (124:1–2) is a single part with four subdivisions: 124:1a, 1b, 1c and 2.
 - 123:3–124:1 **26** words
 - 124:1–2 **17** words
3. The second strophe (124:3) is a single part with two subdivisions: 124:3a and 3b.
 - 124:1–3 **23** words
4. The third strophe (124:4–5) has two parts with four subdivisions: 124:4a, 4b, 5a and 5b.
 - 124:1–4 **17** words before *atnach*
 - 124:2–5 **26** words
5. The fourth strophe (124:6) is a single part with three subdivisions: 124:6a, 6b and 6c.
 - 124:1–6b **40 = 23 + 17** [compositional formula]
 - 124:1–6 **23** words before *atnach*
6. The fifth strophe (124:7–8) is a single part with three subdivisions: 124:7a–c, 7d and 8.
 - 124:1–6 **23** words before *atnach*
 - 124:1–7 **51** (= **17** x 3) words and **32** (= 2x2x2x2x2) words before *atnach*

Observations

1. The five strophes in Psalm 124 may be outlined in a menorah pattern, which is determined primarily on prosodic grounds, as follows:

A	If it had not been YHWH who was for us—repeat:	[5] 124:1
B	If it had not been YHWH who was for us, when enemies appeared	[4] 124:2
C	They would have swallowed us alive	[4] 124:3
X	The torrent of waters would have overwhelmed us	[4.4] 124:4–5
C'	Blessed is YHWH who did not give us as prey to their teeth	[4] 124:6
B'	Our soul escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers	[4] 124:7
A'	Our help is in the name of YHWH maker of heaven and earth	[5] 124:8
2. In terms of the 57 words in Psalm 124, the **arithmological center** falls on the word על ("on, over") in 124:4b. The initial **concentric compositional formula** is:

$$57 = 28 + 1 + 28 \quad \text{[word count—with heading]}$$

One candidate for the **meaningful center** is found by adding one word on either side of the **arithmological center** (with the 3-word heading included), as follows:

נפשנו על עבר It passed over our soul.

The **concentric compositional formula** becomes:

$$57 = 27 + 3 + 27 \quad \text{[word count—with heading]}$$

A more likely **meaningful center** is found by including five words on either side of the **arithmological center**, as follows:

אזי המים שטפונו Then the waters would have flowed over us;
 נחלה עבר על נפשנו The torrent would have passed over our soul;
 אזי עבר על נפשנו Then it would have passed over our soul.

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

$$57 = 23 + 11 + 23 \quad [\text{word count—with heading}]$$

3. The 28-word nested **meaningful framework** (with the 20-word framework underlined) reads as follows:

- 1 שיר המעלות לדוד A song of ascents belonging to David
 לולי יהוה שהיה לנו If it had not been YHWH who was for us
 יאמר-נא ישראל Let Israel now repeat:
 2 לולי יהוה שהיה לנו If it had not been YHWH who was for us ...
 כצפור נמלטה מפח יוקשים Like a bird it has escaped from the snare of the fowlers
 4 הפח נשבר ואנחנו נמלטנו The snare is broken and we escaped.
 עזרנו בשם יהוה Our help is in the name of YHWH,
 עשה שמים וארץ Maker of heaven and earth.

4. Summary of the concentric compositional formulae:

$$57 = 27 + 3 + 27 \quad \text{word-count}$$

$$57 = 23 + 11 + 23$$

$$57 = 14 + 29 + 14$$

$$57 = 10 + 37 + 10$$

$$34 = 13 + 8 + 13 \quad \text{SAS units}$$

$$19 = 7 + 4 + 7 \quad \text{briques (primary SAS units)}$$

5. In the prosodic structure of Psalm 124 as a whole, the basic building blocks (**briques**) in each poetic **verset** are the **primary syntactic accentual stress units**. These sub-units are delineated by the Masoretes, who marked 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*.

- **Ole 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 124 has 18 **briques** (primary stress units), 17 of which are marked by *soph pasuq* (8 times, at the end of each verse), *atnach* (7 times, in each verse except v. 7), and *ole weyored* (2 times, in vv. 1 and 7). The one remaining boundary is marked by *revia* (v. 7).

6. The prosodic structure of Psalm 124, in terms of its **briques** (primary syntactic accentual-stress units), may be displayed as follows: ^ represents *atnach*; : represents *soph pasuq*; † represents *ole weyored*, and † represents all other accent markers.

I A ¹ *šîr hammaʿălôt ləḏāwîd* †
lûlê yhwš šehāyāh lānû ^ *yōʾmar nāʾ yîsrāʾēl* :
² *lûlê yhwš šehāyāh lānû* ^ *bəqûm ʿālênû ʾādām* :
 B ³ *ʾāzî ḥayim bəlāʿûnû* ^ *baḥărôt ʾappām bānû* :

II X ⁴ <i>ʾāzî hammayim šəṭāpûnû</i> ^	<i>naḥlāh ʿāḇar ʿal</i> ʿal <i>naḫšēnû</i> :
⁵ <i>ʾāzî ʿāḇar ʿal naḫšēnû</i> ^	<i>hammayim hazzēḏônîm</i> :

III B' ⁶ *bārûk yhwš* ^ *šellōʾ nəṭānānû ṭereḫ ləšinnêhem* :

A' ⁷ *naḫšēnû kəšippôr nimləṭāh mippaḥ yôqəšîm* †
happaḥ nišbār † *waʾānaḥnû nimlāṭēnû* :
⁸ *ʿezrēnû bəšēm yhwš* ^ *ʿōšēh šāmayim wāʾāreṣ* :

7. The 18 **briques** are distributed within 3 **strophes** in Psalm 124 as follows: 18 = 7 + 4 + 7.

The **arithmological center** of Psalm 124 falls on the word ʿal (“on, over”) in 124:4b, with 28 words on either side. Psalm 124 has 34 SAS units, 18 **briques**, 8 **versets**, and 3 **strophes**. The **arithmological center** is in the middle **strophe**, the middle two **versets**, the middle two **briques**, and the middle two SAS units.

8. Terrien finds 3 strophes in Psalm 124 (*The Psalms*, 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
A 124:1–2	1 124:1–2
B 124:3	2 124:3–5
X 124:4–5	
B' 124:8	3 124:6–8
A' 124:7–8	

9. The evidence from the logoprosodic analysis supports the inclusion of the three-word heading as an integral part of Psalm 124 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:

124:1–2	17 words
124:1–3	23 words
124:1–4	17 words before <i>atnach</i>
124:1–5	26 words
124:1–6	23 words before <i>atnach</i>
124:1–7	51 (= 17 x 3) words and 32 words before <i>atnach</i>

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 seven possible boundaries to work with. In 6 out of 7 of these boundaries (or more than 85% 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 124.

10. 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 124 was originally Psalm 93 (124 less 31).
11. Determining the details of the musical and literary structures of Psalm 124 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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