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Psalm 129

Phase 1: ORAL



Step 1: Listen

Listening to a guide translation and versions of the psalm

Listen well to the poem (notice content, emotions and interesting use of language). There are two guide translations in Appendix A:

1. **Hebrew-mirror** - copied from the Exegetical Layout and adjusted for minimal readability,
2. **Guide translation** - the literal, type 1 corresponding (but more readable) translation, exegetically the same as Hebrew-mirror.

Activity: Read the Hebrew-mirror and the Hebrew tight version in Appendix A. One reader per translation or one reader for all translations (as skills permit). Others to listen with closed books. Consider 'how to listen' – posture? With responses? In silence?

Activity: Have one person (representing a priest) read v.1a and the rest repeat v.1a. Similarly with v.1b, 2a, 2b, 3, 4, each time the group (representing the community of Israel) repeating. Then have the priest declare vv.5-8, with the community nodding and responding with "Amen", or "Yes, LORD" or similar. (This way of saying a psalm together is also seen in Ps 118:2 and Ps 124:1.)



Step 2: Familiarise

Explaining and discussing the meaning and beauty of the psalm

Get an overview of the poem (the big picture) - what's the main message? Who is involved? A poem must be understood as 'a whole' (unlike a story).

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE PSALM

After listening to the guide translations, please respond to any of the following questions:

- What do you like about the psalm?
- What do you find difficult?
- How does the psalm make you feel?





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- Which verse do you find particularly important in this psalm?
- What does this psalm teach you about the LORD? What is the LORD like?
- Are there any noticeable repetitions in this psalm?
- What is the mood of the psalmist in vv.1-3? Does that mood change? How?¹
- What are the main ideas the poet is trying to communicate?²

ENGAGING WITH THE WHOLE PSALM

Facilitator: address the following topics:

- *The participants in the psalm, the different "speakers" and "audiences"*
- *The historical background and the context of the psalm, the story behind the psalm, if relevant*
- *The theme of the psalm*
- *The flow of the psalm*
- *The potential big picture obstacles*
- *Emotion map*
- *The peak or peaks of the psalm*
- *The genre and purpose of the psalm*
- *Highly important poetic device(s) related to understanding the big picture*
- *How does the psalm point to Christ?*

Discuss:

- **Participants:** Who are the "they", the persecutors? Pagan nations? Internal wicked people? Both? Internal wicked people probably don't hate Zion.
- Who is speaking to whom in the psalm?
It seems to be a single speaker all through, somebody who wants to encourage Israel. The song was most likely sung to each other.
- What seems to you as a group to be the theme of the psalm?

The theme and flow of the psalm

Theme: Israel was not spared suffering, but God is just, and will punish their enemies (at least in the end).

Flow: In the first four verses, the psalmist is confident that in spite the attacks and the persecution, and the scars, they prevailed. Then from vv.5-8, he is defiant against the ungodly, the haters of Israel. This defiance is described in terms of trust that the LORD is righteous and that He will cut the cords of oppression. And secondly, that those who hate Zion will be shamed, their harvests failing, with no blessing.

To unpack it a little more:

¹ First in v.4, he is confident. Then from vv.5-8, he is defiant against the ungodly.

² Our enemies treated us very badly, but God is just, and broke their evil. Now we ask God to curse them.



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1. Part 1 is about Israel suffering persecution (vv.1-3). The scarred survivor – many times, but not been successful, but nevertheless caused intense suffering compared to a vivid image of a scourged man.
2. Part 2 is about power for the persecuted (v.4): The righteous Lord has defeated the wicked
3. Part 3 is the petition of the persecuted (vv.5-8), God’s people – three curses: their withering; their harvest fails; no blessing is pronounced on them.

Israel is not celebrating any achievements but that she survived and prevailed in spite of the attacks. The psalm contrasts Israel and her enemies. The trust in YHWH leads to defiance of the haters. Those who hate Israel will wither, without the blessing. The way of hate is self-destroying, setting oneself up against God is suicide. In the end, silence (DK).

