

Third Presbyterian Church
Bible Study – Psalm 137/Job 1
Responding in our Babylons

Psalm 137:1-9 (KJV)

¹ By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. ² We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. ³ For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us *required of us* mirth, *saying*, Sing us *one* of the songs of Zion. ⁴ How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land? ⁵ If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget *her cunning*.

⁶ If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. ⁷ Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase *it*, rase *it*, *even* to the foundation thereof. ⁸ O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy *shall he be*, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. ⁹ Happy *shall he be*, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

Job 1:1-22 (KJV)

¹ There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name *was* Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.

¹⁸ While he *was* yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters *were* eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house:

¹⁹ And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

²⁰ Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, ²¹ And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

²² In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

Questions

1. How has your relationship with the Lord helped you through a difficult time in the past?
2. In difficult situations do we tend to be more or less sensitive to God? Why?
3. Why is it difficult to remain faithful to one's beliefs in difficult times?
4. How does/has your relationship with God usually change(d) when you are going through hard times?
 - A. What have been your lessons learned that you can share with others about going through hard times and keeping my faith in God?
5. **Read Romans 12:17-21**
 - A. What are some of the reasons prayers for our enemies are so difficult?
 - B. Share an account where you prayed for your enemy and what was the outcome?
 - C. How does knowing that our enemies are under God's control give us a difference perspective on dealing with their attack?
6. When in a "Babylon" situation how does remembering that it's purposeful help us to continue to Serve, praise and worship God?
 - A. A Faith that can't be tested can't be trusted.
 1. What does this mean and how does it not only apply to our relationship to God but with one another as well?
 - B. Why is stopping praise, study, service and worship attendance the absolute wrong things to stop in our Babylons?
 - C. What do you suppose the outcome will be in our "Babylon" if we just sulk and have a "woe is me" pity party?
 - D. Discuss this statement: The test of Babylon will **bring the best** out of us **And purge** the worse in us.
 - E. **Agree or Disagree and why, "WE will only praise in Babylon to the level of our faith in God."**
7. How does this psalm/Study on Job encourage you to handle the challenges you face?
8. What specific steps could you take this week to strengthen your commitment to the Lord, even if you are going through a difficult experience?
9. How could you encourage or help a person who is struggling with a problem this week?
10. Share your major takeaways from the sermon/lesson.

NOTES ON PSALM 137

The Vulgate, Septuagint, Ethiopic, and Arabic, say, ridiculously enough, a Psalm of David for Jeremiah. Anachronisms with those who wrote the titles to the Psalms were matters of no importance. Jeremiah never was at Babylon; and therefore could have no part in a Psalm that was sung on the banks of its rivers by the Israelitish captives. Neither the Hebrew nor Chaldee has any title; the Syriac attributes it to David. Some think it was sung when they returned from Babylon; others, while they were there. It is a matter of little importance. It was evidently composed during or at the close of the captivity.

Psalm 137:1

By the rivers of Babylon—These might have been the Tigris and Euphrates, or their branches, or streams that flowed into them. In their captivity and dispersion, it was customary for the Jews to hold their religious meetings on the banks of rivers. Mention is made of this Acts 16:13, where we find the Jews of Philippi resorting to a river side, where prayer was wont to be made. And sometimes they built their synagogues here, when they were expelled from the cities.

Psalm 137:2

We hanged our harps upon the willows—The ערבים *arabim* or willows were very plentiful in Babylon. The great quantity of them that were on the banks of the Euphrates caused Isaiah, 15:7, to call it the brook or river of willows. This is a most affecting picture. Perhaps resting themselves after toil, and wishing to spend their time religiously, they took their harps, and were about to sing one of the songs of Zion; but, reflecting on their own country, they became so filled with distress, that they unstrung their harps with one consent, and hung them on the willow bushes, and gave a general loose to their grief. Some of the Babylonians, who probably attended such meetings for the sake of the music, being present at the time here specified, desired them to sing one of Zion's songs: this is affectingly told.

