

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

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4	A strophe made up of three lines,
5	lines 4, 5, and 6 of a macrounit;
᠆	᠆ concludes a strophe; ᠆ a sub-stanza; ᠆ a stanza; 22 a section

¹ For an introduction to the general rule and the length rule, see John F. Hobbins, "Regularities in Ancient Hebrew Verse: An Overview," at www.ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com.

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

all 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
at her demise

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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_sits alone	a_city once_full of_folk
	2	she's_become like_a_widow	a_mistress among_nations
	<u>3</u>	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
	<u>6</u>	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
	<u>9</u>	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
	<u>12</u>	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
	<u>15</u>	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
	<u>18</u>	they_fled without_strength	before the_pursuer
1:7	19	Remember Jerusalem, Yahweh	her_poverty, her_homelessness
	<u>20</u>	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
	<u>22</u>	foes looked_on and_laughed	at_her_demise