



Psalm 137

Context of the Psalm: The Psalm is written by an Israelite during the exile in Babylon. After 400 years of Israel being warned through the prophets to repent and turn to God, they were given over to the Babylonians to face judgment. Babylon invaded Judah and totally destroyed Jerusalem and all of Judah (587 BC). During that time the Israelites endured horrific evil (see Lamentations 2:20-21) at the hand of the Babylonians. After the Babylonians overthrew Judah they took the Israelites back to Babylon. It is here where we enter Psalm 137. An Israelite is lamenting his current situation in exile and praying for the same harm to happen to Babylon that he and his people endured.

Discussion: What do you think are the differences in peoples' experience who face a difficult time caused by poor choices versus a difficult time that is beyond their control?

Read Psalm 137 together.

Pretty troubling isn't it? Perhaps you already heard Pastor Mark's sermon on this Psalm. Regardless, let's dive into this passage together and wrestle through some of the complexities of this passage. Try to hold off trying to figure out verse 9 until you spend some time in the chapter.

Verses 1-3.

1. What is the current state of the Israelites and what are they being requested to do?
2. Songs of Zion could be Psalms or other sacred songs. Why would their captors be asking them to sing? If you were in their shoes, how do you think you would be feeling at this point?

Verses 4-6.

3. The Psalmist equates singing the Lord's song in such conditions with forgetting Jerusalem. What evidence do you find of his strong desire to not forget Jerusalem.
4. Now that the Psalmist has found himself in exile, what might he be missing in Jerusalem?

Verses 7-9.

5. Verse 7 is the Psalmist recalling the devastation of Jerusalem from the Edomites (Obadiah 11-14) and asking God to remember their evil actions. What does this prayer tell you about the Psalmist's view of revenge and view of God?
6. Now that you have taken a closer look at all the verses, how would you describe the emotional flow of the Psalter's words?
7. Where is the Psalmist finding hope?

Now let's look at verse 9. Perhaps you are wondering, "How can the Psalmist call a violent murderer of babies blessed?" "How could God allow this?" According to the ESV Study Bible, such practice with infants was familiar in the ancient world (2 Kings 8:12, Hosea 10:14, 13:16). Babylon most likely committed this horrific act towards Israel when they overthrew them in Judah. The Psalmist is asking God to judge Babylon with the same acts that were committed to them. Imagine his hatred and anger. There is a good chance he watched Lamentation 2:20-21 go down. He is not endorsing the act but rather he is pleading God for justice. From his point of view this is how he sees justice being carried out. Unlike us, he does not have the cross of Jesus to depend on for the hope or forgiveness of sins.

Read the Psalm again. How would you describe this prayer? Do you find it helpful or hurtful to pray prayers like this? Why?

The Psalmist is sitting among his enemies who have dealt harshly with him and his people and destroyed their city. He prayed for God to carry out justice. If only he knew at this moment the end of the story - Isaiah 13. In the meantime, God used the exile to purify his people in Babylon.

Application: Today if and when we find ourselves in the middle of oppression or evil, we can turn to the cross of Jesus. If we are in the wrong, we can receive the generous gift of forgiveness and peace with God once again. If we are the victims of an unjust action, remember God willingly gave up *his child* to be murdered in order that all of evil and death would be overcome. Evil will not have the last word. Our God of justice will deal rightly with all whom have come against His name. Is there any situation in your life where you need the assurance of God's righteousness and justice? Is there any place in your life where you need the cleansing of Jesus? Take some time to be open with God and let him know your heart.