There are other ways to perceive this flow of thought: focussing on the persecutors, there working up up incrementally from oppression to not prevailing to YHWH the Righteous breaking the fetters of the wicked to the haters not being blessed in harvest and social relationships. First, they cruelly plough, oppress, then they are shamed and reduced.

Activity: as a group, only discuss the first line. The first line on any poem is important. How do you think this first line sets the scene for the whole psalm?

Discuss:

- **Peak of the psalm:** The center of the psalms seems to be the peak and main point at v.4: “the LORD is righteous, he puts things right by severing the cords of oppression”, and that haters of Zion will be shamed.
- **Pictures and images, and other poetic features relating to the big picture**
 - vv.1-4 pattern of rhythm is 3:2, reverse in vv.5-7 to 2:3.
 - “They greatly attacked me since my youth” is repeated twice (vv.1-2).
 - Quoting s used twice: “Let Israel say” (v1), “let them not say” (v.8)

Genre of the psalm

Psalm 129 is a psalm of thanksgiving, but end with a confession of confidence and a curse for the shaming and undoing the enemies. Several genres co-exist in this psalm.

Historical setting of the psalm

This is the 10th of the 15 Psalms of Ascents, which are all linked to pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the annual feasts. Such communal times were regular reminders of their past (and possibly present) suffering, but this psalm reminds them strongly that God is just, and that he will deal with their enemies. Their enemies are the hostile neighbouring nations like Edom and Aram, but also the oppressing superpowers of their time, Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. This psalm could refer to any of these. If the psalm is post-exilic, which may be likely



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if the survival referred to is from the Exile, then the Samaritans living in their midst are also referred to as enemies.

Significance of the psalm

The purpose of this psalm is to encourage surrender and thanksgiving in the godly pilgrims as they go up to Jerusalem and as they go up to bring their sacrifices while hearing the temple choirs singing these (and other) songs. The psalm expresses acceptance of their lot, confession of prevailing, but also a strong desire for ultimate justice to be meted out to the persecutors.

UNLOCKING SOME OF THE BIG PICTURE OBSTACLES TO THE PSALM

Discuss:

1. The identity of the “*enemies*” is just not clear. It can be a range. But then again, this ambiguity or open-ended writing is very poetic.
2. When is the time of “*my youth*” in vv.1-2? If the Psalm is read as the experience of the nation rather than an individual, then their “*youth*” may refer to the time of the Exodus (DK).
3. The exact reference of the suffering expressed by the lines “*Upon my back ploughed the ploughers / They made their furrows long*” is not clear. (See the notes in Step 5 and Appendix B for more information.) It is very vivid, graphic poetic language and should be translated as literally as possible to keep the effect.
4. The final negation of the blessing to those persecuting is a rather strange way to curse one’s enemies, but poetically it is very powerful. The persecuting enemies are shamed and cursed, not to receive a blessing.
5. The contrast between the violence of the attacks in Part 1 and the less-violent response in part 2 is difficult to fully fathom. The shaming of the enemies of part 2 is just not matching the violence of part 1. This could indicate nobility of soul or just sheer exhaustion (Segal), but it more likely hints at surrendering to the LORD the vengeance, and not we. As such, it is a huge statement of faith in the LORD and the future He will bring.

SEGMENTATION OF THE PSALM

Stanza 1 (verses 1-3): Israel was greatly attacked but prevailed

Stanza 2 (verse 4): The righteous LORD defeats those who hate Zion and redeems his people.

Stanza 3 (verses 5-8): The curse on the enemies of Israel

FINAL SUMMING UP

To summarise the Psalm, discuss the following questions:



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- What is the main point or message of the psalm?
Israel has been persecuted but survived. In the end, The LORD will bring justice and shame those persecuting enemies.
- What does this Psalm teach you about the LORD?
He is righteous and will put things right at the right time.
- How can you or your church use this psalm?
The Father restored everything through his Son when the Son came and died. We must celebrate that all the time, just like the pilgrims of old. He is the great Restorer, already. But there is also the expectation of future restoration when all things are brought under the Lordship of our Lord Jesus Christ. So the suffering we are undergoing now, will have a happy ending. This includes the full restoration of the spiritual Israel as well, the physical descendents of Abraham who are in Christ. So this psalm will be wholly fulfilled at last. The church can say the same, also relentlessly persecuted through the centuries and survived. For instance, the 52,000 martyrs of Nigeria (2024). A further application is that the godly are not spared persecution and attack, including the followers of Jesus of the New Covenant (cf. 1 Peter 2-4; 2 Thess 1, the Book of Revelation).
- What heading or title would the group suggest for this psalm?
"Persecuted Israel" (DK), "Desire for the downfall of Israel's enemies".



