

# Isaiah 1:2-20

## A New Translation

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The translation offered below is designed to enhance appreciation of the poetry and prosody of the underlying Hebrew text. Unobtrusive differences in the use of blank spacing define stress units, versets, lines, strophes, and stanzas. An introduction to the building blocks of ancient Hebrew verse is offered elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

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 grouping words in translation, and serves to point to underlying prosodic units in the Hebrew. Minimal use of capitalization and punctuation are intentional. Capitalization marks the onset of a strophe as defined in the general rule, except when enjambment occurs across strophic boundaries.

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 enallage, chiasm, ellipsis, and inversion which perforce result in a less idiomatic rendering.

My thanks to David Curzon for going over a draft of this translation, and for helping me to avoid unnecessary archaisms and awkward expressions.

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<sup>1</sup> See the present writer's supporting essays at [www.ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com](http://www.ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com), beginning with "Regularities in Ancient Hebrew Verse: An Overview."

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 trough  
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

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

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  
blood of bullocks  
lambs and he-goats  
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

Wash get clean  
remove your evil doings  
from before my eyes  
cease dealing harshly  
practice dealing kindly  
seek after justice  
restrain the violent  
be just to the orphan  
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 wool  
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