Isaiah 1:2-20
A Bilingual Edition

John F. Hobbins
www.ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com

The original Hebrew is presented in Tiberian Masoretic dress. Vertical alignment of versets facilitates the observation of parallelisms. A verset of two to three stress units is given a line of its own, with stress units marked by the use of the magqeph like MT, but not always in accordance with it. Interstitial gaps of varying dimensions set off lines, strophes, and stanzas. A circulus is placed over a word if its consonantal skeleton or vocalization is at variance with MT. An introduction to the building blocks of ancient Hebrew verse, discussions of individual poems, and background essays of a technical nature are offered elsewhere.¹

The English translation is designed to enhance appreciation of the poetry of the original. The goal has been to furnish a global approximation of the poetry and prosody of the Hebrew, even if the results are necessarily piecemeal. I sometimes retain examples of enallage, chiasm, ellipsis, and inversion which perforce result in a less idiomatic rendering. Differences in the use of blank spacing define stress units, versets, lines, strophes, and stanzas. Minimal use of capitalization and punctuation is intentional. By and large capitalization marks the onset of a stanza as defined in the general rule.²

² The general rule: ancient Hebrew verse is confined within a system of “twos and threes”: two to three “stress units” make up a “verset”; two to three versets a poetic “line”; two to three lines a “strophe”; two to three strophes a “stanza”; two to three stanzas a “section”; and two to three sections a poem, or an extensive section thereof.
Isaiah 1:2-6

Hear o heavens
give ear o earth
Yahweh has spoken
sons I reared and raised
and they rebelled against me
an ox knows its owner
an ass its master’s pen
Israel does not know
my people do not consider
O errant nation
iniquity laden people
brood of evildoers
miscreant sons
who abandoned Yahweh
despised Israel’s Holy One
turned back
where shall one strike you again?
you go on turning away
the whole head is injured
the whole heart sick
from sole of foot to head
no soundness in it
sore and gash
raw wound
not drained
not dressed
not softened with oil
Isaiah 1:7-9

Your land  a desolation
your cities  consumed with fire
your soil  in your sight
of which  foreigners  eat
a desolation  like a storm’s  devastation

and lovely Zion  left over
like a hut  in a vineyard
like a lean-to  in a melon patch
the city  preserved

if  Yahweh  of Armies
had not left  us  a remnant
soon  we’d have been  like Sodom
to Gomorrah  compare
Isaiah 1:10-15

Hear the word of Yahweh
notables of Sodom

give ear to our God’s instruction
people of Gomorrah

what to me are your many slaughters? says Yahweh

I am sated with whole-burnt rams
fat of fed beasts

I’m not pleased that you come
to see my face
who asked this from your hand
that you trample my courts

Do not continue
bringing offerings
its savor is false
to me an abomination

new moon and sabbath
calling of convocation
I cannot abide

assembled evil your new moons
your seasons my soul hates

they’re a burden to me
I’m weary of bearing them

and when you spread out your hands
I’ll hide my eyes from you
no matter how much you pray
I will not listen

your hands are covered with blood
Isaiah 1:16-20

Wash get clean
remove your evil doings from before my eyes
cease dealing harshly
practice dealing kindly
seek after justice
correct the violent
defend the fatherless
plead for the widow

Come let’s settle the case says Yahweh

though your sins be like scarlet robes
they’ll turn white as snow
though red as crimson dye
they’ll become like fleece
if you acquiesce and obey
you’ll eat of the good of the land
if you refuse and revolt
you’ll be eaten by the sword
Yahweh’s mouth has spoken