Step 3: Internalise

Absorbing the big picture of the psalm

'Get the poem inside yourself' (feel the emotions and be able to recall the main ideas).

Look at the whole psalm so that you can experience it and retell the message. This is not an attempt to memorize the psalm, but to be able to understand the whole message and to express it in the target language. Aim to do at least the first two activities.

CREATIVE RESPONSES

First, do Internalisation Activities 1-5 as a whole group

Internalisation Activity: Listen to Psalm X being read again. Note all the words you hear which speak of God's power, or which are very intense/extreme language.

Internalisation Activity: Say each line of the psalm in the right order, as a group. Use your own words; there's no need to have it precisely right. Then let one or two persons say each line of the psalm, again in the right order

Internalisation Activity: Then, as a group, make gestures for each line and again say all the lines in order, but this time with gestures. Use mime/gestures to show the emotion and action.





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Internalisation Activity: Lastly, as a whole group, use the popcorn method. Each line, in the right order, is said by a different person. Do this a second time to further reinforce.

Internalisation Activity (optional): The storyboard method: draw pictures of each event in the psalm as they unfold.

Then divide the group into two or three groups

Internalisation Activity: Skits—act out what’s happening in each of the lines. Make a little drama. Encourage them to use facial expressions, body language, motions, and movement to try to experience the emotions and the sequence of events. This psalm lends itself well to a skit.

Internalisation Activity: Memory song, chant or memory aid to help remember the psalm. Consider making a short poem of the song in the local language or Language of Wider Communication to help you remember the different actions in order. This song is only to help everyone remember each stanza in sequence (and the lines in sequence if it is a short psalm)



Step 4: Explore and compose

Explore the Hebrew and local poetry and compose a song

EXPLORING HEBREW AND LOCAL POETRY

For the facilitator: in this step, address the following topics to explore in Hebrew poetry:

- 1) Repetition of words, images, and sounds
- 2) Handling the Hebrew parallelisms
- 3) Figures of speech, like metaphors, personification
- 4) Rhythm, verse length, beat
- 5) Word order, clause order
- 6) Poetic devices that emphasize and mark something as important

Once the artist-translators have sufficiently internalised and drafted the psalm in the workshop setting, compose a song, poem, rap, chant, or prayer to capture as much of the psalm as possible.

1. Poetic devices- repetitions of words, images, and sounds

Activity: Trace all the words that are repeated. Then all the concepts/images.

2. Poetic devices - main Images or metaphors of the Psalm

- Metaphors, metonyms, similes, personifications, hyperboles, merisms,



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Activity: Can you identify any images, similes or metaphors?

3. Rhythm

Activity: Listen to the psalm again and in groups, and get a feel for the rhythm. Are the lines short or long?

4. Irregular word order

- Fronting of nouns before the verbs in Hebrew is particularly in focus here

Activity: Look at the Flower Garden or the Hebrew-mirror, and identify all the verses that have irregular word order, mostly (in English) nouns put before the verbs.

5. Highlighting poetic devices

Activity: Look at the Flower Garden in Appendix C or the Hebrew-mirror in Appendix A, and identify all the verses that have highlighting devices.

