

# Psalm 125:1–5

## Translation, Logoprosodic Analysis, and Observations

### Prayer for Deliverance from a National Enemy

### Psalm 125:1–5

#### A. *Those Who Put Their Trust in YHWH Are as Unmoveable as Mount Zion* (125:1)[3.3]

125:1	A song / of ascents //	<u>7</u> 2_	<u>2</u> 2 0
		124:7–125:1a	17 14 3
	Those who put their trust / <sup>a</sup> in YHWH //	<u>12</u> 1_	<u>2</u> 2 0
		124:2–125:1b	51 32 19
	Like Mount Zion / <sup>b</sup> they shall not be shaken /	11 2	4 0 4
	forever it remains //	<u>9</u> 1	<u>2</u> 0 2
		124:2–125:1	57 32 25

#### B. *YHWH Surrounds His People Like Mountains Surround Jerusalem* (125:2) [4.4]

125:2	Jerusalem! / Mountains / surround her /	17 3	4 4 0
	and as for YHWH /	<u>4</u> 1_	<u>1</u> 1 0
		124:6–125:2b	36 23 13
	He surrounds / <sup>a</sup> his people //	8 2	2 2 0
	from now on / and forever //	<u>11</u> 2	<u>3</u> 0 3
		124:8–125:2	26 14 12

#### C. *Evil's Power Does Not Rest on the Allotment of the Righteous* (125:3) [4.4]

125:3	For it shall not rest / the scepter of wickedness /	16 2	5 5 0
	on / the allotment of the righteous //	<u>10</u> 2_	<u>3</u> 3 0
		124:8–125:3b	34 22 12
	So that / the righteous will not extend / <sup>a</sup>	15 2	4 4 0
	their hands / <sup>b</sup> to wrongdoing //	<u>10</u> 2	<u>2</u> 2 0
		125:1–3	34 25 9

#### D. *Show Goodness, O YHWH, to the Good and the Upright in Heart* (125:4) [2.2]

125:4	Show goodness YHWH / to the good //	14 2	<u>3</u> 3 0
		125:3–4a	17 17 0
	And to the upright / in their hearts //	<u>13</u> 2	<u>2</u> 0 2
		125:3–4	19 17 2

**E. May YHWH Chase Away Those Who Follow Crooked Ways (125:5) [3.3]**

125:5 And those who turn aside to their crooked ways / may YHWH / <sup>a</sup> cause them to pass away /	12 1	2 2 0	0
	_10 2_	<u>2 2 0</u>	
	125:3–5b	<b>23</b> 21	2
 (Along) with the doers of evil // (but) peace / be upon Israel //	 11 1	 3 3 0	
	<u>10 2</u>	<u>3 0 3</u>	
	124:8–125:5	<b>55</b> 38	<b>17</b>
	125:1–5	<b>49</b> 35	14

Scansion in SAS units: (3.3) . (4.4).(4.4).(2.2) . (3.3) = 6 + 20 + 6 = **32**

Concentric Compositional Formula: 49 = 24 + 1 + 24 [word count—with heading]

**Notes:**

- 125:1<sup>a</sup> Reading *mērəkā* preceded immediately by *gaʿyā* (= *meteg*) in Letteris as disjunctive. BHS omits *gaʿyā* (= *meteg*).
- 125:1<sup>b</sup> Reading *mērəkā* preceded immediately by *gaʿyā* (= *meteg*) in BHS as disjunctive.
- 125:2<sup>a</sup> Reading *munah* here in BHS as disjunctive.
- 125:3<sup>a</sup> Reading *tarhā* followed preceded by *gaʿyā* (= *meteg*) in Ginsburg as disjunctive. BHS omits *gaʿyā* (= *meteg*).
- 125:3<sup>b</sup> Reading the disjunctive *ʾazlā ləḡarmēh* with Ginsburg and Letteris. BHS omits the *pāsēq*.
- 125:5<sup>a</sup> Reading *munah* here in BHS as disjunctive.

