

David's lament over Saul and Jonathan – G's full text analysis and performance decisions

יִזְוִי וְיִקְרַן דָּוִד, אֶת-הַקִּינָה הַזֹּאת, עַל-שָׂאוּל, וְעַל-יְהוֹנָתָן בְּנוֹ.

17 And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son

This is an author's note, not part of the lament. In reality, David most probably stood up, waited for his men to turn silent, opened his mouth, took a deep breath, and spoke. Even if there was some kind of MC (master of ceremony), he could not have said that phrase. How did he know what David was about to say?

G's decision – I will eliminate this phrase from the spoken performance.

יַח וְיֵאמֶר, לְלַמֵּד בְּנֵי-יְהוּדָה קֶשֶׁת, הִנֵּה כְּתוּבָה, עַל-סֵפֶר הַיָּשָׁר.

18 (Also he bade them teach the children of Judah the use of the bow; behold, it is written in the Book of Jasher):

This phrase has always been the source of confusion. "The Book of Jasher" was lost, and we don't know what was in it exactly. Therefore, we need to lean on what we do know. The first word in Hebrew (marked), is "va'yomer" meaning "so he said –" or "and he said –" or "he intended to -". Teaching to use the bow in a Biblical context is teaching to be the best of warriors. If it is written, it is imperative. If it's written in a book, there is a history to this custom. Not everybody could read then. Those who could were those who received education. In this case, most probably commanders beyond a certain rank.

G's decisions – I'm adding 'David' after "va'yomer" to gain back the cue missing after I dropped the first sentence. So it will be "so David said, -"

The lament, the way I see it, opens with David drawing a frame. "Why am I going to tell you what I am about to tell you? Because teaching you to become the best warriors, is my duty, like it was the duty of all the commanders before me".

יט הַצְּבִי, יִשְׂרָאֵל, עַל-בְּמוֹתֶיךָ, חֲלָל: אֵיךְ, נָפְלוּ גִבּוֹרִים.

19 “The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places! How are the mighty fallen!

The original is arranged in a different order: the beauty, of Israel, upon thy high places, is slain. Notice the frequency in using commas and that there are no exclamation marks.

G's decision – these commas do two things: they space the words, give them weight, and they allow the speaker to gain momentum. The first three (marked) are appeals, I'm going to perform them outwards; the fourth drops to the ground ("is slain") and that is where the rest stays – down.

כ אל-תִּגִּידוּ בְּגַת, אֶל-תְּבַשְׂרוּ בְּחוּצַת אֲשָׁקֶלוֹן: פֶּן-תִּשְׂמַחְנָה בְּנוֹת פְּלִשְׁתִּים, פֶּן-תִּעֲלֶזְנָה בְּנוֹת הָעַרְלִים.

20 Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.

Here too part of the original is arranged in a different order: lest-rejoice the daughters... lest-triumph the daughters...

More things to notice:

David spoke this lament in Ziklag. Gat was close; Ashkelon was distant, on the coastline. This helps understand David's gesticulation here – don't tell it close and don't tell it far either.

He mentions the women in their enemy's towns rejoicing as something he strictly wants to eliminate. Notice he uses "it not" twice. What's the problem? I don't know if you, the reader, have seen this happen – an overt burst of joy over the death of your people, performed mainly by women, dancing and screaming "cululululy!!!". It boils one's blood, it demoralizes, and it's a terrible disgrace. David, knowing the situation was fragile, commanded his people harshly because he didn't want them to go through the emotional turmoil.

The spoken phrase, is a little clunky. Yet, David needs all the words because they paint a very clear picture; therefore the division into four using negative commands - "it not" and "lest". Here they serve also as binding material.

G's decisions – David mentions Gat, Ashkelon and soon he will mention Mt. Gilboa. He has a clear map in his head and he is using distances to enhance his words. Therefore, in my imagination, he is standing, and so will I, with his back to the Jordan Valley, facing the Mediterranean from afar. That will help me keep the picture in place.

I'll use a commanding voice for the first half of the phrase. On the second part, I'm going to mimic the behavior of those women. That will upset the audience's feelings. I think he wanted to make them feel what will happen, feel, not rationalize. That would give them the motivation to keep their mouths closed.

כֹּהֲרֵי בְּגִלְבֹּעַ, אֶל-טַל וְאֶל-מָטָר עֲלֵיכֶם--וּשְׂדֵי תְרוּמַת: כִּי שָׁם נִגְעַל, מִגֹּן גְּבוּרִים--מִגֹּן שְׂאוּל, בְּלִי מִשִּׁיחַ בְּשֶׁמֶן.