COMPOSING A SONG

For the facilitator: several considerations, like the big question when to start doing the song

- 1) *When to start composing a song? The guide writer and facilitator have some freedom when. Either at the end of step 4, or after step 5. There are pro's and con's to each option. One advantage of doing it in Step 4 (before the detailed exegesis) is that the team starts to think about poetry. They only start to think about poetry once they start composing a song. The risk is that when they compose something early, before step 5, that they settle on a melody they like, but need to change it or even abandon it after getting the more detailed exegetical insights. The advantage*
- 2) *Some other considerations: what about memory aid, the poem or song made at the end of Step 3?*
- 3) *Another option is to only compose a nice tune and song on one stanza with not any serious exegetical issues. That tune can then be used for the rest of the psalm at the end of Step 5. Experience with shorter sections, like one or two stanzas at a time, to compose.*
- 4) *The team needs to learn some song-writing skills.*
- 5) *It is not necessary to use the same tune for every stanza. Sometimes 3-4 tunes can be used for long psalms.*



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Note the poetic devices used in the Hebrew mirror or in the Flower Garden (Appendix C). What is the psalmist trying to achieve? Consider what poetic devices are used in the local language to achieve the same functions.

Activity: NOW, COMPOSE A SONG! Participants are to choose a style or genre that is relevant for the psalm, and to set the whole psalm or sections to a rhythm or music. The song needs to cover all the main stanzas, but doesn't need to be correct in every detail (that comes later in Step 5)

Activity: Make a recording of the composition(s).



Step 5: Draft

Translating stanza-by-stanza

Listen to the poem again. Orally create stanza-by-stanza a first draft of the psalm in the target language, trying to capture the poetic elements and essential details of the meaning. To take full advantage of the oral form, avoid reverting to written Biblical text at this point.

Activity: Divide into smaller groups and let one in each group read through guide translation #2: Hebrew-tight (or play a recording) while others translate. The oral draft can at that point be recorded and/or immediately written down (Step 6 merged with Step 5).

STANZA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Often it speeds the work to have different groups do different stanzas. If you do this, make sure you all hear the psalm from top to bottom and to make suggestions to other groups when you come together...

Stanza 1: Verses 1-3 Israel was greatly attacked but prevailed

A song of ascents.

1 "They greatly attacked me since my youth,"
let Israel now say.
2 "They greatly attacked me since my youth,
yet they did not prevail against me."
3 Upon my back ploughed the ploughers.
They made their furrows long.

A song of ascents.

1 "They greatly oppressed me since my youth,"
let Israel now say.
2 "They greatly oppressed me since my youth,
yet they did not prevail against me."
3 Upon my back ploughed the ploughers.
They made their furrows long.

Discuss:

- The two repeated lines in vv.1-2 are exactly the same and need to be the same in translation. Their repetition makes them more prominent and thematic.





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- “yet” means notwithstanding, the intension of the attach was not achieved. Take great care in selecting the right connective.
- “not prevailed” means not overcome.
- This is figurative, agricultural language, used to portray a scourged back with long and deep, cruel wounds. It refers to traumatic experiences like the exile and other oppression by the nations, like the time in Egypt before the exodus. It also refers to punishments, when Israel fell into idolatry, as seen in the Book of Judges. Discuss how you will translate this metaphor.

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

Stanza 2: Verse 4 The LORD is righteous and has ended the oppression of Zion

4 The LORD is righteous;
He has cut the cord of the wicked.

4 The LORD is righteous,
He has cut the cord of the wicked.

Discuss:

- This verse is the peak of the psalm and should be indicated as a separate stanza.
- “The LORD is righteous” means the LORD rules according to his own divine will or order. In this case, righteous then means that he is putting things right: Zion will survive and her enemies will be undone.
- “He has cut the cord of the wicked” means the attacks and persecution has now ended. Notice the present perfect (in English) representing a qatal Hebrew verb. We are speaking of deliverance as something that has already been accomplished.

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

Stanza 3: Verses 5-8 The curse on those who hate Zion

5 Let them be put to shame and be turned back
all those who hate Zion.
6 Let them be like the grass on the housetops
which has withered before it has grown up,
7 with which it does not fill
the hand of the reaper
or the arm of the sheaf binder.
8 And let those passing by not say,
“The blessing of the LORD on you.
We bless you in the name of the LORD.”

5 All those who hate Zion,
let them be put to shame and be turned back.
6 Let them be like the grass on the housetops
which has withered before it has grown up,
7 with which it does not fill
the hand of the reaper
or the bag of the sheaf binder.
8 And those passing by do not say,
“The blessing of the LORD be on you.
We bless you in the name of the LORD.”

