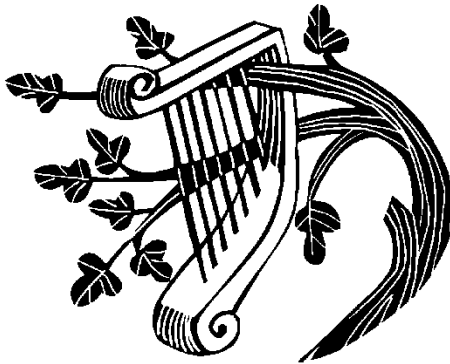


PSALM 137

HOW CAN WE SING THE LORD'S SONG?



Psalm 137 is a sad song of an exiled people, the Jews. After years of rejecting God's commands and worshipping other gods, God punished them by sending the Babylonians to conquer and deport them.

In Babylonia they sat, taunted by their captors and longing for their homelands. Their prayers turned from yearning to vengeance as they call down curses upon their captors.

What do you think - can Christians today pray such bloodthirsty prayers as Psalm 137?

THE AUTHORS

People

Exiled Nation of Judah

Dates

597– 538 B.C.

Location

Rivers of Babylon

History

Israel's Fall in 722 B.C.
Jeremiah / Ezekiel's Warnings

Exile

Nebuchadnezzar's Conquests
2 Deportations in 597 and 586 B.C.

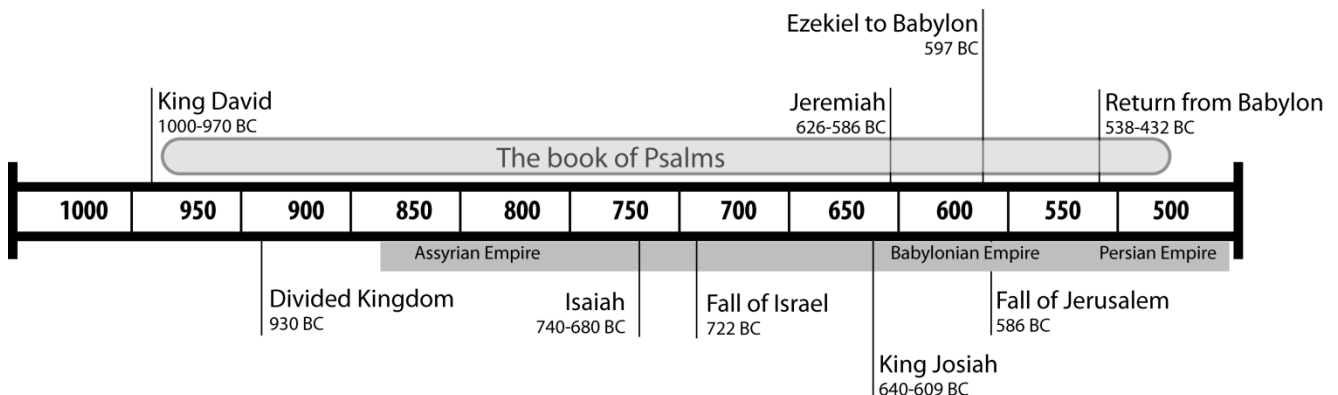
THE POETRY

The 12 poetic lines of this Hebrew song divide symmetrically into three stanzas of 4 lines each. Verses 1-3 find the believers remembering their sorrow, verses 4-6 are their commitment to Jerusalem, and verses 7-9 are a call for retribution on Edom and Babylon.

THE PSALM

Psalm 137 is known as an Imprecatory Psalm. This Psalm, along with Psalms 55, 56, 58, 69, and 109, contains curses or prayers for the punishment of the psalmist's enemies.

Imprecatory Psalms are hotly debated in Christianity as to their validity and their worth. Often, they are thrown out as remnants of a less developed Hebrew religion or referenced as contradictions to Christ's teaching not to take revenge (Matthew 5:38-44).



Read Psalm 137:1-3.

1. According to Lamentations 2:6-7, what do God's people do at Zion?

Lamentations 2:6-7

He has destroyed his place of meeting.
The LORD has made Zion forget her appointed feasts and Sabbaths; in his fierce anger he has spurned both king and priest. The Lord has rejected his altar and abandoned his sanctuary.

2. Could God's people sing songs of Zion in Babylon? Why or Why Not?

Read Psalm 137:4-6.

3. What would this psalmist rather have happen than forget Jerusalem?

What is that saying about his/her commitment to God?

4. Contrast how the captors viewed the "songs of Zion" with how God's people did.
5. Consider our confirmation practice. We ask young men and women to be faithful to the Lord, even until death.

Do you see any similarities between our confirmation vows and this psalmist's vow?

Read Psalm 137:7-9.

6. Why was the Edomites' action so hideous?
7. How was Babylon, a prosperous nation, doomed to destruction?

Jeremiah 25:12

I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt... and will make it desolate forever.

8. Verse 8 says "happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us." What had the Babylonians done to the Jews?
9. Was it right for the Jews to want vengeance on the Babylonians?
10. Jesus told Christians in Matthew 5:44 to "love your enemies". Does that teaching contradict an Imprecatory Psalm like Psalm 137?
11. Does the psalmist want justice or revenge upon Babylon?
12. Has the psalmist gone too far in describing the ways (dash infants against the rocks) he wants the Babylonians to be punished?
13. Luther once said we cannot pray without cursing. How is that true of every single one of our prayers?
14. Respond to this statement found on jesuswalk.com recommending how to handle an Imprecatory Psalm.
 1. Recognize the rightness of hating sin and unrighteousness.
 2. Acknowledge that the psalmist's curses are an example of pre-Christian attitudes. They are understandable. They are human. But they are not to be examples of our lives as Christians.
 3. Examine your own heart to see if that same kind of bitterness and hatred is lurking deep within. And if the Lord allows you to see it there, repent and forgive. Let it go, and claim the higher road of Christ and his cross.