21 “Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain upon you, nor fields of offerings. For there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil.

The first part of the phrase is self-explanatory – it's a curse. For the second G chose a different interpretation than the one you can gather from the translation: For there was stained with blood, the shield of the mighty—the shield of Saul that will never again be lubricated with oil (the shields were made of leather).

G's decision – well, Mt. Gilboa is far to the north. It's a curse. This is also about the death of a king. Again "it-not" appears. This will have to be performed with rage, not letting go until the end of the sentence. I'll need to bring it to the limit also because in a second Jonathan is mentioned and that will be something different.

כֹּב מִדַּם חֲלָלִים, מִחֶלֶב גְּבוּרִים--קֶשֶׁת יְהוֹנָתָן, לֹא נָשׁוּג אַחֹר; וְחֶרֶב שְׂאוּל, לֹא תָשׁוּב רִיקָם.

22 “From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty.

G's decision – I'm treating the first part as David talking about the people of Israel fighting and dying there. So – although many of their people died, Jonathan and Saul (who knew he was going to lose the battle and die), never

stopped fighting with all their might. I want the audience to feel horror and appreciation.

כג שְׂאוּל וַיְהוֹנָתָן, הַנְּאֻהָבִים וְהַנְּעִימִים בְּחַיֵּיהֶם, וּבְמוֹתָם, לֹא נִפְרְדוּ; מִנְּשָׂרִים קָלוּ, מֵאַרְיֹת גְּבוּרוֹ.

23 “Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.

Notice the way Saul and Jonathan are mentioned – there is a castling here. First – Saul. Then – Jonathan and Saul. Now – Saul and Jonathan and soon – Jonathan alone. David is moving carefully from the king to his beloved, paying respect first and clearing the space for a very personal, vulnerable moment.

Another thing happening is a shift in lingual style. Hebrew uses many consonants and even more when the situation is harsh. Here, we suddenly see a flood of vowels, the language turns soft, and you can almost sing parts of the text.

G's decision – the first part of the phrase is very soft, loving, and sad with beauty. The second part is praise but it isn't heavy. It needs to be uplifting, not grave.

כד בָּנוֹת, יִשְׂרָאֵל--אֶל--שְׂאוּל, בְּכִינָה; הַמְּלַבְּשֶׁכֶם שָׁנִי, עִם-עֲדָנִים, הַמַּעֲלָה עֲדֵי זָהָב, עַל לְבוּשְׁכֶן.

24 “Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel.

G's decision – this is lush although he says, "weep". This is beautiful; I'll want to make the audience feel the richness.

כה אֵיךְ נָפְלוּ גְבוּרִים, בְּתוֹךְ הַמִּלְחָמָה--יְהוֹנָתָן, עַל-בְּמוֹתֶיךָ חֵלֶל.

25 “How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou was slain in thine high places.

G's decision – a few sentences ago David was cursing at the top of his voice. In the last sentence, he was almost tempting through song. However, the

lament is not over yet and he turns to address his deep pain. The "how" will have to 'snap' the audience back in, binding to the beginning also through "thy high places". I'll need to find a way to repeat the same feeling but with a slight diversion so it doesn't sound mechanical.

כֹּז צַר-לִי עֲלֶיךָ, אָחִי יְהוֹנָתָן--נִעְמָתָה לִּי, מְאֹד ; נִפְלְאָתָה אֲהַבָתְךָ לִּי, מֵאַהֲבַת נָשִׁים.

26 I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan; **very pleasant hast thou been unto me**. Thy love to me was wonderful, **passing** the love of women.

The original of the marked segment is "pleasant hast thou been unto me, very". The word "passing" is an interpretation. What originally appears is closer to "than". In both examples, the original is more delicate, intricate.

G's decision – a single phrase to lament the death of his beloved; that can tear you apart, you don't want to let go. I'll want to take my time here, softly, looking inside. What you hear is only the echo of eternity.

כֹּז אֵיךְ נָפְלוּ גִבּוֹרִים, וַיֵּאבְדוּ כָּלֵי מִלְחָמָה.

27 "How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

Obviously, the exclamation mark in the translation is out of place.

G's decision – a man has to do what a man has to do. I understand why it's here as a repetition binding the text but now I understand the "how"s don't build-up; they dismantle.