Discuss:

- The LORD is going to do three things to Zion’s haters (vv.4-5): he has already cut their cords, now the LORD is asked to put them to shame, turning them back (from attacking), and remove any blessing. Maintain this order.
- There are two “Let them/those...”, in v.6 and in v.8. This is an opportunity to use the same verb and initial rhyme.





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- The simile (comparison) of the retribution on the wicked with “grass on the housetops” means that the grass they used to roof their homes has withered.
- Verse 8 seems to be an Israelite agricultural blessing (see for instance Ruth 2:4). The identity of passing-by speakers of verse 8 are not altogether clear but maybe not that important to have a specific reference. This is poetry, so not absolutely everything has to be identified and analysed.

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Activities:

- 1) Listen again to the recordings of each verse or section.
- 2) Think about how to include relevant parts from previous steps and to use ideas from the previous creative activities.
- 3) Put everything together to make a poetic oral representation of the complete psalm, and then record it.



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Phase 2: TEXT



Step 6: Transcribe

Make a written draft

Activity: Transcribe the recording/s of the oral draft onto paper or a computer.

Before moving on to the checking steps, check the transcribed draft for the following. This should be done as a whole group, looking at the psalm projected onto a screen or wall. Doing this now will help the exegetical and poetical checks that follow to stay focused on essential matters.

1. **Versification:** put the verse numbers into the psalm.
2. Check that the number of the psalm, and any **superscription**, are in place at the top. (Superscriptions are often left out completely according to team policy, but they are recommended to be put in the written text but not the song.)
3. Put in the **stanza breaks** (blank lines usually).
4. Correct the **punctuation**, in particular finding out where the sentences should end. Different groups use different approaches. Our recommendation is to use capital letters only for the beginning of sentences, not for the beginning of each poetic line.
5. Correct the **spelling**. You may find that there is a lot of discussion over this. The group needs to have consistency but also needs to abide by any government guidelines.
6. Raise any questions you have about the **back translation** at this point. The back translation just needs to be comprehensible; it does not need spell checks etc. You, the facilitator, are the only person who needs it. However, without a good back translation you cannot understand what is going on. As a bonus, at least a couple of exegetical questions you've prepared usually turn out to be unnecessary after this step.
7. Check the **line divisions** (this refers to how the power is broken up into lines and where to make those breaks).



Step 7: Contents Check

Checking exegetical faithfulness

Check the exegesis of the oral translation. Consider whether the correct meaning has been translated and if the wording used can be improved. The purpose of this step is to check the content of your draft for faithfulness and trustworthiness.



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Activity: Review the draft translation in detail, using the oral recording of Step 5 or the transcription of Step 6. Do an exegetical check by comparing the draft with the guide translations given in Appendix A and the exegetical layout in Appendix B and adjust the text as necessary.

EXEGETICAL CHECKLIST

Give special attention to:

- Go through all the notes again for each stanza in Step 5 and make sure everything has been covered.
- Ensure you have the repetitions which appear in the text (note the colours).
- Ensure v.2a is exactly the same as v.1.
- V.2b must have an adversative ('but . . .'), and v.4 must also have an adversative ('but').
- In v.4, the word used for 'just' should be the same as in Ps 125:3.
- turned back(ward): possibly change their ways as a result of their shame. This links with the idea of 'distancing oneself from the hated person'.
- Vv.6-7 is complex. If necessary, break down the idea into two or more sentences.
- Check v.8 is understood properly – with the negative, and with the two parts of the sentence understood as one idea.



Step 8: Poetry Check

Compare and weigh the poetic features

Check if the Hebrew poetry is all accounted for in the translation through equivalent poetic features in the target language. Consider if the poetry of the translation can be improved, for example, look at the length of lines and the use of rhythm and ideophones.

Activity: Consider the poetic features of your translation. Do they reflect the purpose of the Hebrew poetic features, drawing attention to the correct parts? Experiment a bit with different word-orders and see what sounds the most beautiful, the most poetic.

POETIC CHECKLIST

Give special attention to:

- check the imagery in v.3 is communicating effectively:
- "They greatly attacked me since my youth" is repeated twice (vv.1-2).
- The direct speech for quoting or fore-saying is used twice: "Let Israel say" (v1), "let them not say" (v.8). This provided vividness and should be translated as direct and not indirect speech.