Psalm 137:3

They that carried us away captive required of us a song—This was as unreasonable as it was insulting. How could they who had reduced us to slavery, and dragged us in chains from our own beautiful land and privileges, expect us to sing a sacred ode to please them, who were enemies both to us and to our God? And how could those who wasted us expect mirth from people in captivity, deprived of all their possessions, and in the most abject state of poverty and oppression?

Psalm 137:4

How shall we sing the Lord's song—אֵיךְ נִשְׁרֵי *eich! nashir*; O, we sing! Who does not hear the deep sigh in the strongly guttural sound of the original אֵיךְ *eich!* wrung, as it were, from the bottom of the heart? Can WE, in this state of slavery,—WE, exiles, from our country, WE, stripped of all our property,—WE, reduced to contempt by our strong enemy,—WE, deprived of our religious privileges,—WE, insulted by our oppressors,—WE, in the land of heathens,—WE sing, or be mirthful in these circumstances? No: God does not expect it; man should not wish it; and it is base in our enemies to require it.

Psalm 137:5

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem—Such conduct would be, in effect, a renunciation of our land a tacit acknowledgment that we were reconciled to our bondage; a concession that we were pleased with our captivity, and could profane holy ordinances by using them as means of sport or pastime to the heathen. No: Jerusalem! we remember thee and thy Divine ordinances: and especially thy King and our God, whose indignation we must bear, because we have sinned against him.

Let my right hand forget—Let me forget the use of my right hand. Let me forget that which is dearest and most profitable to me; and let me lose my skill in the management of my harp, if I ever prostitute it to please the ungodly multitude or the enemies of my Creator!

Psalm 137:6

Let my tongue cleave—Let me lose my voice, and all its powers of melody; my tongue, and all its faculty of speech; my ear, and its discernment of sounds; if I do not prefer my country, my people, and the ordinances of my God, beyond all these, and whatever may constitute the chiefest joy I can possess in aught else beside. This is truly patriotic, truly noble and dignified. Such sentiments can only be found in the hearts and mouths of those slaves whom the grace of God has made free.

Psalm 137:7

Remember—the children of Edom—It appears from Jeremiah 12:6; 25:14; Lamentations 4:21, 22; Ezekiel 25:12; Obadiah 1:11-14; that the Idumeans joined the army of Nebuchadnezzar against their brethren the Jews; and that they were main instruments in rasing the walls of Jerusalem even to the ground.

Psalm 137:8

O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed—Or, O thou daughter of Babylon the destroyer, or, who art to be ruined. In being reduced under the empire of the Persians, Babylon was already greatly humbled and brought low from what it was in the days of Nebuchadnezzar; but it was afterwards so totally ruined that not a vestige of it remains. After its capture by Cyrus, A.M. 3468, it could never be considered a capital city; but it appeared to follow the fortunes of its various conquerors till it was, as a city, finally destroyed.

Rewardeth thee as thou hast served us—This was Cyrus, who was chosen of God to do this work, and is therefore called happy, as being God's agent in its destruction. Greater desolations were afterwards brought upon it by Darius Hystaspes, who took this city after it had revolted, and slaughtered the inhabitants, men and women, in a barbarous manner. Herod. lib. iii.