**Summary of the Logoprosodic Analysis**

1. Psalm 125:1–5 has five strophes: 125:1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

A 125:1	2 balanced dyads:	[7 + 12] + [6 + 14]	= 19 + 20	morae
B 125:2	2 balanced dyads:	[17 + 4] + [8 + 11]	= 21 + 19	morae
X 125:3ab	dyad (in balance with next strophe):	[16 + 10]	= 26 +	morae
B' 125:3d–4	2 balanced dyads:	[15 + 10] + [14 + 13]	= 25 + 27	morae
A' 125:5	2 balanced dyads:	[12 + 10] + [11 + 10]	= 22 + 21	morae

- 2. The first strophe (125:1) is a single part with three subdivisions: 125:1a, 1b and 1cd.
  - 124:2–125:1 **32** words before *atnach*
- 3. The second strophe (125:2) is a single part with two subdivisions: 125:2ab and 2cd.
  - 124:2–125:2 **26** words
- 4. The third strophe (125:3) is a single part with two subdivisions: 125:3ab and 3cd.
  - 125:1–3 **34** (= 2x17) words
- 5. The fourth strophe (125:4) is a single part with two subdivisions: 125:3cd and 4.
  - 125:3–4 **17** words before *atnach*

6. The fifth strophe (125:5) is a single part with two subdivisions: 125:5ab and 5cd.
- 124:8–125:5 17 words after *atnach*

## Observations

1. The five strophes in Psalm 125 may be outlined in a 5-part concentric pattern, which is determined primarily on prosodic grounds, as follows:

A	Those who put their trust in YHWH are like Mount Zion	[3.3]	125:1
B	YHWH surrounds his people like mountains surround Jerusalem	[4.4]	125:2
X	<b>Evil's power does not rest on the allotment of the righteous</b>	[4.4]	125:3
B'	Show goodness, O YHWH, to the good and the upright in heart	[2.2]	125:4
A'	May YHWH chase away those who follow crooked ways	[3.3]	125:5

2. In terms of the 49 words in Psalm 125, the **arithmological center** falls on the word **הרשע** (“the wicked”) in 125:3a. The initial **concentric compositional formula** is:

$$49 = 24 + 1 + 24 \quad [\text{word count—with heading}]$$

A **meaningful center** is found by adding three words on either side of the **arithmological center** (with the 2-word heading included), as follows:

3	<b>הרשע</b> כי לא ינוח שבט	The scepter of wickedness shall not rest
	על גורל הצדיקים	on the allotment of the righteous.

The **concentric compositional formula** becomes:

$$49 = 21 + 7 + 21 \quad [\text{word count—with heading}]$$

A **meaningful center** may be extended to include nine words on either side of the **arithmological center**, as follows:

	סביב לעמו	He surrounds his people,
	מעתה ועד עולם	from now on and forevermore.
3	<b>הרשע</b> כי לא ינוח שבט	The scepter of wickedness shall not rest
	על גורל הצדיקים	on the allotment of the righteous.
	למען לא ישלחו הצדיקים	Provided that the righteous do not extend
	בעולתה ידיהם	their hands in mischief.

The **concentric compositional formula** becomes:

$$49 = 15 + 19 + 15 \quad [\text{word count—with heading}]$$

3. The 20-word nested **meaningful framework** (with the 16-word framework underlined) reads as follows:

1	<u>שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת</u>	<u>A song of ascents</u>
	<u>הַבֹּטְחִים בַּיהוָה</u>	<u>The ones who put their trust in YHWH</u>
	<u>כַּהַר־צִיּוֹן לֹא־יִמוּט</u>	<u>They are like Mount Zion, they shall not be shaken</u>
	לְעוֹלָם יֵשֵׁב	Forever it remains.
	וְהַמִּטִּים עַקְלָלוֹתָם	And those who turn aside to their crooked ways
5	<u>יִוְלִיכֶם יְהוָה</u>	<u>May YHWH cause them to pass away</u>
	<u>אֶת־פְּעֵלֵי הָאוֹן</u>	<u>With the doers of evil</u>
	<u>שְׁלוֹם עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל</u>	<u>Peace be upon Israel.</u>