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- The back of Israel is compared to a field being ploughed. Those ploughing cause long furrows in the soil. This may refer to the length of their suffering in Egypt. (See also Is 51:23 and Mic 3:12 for the same imagery.)
- Cut the cords: This may refer to the cords used to guide the animal when ploughing. Or it may refer to the cords used to punish the people in Egypt. (See Ps 2:3). Ensure the idea communicated is that something oppressive is being removed.
- Check if you maintained the metaphors as far as possible.
- Check for poetic rhythm. Check if the verse lines are not too long with too many syllables and accents. Use enjambment where the sentences are required to overrun the syllable limits.
- There is one vocative, in v.4 “The LORD”. Consider the best position in the verse, in line with local word-order and phrase-order discourse preferences.
- Always keep the lines as compact and short as possible.



Step 9: Finalise

Preparing the final version of an authenticated translation

Prepare the final version which will serve as an authorized translation, that in turn will serve as the basis for performing the psalm in the community (audio, visual and written).

Activity: Re-check the spelling of your transcription, the punctuation, in-setting, and the layout of paragraphs to represent stanza segmentation.

Activity: Re-check the essential accuracy of the back translation (not worrying about spelling).

Activity: In AVTT, ensure that the final text of your psalm is uploaded with a back translation, check that the recordings from different steps are in the correct place, and do a final audio recording.

Activity: If possible, copy the final written text into Paratext.



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Phase 3: PERFORMANCE



Step 10: Perform

Performing the psalm in your community

Convert text into performance (dramatic reading/song/chant) to both perform and share this psalm, ensuring the main message comes through in content and style (the same emotional mood as the original poem in the Bible).

You now want to convert your written translation into a performance (song or chant) so that you can share it with your community. You need to make sure that the main message comes through in content and style (the same emotional mood as the original poem in the Bible). The genre - lament or praise or thanksgiving or other - should be similar to songs of the same genre in your culture.

Psalm-specific ideas:

- ...

Activity: Identify any relevant genres or styles or performance and put the psalm to music. You can put the whole psalm to music, word-for-word, or you can use creative licence to adapt the psalm for the performance.

Activity: Complete a transcript and back translation for the lyrics of any song created by the team to be checked before recording.

FINAL CHECKLIST

In the end of each psalm, there should ideally be four products:

1. Transcription: An authorized, authenticated, or officially written draft in AVTT and Paratext.
2. Dramatic Reading: A recording of a dramatic reading or recitation of the whole psalm, using the authenticated version word-for-word, recorded in AVTT.
3. Whole Psalm Performance: A recording of a performance of the whole psalm, using the entire authenticated version but with freedom to adapt it for authentic performance, including poetic and dramatic features beyond the authenticated version, recorded in AVTT.
4. Song or Hymn: A recording of a performance of part of the psalm including the main idea of the psalm, in the form of a song, hymn or chorus, with or without drama, with freedom to adapt it for authentic performance and to make it easy to sing and remember, recorded in AVTT. An improved version of the Step 4 composition could be used here.



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Appendix A: Guide Translations

Guide Translation #1 (Hebrew-mirror)	Guide Translation #2 (Hebrew-tight)
<p>Song of ascents.</p> <p>1 “They greatly oppressed me since my youth,” let Israel now say.</p> <p>2 “They greatly oppressed me since my youth, yet they did not able against me.</p> <p>3 Upon my back ploughed the ploughers. They made long their furrows.</p> <p>4 Yahweh is righteous. He has cut the cord of the wicked.</p> <p>5 Let them be put to shame and turned back, all those who hate Zion.</p> <p>6 Let them be like the grass of the housetops Which, before it grows up, withers;</p> <p>7 with which he will not fill his hand, the reaper, or his cloth, the binder of sheaves.</p> <p>8 And those passing by do not say, “The blessing of Yahweh be on you. We bless you in the name of Yahweh.”</p>	<p>A song of ascents.</p> <p>1 “They greatly oppressed me since my youth,” let Israel now say.</p> <p>2 “They greatly oppressed me since my youth, yet they did not prevail against me.”</p> <p>3 Upon my back ploughed the ploughers. They made their furrows long.</p> <p>4 The LORD is righteous, He has cut the cord of the wicked.</p> <p>5 All those who hate Zion, let them be put to shame and be turned back.</p> <p>6 Let them be like the grass on the housetops which has withered before it has grown up,</p> <p>7 with which it does not fill the hand of the reaper or the bag of the sheaf binder.</p> <p>8 And those passing by do not say, “The blessing of the LORD be on you. We bless you in the name of the LORD.”</p>



