Lamentations 1:1-7

A New Translation

The translation offered below is designed to enhance appreciation of the poetry and prosody of the underlying Hebrew text. The notations provided relate to the operation of the general rule and the length rule.¹

A translation free of notation is offered first. Unobtrusive differences in the use of blank spacing define stress units, versets, lines, strophes, and stanzas.

Even if one possesses little or no knowledge of Hebrew, the translation may prove helpful in getting a sense of how ancient Hebrew poetry works. A single dominant accent is signaled by attaching words in translation, and serves to point to underlying prosodic units in the Hebrew. Minimal use of capitalization and punctuation are intentional. Capitalization serves to mark the onset of a strophe as defined in the general rule.

The goal has been to furnish a global approximation of the poetry and prosody of the Hebrew text, even if the results are necessarily piecemeal. The rich texture of the original cannot be mapped onto a translation except in fits and starts. I sometimes retain, in imitation of the Hebrew, examples of chiasm, inversion, and ellipsis which perforce result in a less idiomatic rendering.

It is not possible, of course, to reproduce every case of two stresses in a row in the original or to suppress every case of two stresses in a row in translation without analogy in the original. Nevertheless, some attempt has been made to mimic the overall frequency of stress clash in the Hebrew text. The reproduction of metrical feet in translation is a daunting task. Some attempt has been made to represent shorter feet in Hebrew with shorter feet in English, and longer with longer, but no attempt has been made to avoid dactyls and first class paeons, though of course they are non-existent in Hebrew.

Lines are numbered in sequence according to their place in units of 12, 14, 18, 22, 28, or 36 lines. The essential story line is carried by the first lines of each strophe: 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, and 19. Sub-themes are carried by other lines. A series of third lines carries the theme of departure: 12 (with an untranslatable double entendre having to do with mourning), 15, and 18. The theme of mourning and isolation, followed by its paradigmatic complement, derision by others, punctuates the unit: 1-2, 4-5, 10-12, and 21-22.

The syllable count of the translation of the second half of each line is typically less than the count of the first half. The result approximates qinah meter. The effect is often subtle, as is the case in the Hebrew.

Symbols

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A strophe made up of three lines,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>lines 4, 5, and 6 of a macrounit;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6 concludes a strophe; 6 a sub-stanza; 6 a stanza; 22 a section</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lamentations 1:1-7

How is it she sits alone
she’s become like a widow
a princess among states

She weeps and weeps in the night
a supporter she has not
her neighbors all betrayed her

Dispersed is Judah, by poverty
she that sat among nations
all her pursuers overtook her

The roads to Zion are mourning
all her gates are deserted
her maidens led away

Her foes are now uppermost
for Yahweh brought her agony
her children have gone

From fair Zion departed
her princes became like deer
they fled without strength

Remember Jerusalem, Yahweh
her treasures are finished those possessed

When her people fell by foe’s hand
foes looked on and laughed

a city once full of folk
a mistress among nations
become a serf

tears on her cheek
among all her friends
became her enemies
dire enslavement to escape
has found no place of rest
twixt narrow passes

for lack of comers to feasts
her priests full of sighs
for her it is gall

her enemies at ease
for the magnitude of her sin
captive before foe

àll her splendor
that find no place for pasture
before the pursuer

her poverty, her homelessness
from days of yore

with no one her to help
àt her demise
Lamentations 1:1-7

A block of text = strophe. A line = line. A half-line (in a tripartite line, a third of a line) = verset. A free standing orthographical unit = prosodic word. An intonational break at the conclusion of a verset: a blank space. A longer intonational break concludes each line.

1:1 1  How is it she s i t s a lone a city once full of folk
2  she’s become like a widow a mistress among nations
3  a princess among states become a serf

1:2 4  She weeps and weeps in the night tears on her cheek
5  a supporter she has not among all her friends
6  her neighbors all betrayed her became her enemies

1:3 7  Dispersed is Judah, by poverty dire enslavement to escape
8  she that sat among nations has found no place of rest
9  all her pursuers overtook her twixt narrow passes

1:4 10  The roads to Zion are mourning for lack of comers to feasts
11  all her gates are deserted her priests full of sighs
12  her maidens led away for her it is gall

1:5 13  Her foes are now uppermost her enemies at ease
14  for Yahweh brought her agony for the magnitude of her sin
15  her children have gone captive before foe

1:6 16  From fair Zion departed all her splendor
17  her princes became like deer that find no place for pasture
18  they fled without strength before the pursuer

1:7 19  Remember Jerusalem, Yahweh her poverty, her homelessness
20  her treasures are finished those possessed from days of yore
21  When her people fell by foe’s hand with no one her to help
22  foes looked on and laughed at her demise