4. Summary of the concentric compositional formulae:

$$49 = 21 + 7 + 21 \quad \text{word-count}$$

$$49 = 15 + 19 + 15$$

$$49 = 10 + 29 + 10$$

$$49 = 8 + 33 + 8$$

$$32 = 6 + 20 + 6 \quad \text{SAS units}$$

$$16 = 3 + 10 + 3 \quad \text{briques (primary SAS units)}$$

5. In the prosodic structure of Psalm 125, 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*.
- **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 125 has 16 **briques**

(primary SAS units), 11 of which are marked by *soph pasuq* (5 times, at the end of each verse), *atnach* (4 times, in each verse except v. 3), and *ole weyored* (2 times, in vv. 1 and 3). The five remaining boundaries are marked with *rəḥîa* (vv. 2, 3 and 5), *merka* [after the sequence *tsinnorit* plus *galgal*] (v. 2), and *'azla legarmeh* [in Ginsburg and Letteris] (v. 3).

6. The prosodic structure of Psalm 125, 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 <sup>1</sup> *šîr hamma<sup>ˁ</sup>ālôṭ†*  
*habōṭəḥîm ḥa-yhwh ^* *kəšîyôn lôʔ yimmôṭ lə<sup>ˁ</sup>ôlām yēšēḇ :*

II B <sup>2</sup> *yərûšālaïm †* *hārîm sâḥîḇ lāh †*  
*wa-yhwh sâḥîḇ lə<sup>ˁ</sup>ammô ^* *mē<sup>ˁ</sup>attāh wə<sup>ˁ</sup>ad <sup>ˁ</sup>ôlām :*

X <sup>3</sup> <i>kî lôʔ yānûaḥ šēḇeṭ <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">hāreša<sup>ˁ</sup></span> †</i> <i>ˁal gôral haṣṣaddîqîm †</i> <i>ləma<sup>ˁ</sup>an lôʔ yišləḥû haṣṣaddîqîm †</i> <i>bə<sup>ˁ</sup>awlātāh yəḏêhem :</i>
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III B' <sup>4</sup> *hêtîḇāh yhwh laṭṭôḇîm ^* *wəlîšārîm bəlibbôtām :*

A' <sup>5</sup> *wəhammaṭṭîm ˁaqalqallôtām †* *yôlîkēm yhwh ʔeṭ pō<sup>ˁ</sup>ālê hāʔāwen ^*  
*šālôm ˁal yîsrāʔēl :*

7. The 17 briques are distributed in 5 strophes in Psalm 125 as follows: 16 = (7 + 4 + 5).

The **arithmological center** of Psalm 125 falls on the word hāreša<sup>ˁ</sup> (“the wicked”) in 125:3a, with 24 words on either side. Psalm 125 has 32 SAS units, 16 **briques**, 7 versets, 5 strophes and 2 cantos. The **arithmological center** is in the middle strophe, the middle verset, the middle two **briques**, and the middle two SAS units. There are 201 morae in Ps 125—with 92 morae before the word hāreša<sup>ˁ</sup> (“the wicked”) in 125:3a and 105 morae after it.

8. Terrien finds 2 strophes in Psalm 125 (*The Psalms*, pp. 822–24.) The analysis presented here, which is based on the balance in mora-count and the concentric pattern in the distribution of SAS units, indicates that there are five strophes.

Christensen	Terrien
I A 125:1	I 125:1–3
B 125:2	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">X</span> 125:3	
II B' 125:4	II 125:4–5
A' 125:5	

Terrien describes Psalm 125 as “perhaps accidentally truncated” (*The Psalms*, p. 822). He was puzzled by what he describes as a “strange construction (that) may have reflected the

difference of style between proverbial meditation (vv 1–3) and prayer to the Lord immediately returning to an indirect form of speech.”

9. Note the following list of significant compositional numbers at the boundaries of the verses counting from the beginning:

125:1–3    **34** (= **17** x 2) words

125:1–5    49 words    [49 = **17** + **32** = **23** + **26**]

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 four possible boundaries to work with. In 1 out of 4 of these boundaries (or 25% of the time) a multiple of one of these four compositional numbers is present. If the number **49** is included, the percentage increases to 50%.

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 125 was originally Psalm 93 (124 less 31).
11. Determining the details of the musical and literary structures of Psalm 125 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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