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Appendix B: Exegetical Layout

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SUGGESTED HEADING

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Coding for TAM Verbs and Hebrew features:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qatal perfective = blue • Yiqtol imperfective = red | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infinitive construct = purple • Wayyiqtol waw+imperfective = pink • Jussive/cohortative = light brown | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imperative = brown • Participle = green • Weqatal = navy |
|--|---|--|

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת	1 A.song.of the.ascents
רַבַּת צָרְרוּנִי מִנְעוּרַי	Greatly ³ they.oppressed.me from.my.youth ⁴
יֹאמֵר-נָא יִשְׂרָאֵל:	Let.him.say ⁵ Israel
רַבַּת צָרְרוּנִי מִנְעוּרַי	2 Greatly ⁶ they.oppressed.me from.my.youth ⁷

³ Greatly (or perhaps “many times/often”) also in Ps 120:6 and Ps 123:4. There has been ongoing oppression by the enemy. HALOT defines it as ‘in rich measure’.

⁴ from my youth: a long time! The reference could also be to Israel’s history when she was afflicted in Egypt and in the wilderness.

⁵ let Israel say: the leader/priest calls upon the community to repeat after him the words of declaration (at least in vv.1-4). See also Ps 118:2 and Ps 124:1.

⁶ Repetitions of *rabbat* ‘greatly / many times, relentlessly’, and the full repetition of line 1a ‘oppressed me’: these are poetic features.

⁷ This line is the same as 1b. This is an example of parallelism.



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גַּם לֹא-יָכְלוּ לִי:	also not-they.were.able ⁸ against.me
עַל-גִּבִּי תְּרֹשׁוּ חֲרָשִׁים	3 Upon-my.back ⁹ they.ploughed ploughers,
הָאָרְצוֹ לְמַעַנְיָתָם	they.made.long their.furrows.
יְהוָה צַדִּיק	4 Yahweh (is) righteous ¹⁰
קָצַץ עֲבוֹת רְשָׁעִים:	He.cut cord.of ^{11 12} wicked(.people),
יָבֹשׁוּ וַיִּסְגּוּ אָחֹר	5 they.were.put.to.shame and.they.turned back ^{13 14}
כָּל שֹׂנְאֵי צִיּוֹן:	all ¹⁵ haters.of ¹⁶ Zion.

⁸ *not were able*: the sense here is that they have not been able to prevail - the enemy has not been successful in overcoming Israel. They have not gained victory over me (NIV), not been able to overcome (AM).

⁹ The poetic imagery here is of a scourged man, likening his back to the furrows of a ploughed field. (DL, also Segal). It is not literally about ploughing, contra. AM, who says it refers to a ploughed land. This may refer to the length of their suffering in Egypt. See also Is 51:23 and Mic 3:12 for the same imagery.

¹⁰ The mood changes strongly in v.4 with a confident assertion about how the Lord intervened because of his righteousness/justice. YHWH the Righteous is putting things right (qatal verb, past) (SJF).

¹¹ *cord*: The Hebrew is singular but in all the English translations the metaphor is translated with a plural. The metaphor is probably more meaningful in English with the plural form. Also, there is no definite article in Hebrew, but English requires one.

¹² *cut the cord*: This may refer to the cords used to guide the animal when ploughing. Or it may refer to the cords used to punish the people in Egypt. See Ps 2:3 where it refers to shackles. The metaphor may be describing Israel as field which is being ploughed. The oppression of the enemy will be stopped when God metaphorically cuts free the oxen which are ploughing the field. Breaking the cords of the wicked, cutting the fetters (SJF).