Psalm 137:9

Happy—that taketh and dasheth thy little ones—That is, So oppressive hast thou been to all under thy domination, as to become universally hated and detested; so that those who may have the last hand in thy destruction, and the total extermination of thy inhabitants, shall be reputed happy—shall be celebrated and extolled as those who have rid the world of a curse so grievous. These prophetic declarations contain no excitement to any person or persons to commit acts of cruelty and barbarity; but are simply declarative of what would take place in the order of the retributive providence and justice of God, and the general opinion that should in consequence be expressed on the subject; therefore praying for the destruction of our enemies is totally out of the question. It should not be omitted that the Chaldee considers this Psalm a dialogue, which it thus divides:—The three first verses are supposed to have been spoken by the psalmist, By the rivers, etc. The Levites answer from the porch of the temple, in verse 4, How shall we sing, etc. The voice of the Holy Spirit responds in verses 5, 6, If I forget thee, etc. Michael, the prince of Jerusalem, answers in verse 7, Remember, O Lord, etc. Gabriel, the prince of Zion, then addresses the destroyer of the Babylonish nation, in verses 8, 9, Happy shall be he that rewardeth thee, etc. To slay all when a city was sacked, both male and female, old and young, was a common practice in ancient times. Homer describes this in words almost similar to those of the psalmist:—

These excesses were common in all barbarous nations, and are only prophetically declared here. He shall be reputed happy, prosperous, and highly commendable, who shall destroy Babylon.

ANALYSIS OF THE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-SEVENTH PSALM

When this Psalm was composed, the Jews were in captivity in Babylon, far from their own country, the temple, and the public exercises of religion; and the scoff and scorn of their enemies; and they contrast what they were with what they are. This Psalm has two parts:—

- I. The complaint of Israel. Because of the insults of the Babylonians, they deplore their sad condition, long for the temple, and their return to Jerusalem, verses 1-7.

II. An imprecation or prayer for vengeance, on their persecutors, verses 7-9.

I. Their complaint arises from their captivity, and it is aggravated.

- A. From the place, Babylon: "By the rivers of Babylon." A place far from their country; who were aliens from the covenant made by God with Abraham, scornors of their religion, had laid waste their city and forced them to base and servile labor.
- B. From the continuance of their captivity and misery: "There we sat down," etc. Took up the seats allotted to us, and that for seventy years.
- C. From the effects it produced: "Yea, we wept," etc.
- D. From the cause which drew these tears. The remembrance of what they had enjoyed, (now lost), the services of religion: "We wept when we remembered Zion," etc.
- E. From the intenseness of their grief, which was so great that they could not even tune their harps: "We hung our harps," etc.

That which increased their grief was the joy their enemies manifested at it.

- A. THERE, in a strange land, the place of our captivity.
- B. "THEY that carried us away captive."
- C. "They required of us a song." They quired of us mirth, saying,
- D. O thou Jew or captive, come now, "sing us one of the songs of Zion." To this sarcasm the captive Jews return a double answer.

"How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" You are aliens, and this is a strange land; we cannot sing God's service there, which is destined to his honor, to you, or in this place without offending our God.

They reply by a protestation of their hope and constancy in religion, and accurse themselves if they do not continue in it.

- A. "If I forget thee," etc. Forget the worship and feasts I kept there.
- B. "If I do not remember thee," etc. If I do not prefer and make mention of Jerusalem, then "let my tongue cleave," etc. Let me no more have the use of that excellent organ of God's glory. It would be unworthy of my religion, and a dishonor to my God to sing the songs of Zion thus circumstanced, and to scoffers and aliens.

II. This seems to be the sense of the first part of the Psalm. The second part has reference to the imprecations poured out against Edom and Babylon, both persecutors of God's people. The Babylonians carried them away captive, and the Edomites persecuted their brethren with the sword, Amos 1:12.

A. Against Edom.

1. "Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom," etc. How they carried themselves towards thy people on that day when thy anger smote against them, and the Babylonians carried us away.
2. Remember how they added to our affliction, saying, "Rase it," etc.

B. Against Babylon. To her he turns his speech by an apostrophe; but at the same time foretells her ruin: "O daughter of Babylon," etc. Thou seemest to thyself to be most happy; but thy ruin approaches. Shortly after, the Medes, led by Cyrus destroyed them.

1. "Happy shall he be that rewardeth," etc. [See the notes.]
2. "Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones," etc. [See the notes.]

Adam Clarke's Commentary.