

PSALM 137

An Experience of the Captivity

INTRODUCTION.

- A. From Roy H. Enoch (1-8-97). "A Song from the Captivity in Babylon."
- B. Here is one psalm that needs no guessing about when it was written or of the situation it refers to. It shows the sorrow of those of Judah in captivity in Babylon, 587-537BC.
- C. This psalm is very clear and self-explanatory. It is naturally divided into three parts:
 1. Their Pitiful Situation (137:1-3).
 2. Curses Upon Themselves (137:4-6).
 3. Imprecations Against Enemies (137:7-9).

THE TEXT.

- 137:1** By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down and wept,
When we remembered Zion.
- 2** Upon the willows in the midst of it
We hung our harps.
- 3** For there our captors demanded of us songs,
And our tormentors mirth, *saying*,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion."
- 4** How can we sing the LORD'S song
In a foreign land?
- 5** If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
May my right hand forget *her skill*.
- 6** May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth
If I do not remember you,
If I do not exalt Jerusalem
Above my chief joy.
- 7** Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom
The day of Jerusalem,
Who said, "Raze it, raze it
To its very foundation."
- 8** O daughter of Babylon, you devastated one,
How blessed will be the one who repays you
With the recompense with which you have repaid us.
- 9** How blessed will be the one who seizes and dashes your little ones
Against the rock.

COMMENTS.

- A. Their Pitiful Situation (137:1-3).
[v1] "By the rivers of Babylon..." Babylon was sitting on the Euphrates river with the river running through the city, and irrigation canals all around it. Therefore, the many canals must have looked like the city was in the midst of a network of rivers.
"...there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion." The canals and low land around Babylon would have been hot and humid compared to the cooler mountains of Jerusalem.
- [v2,3]** "We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it." Slaves were often required to entertain their masters, and that seems to be the brunt of their sorrow: They were asked to sing songs about Zion, while captives. Most of their songs were festive, rejoicing, and victorious. This may have been the sadistic sport of their tormentors.
- B. Curses Upon Themselves (137:4-6).
[v4] "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" It was not impossible, but an extreme displeasure to be compelled to sing songs of joy and victory, and of the power of their God when captives and helpless.

[v5,6] The curses upon themselves may have been uttered under their breath rather than in rebellion to their captors.

“...Let my right hand forget its skill...” The right hand represented strength and skill. “...my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy.” These curses reminded them of the importance of remembering their nation and city where God’s name rested.

C. Imprecations Against Enemies (137:7-9).

Imprecations are focused against Edom and Babylon. Edom was the nation descended from Esau and protected by God from the Israelites when they were traveling toward Canaan. Yet they rejoiced at Jerusalem’s destruction. This prayer asks God to remember their sin.

Babylon is to be destroyed as Jeremiah and Isaiah had predicted, and the punishment is to be as they had done. This may explain the harshness of the imprecation: “Happy the one who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock.”