¹³ This could be translated as a hendiadys following the NLT: 'be turned back in shameful retreat' or HCSB: 'be driven back in disgrace'.

¹⁴ *turned back(ward)*: possibly change their ways as a result of their shame (in same verse).

¹⁵ *all*: Allen notes the structural correspondence between 'often/greatly' (vs1) and 'all'. He says, 'much affliction in the past is apparently compared with all hostility in the future' (Allen, 2002, p 247).

¹⁶ *hate*: used over 170x in the biblical text (with both God and people doing the action). It is a strong word.





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יְהִיוּ כַחֲצִיר גִּגֹּת	6 May.they.be like.grass.of housetops
שְׁקִדְמַת שְׁלֹף יָבֵשׁ:	which.before it.has.grown-up it.has.withered. 17 18
שֶׁלֹּא מִלֵּא	7 which.not it.fills ¹⁹
כַּפּוֹ קוֹצֵר	his.hand a.reaper
וְחֻצְנוֹ מְעַמָּר:	or.his.bag ²⁰ a.binder.of.sheaves
וְלֹא אָמְרוּ הָעֹבְרִים	8 and.not they.say those.passing.by
בְּרַכַּת יְהוָה אֲלֵיכֶם	"the.blessing.of-Yahweh (be) on.you(.people),
בִּרְכָנוּ אֶתְכֶם	we.bless you(.people) ²¹
בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה:	in.the.name.of Yahweh ²² ”.

¹⁷ *grass*: The psalmist may be using a commonly understood insult used to describe enemies. Isaiah uses this same phrase to describe the downfall of the Assyrian army under King Sennacherib's leadership in 2 Kings 19:26. (See also Matt 13:5). Seeds caught in the mud used for building and plastering homes might have germinated but quickly dies because of the lack of good soil. The agricultural metaphor continues. The curse is that the grass will not have roots deep enough to produce anything of value. This then links with the lack of blessing in v.8. (A good harvest would be a sign of God's rich blessing.)

¹⁸ Dahood (pg 233) notes a wordplay or pun with two similar sounding words in vv 5-6. Vs 5 starts with the word יִבְשֶׁוּ ('will/let be put to shame') and vs 6 ends with the word יִבֹּשׁ ('wither').

¹⁹ Reaper will not be able to fill the hand, too few, not the binder the sheaves (AM).

²⁰ *bags*: The Hebrew describes the multiple steps when you harvest by hand. A worker holds part of the plant in one hand and cuts with the other, then holds or gathers the cut produce. Most English translations say 'arms' but older translations like the KJV use the term 'bosom' referring the chest where the worker would hold the produce before tying it together in a sheaf. The word refers to the way people fill their garment with the gleanings to help carry it. It's not actually a body part at all. "Bag" may also be appropriate.

²¹ Allusion to Ruth 2:4 and the agricultural scene of blessing and harvest.

²² The lack of blessing, or curse, seems against NT ideas of forgiveness of the enemy. But in the face of severe injustice, the believer must cry out to God for justice, and hand over justice to God. The people do not assume the right to punish the enemy, but they ask God to do so, which fits with God's principles of justice.



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APP. B



Appendix C: Flower Garden

The repetitions and patterns below are placed upon guide translation #2 (Hebrew-tight). Read the commentary at the end of this Appendix which explains insights into these patterns.

Colour Code:

- Repeated concept/word
- Repeated concept/word
- Repeated concept/word

See the commentary below concerning the themes, colours, and patterns in this section.

A song of ascents.

1 “They greatly oppressed me since my youth,”
let Israel now say.

2 “They greatly oppressed me since my youth,
yet they did not prevail against me.”

3 Upon my back ploughed the ploughers.
They made their furrows long.

4 The LORD is righteous.
He has cut the cord of the wicked.

5 Let them be put to shame and be turned back
all those who hate Zion.

6 Let them be like the grass on the housetops
which withers before it grows up,

7 with which it does not fill
the hand of the reaper
or the bag of the sheaf binder.

8 And those passing by not say,
“The blessing of the LORD on you.

We bless you
in the name of the LORD.”

