

“Cries From Captivity” Psalm 137

CHS, Treasury of David:

This plaintive ode is one of the most charming compositions in the whole Book of Psalms for its poetic power. If it were not inspired it would nevertheless occupy a high place in poesy, especially the former portion of it, which is tender and patriotic to the highest degree. In the later verses (Ps 137:7-9), we have utterances of burning indignation against the chief adversaries of Israel,—an indignation as righteous as it was fervent. Let those find fault with it who have never seen their temple burned, their city ruined, their wives ravished, and after children slain; they might not, perhaps, be quite so velvet mouthed if they had suffered after this fashion. It is one thing to talk of the bitter feeling which moved captive Israelites in Babylon, and quite another thing to be captives ourselves under a savage and remorseless power, which knew not how to show mercy, but delighted in barbarities to the defenseless. The song is such as might fitly be sung in the Jews' wailing place. It is a fruit of the Captivity in Babylon, and often has it furnished expression for sorrows which else had been unutterable. It is an opalesque (Like an opal) Psalm within whose mild radiance there glows a fire which strikes the beholder with wonder.

StudyLight.org Coffman Commentaries:

For once, there is no need for guessing about the occasion of this Psalm. It reflects the sorrows and thoughts of one of the captives, either during the captivity itself, or shortly afterward when the memories of the terrible experience were still fresh in the psalmist's mind. As Rhodes noted, "The date therefore would be sometime between 587 B.C. and 537 B.C."

THEIR PITIFUL SITUATION

The psalm is fully self-explanatory. The first three verses describe the situation. The chosen people are suffering the captivity in Babylon, enduring the sporting taunts of their enemies, and weeping over their sorrows as they contrasted their status with what it once was in their beloved Jerusalem.

Grey's Outline:

- Tormenting Taunts: 1-3
- The Righteous Remnant: 4-6
- The Passionate (Imprecatory) Prayers: 7-9

Tormenting Taunts: 1-3

You may understand how wicked a soul is by how much they taunt when they have the upper hand over you. Taunting is humiliating and men do this while they can. Taunting is so bad that our sporting officials do not allow it in modern sports. The people of God were contrasting what they once had to their current situation, and it was not good. Why is it that we don't appreciate what we have until sin ruins it?

The Jews had no other choice but to sit by the irrigation canals or the Euphrates and weep. Remembering the good times can be helpful and also painful. The hope of better days returning can give us strength and also bring us lower if we dwell upon the torments and pain of a current uncomfortable situation. This is especially truth when our own sin brought us to a place of suffering.

In verse 2 we see the dire straights the people were in. They were not singing and playing, and they had no intention of doing so. They had no joy to express and could not worship in their lowly state. The visual is heartbreaking. The harps are silent and even

hung in the trees. The people had quit singing. They lost the song in their hearts. A Jew that's not singing in the OT is a sad sight.

Verse 3 shows the height of the torment. "Hey, you Jews... sing us a song about the home land. What's wrong? Your God not helping you anymore?" Then they would laugh at the people. They were even demanded to sing.

The Hebrew word for **demand** is **sha'al**. This is to lay a charge or request upon someone for something. So the Jews have broken hearts and are saddened to be in a foreign land as slaves, and their captors are taunting them to be happy. Have you ever tried to be happy when you didn't want to be happy? "Sing us a song about Zion with joy," they would say. This was just cruel and mean spirited. This was hateful.

The Righteous Remnant: 4-6

There were many Jews there that had not sinned and were lovers of Yahweh. They had been brought with the rest of the group. They would never forget their beloved God and home land. In verse 4 they speak of being in a foreign land.

Many people go to the foreign land on their own. This would be the story of the prodigal son. This is the story of most Jews today and in the past. You can bet that there is no singing in the story of the prodigal until he returns to the house of his father. People don't sing in the far country, and that's exactly what the text calls it in both stories. Luke 15 tells us the boy went to a distant country.

Verse 5 tells us what the far country can do to you. Many Jews, including the prophets, owned property in captivity and even became wealthy. They didn't want to leave Babylon. What a

terrible and disrespectful attitude towards God. What a great mistake they made.

The righteous Jews said they would never forget Jerusalem. They still believed in the promises of God and would not forsake the Holy Land. Many fall into the habit of loving the world and don't just endure Babylon, they learn to love it. Lot is a great example of this. Abraham had to go get him from the Sodomites. The NT tells us his soul was tormented, but he still stayed there.

2 Peter 2:6-9

6 if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; 7 and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men 8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—

NIV

This righteous remnant would rather lose their skills to play, sing and even work than to forget the home land. Verse 6 tells us that they would actually rather die than forget God and Zion.

Jerusalem is their highest joy. Can I ask you a question? What is your highest joy? Is this sanctuary your highest praise and joy? Do you love the things of God and the privileges you have in Christ over the things of the world?

Passionate (Imprecatory) Prayers: 7-9

I love what CHS says about these Jews and their passionate prayers. If you have never been in this situation you might not have ever prayed like this. You may not understand the passion and the pain of these prayers. You may actually think these Jews are ungodly for the way they prayed, but we have never experienced slavery and captivity the way they had. They saw

their children abused and they lost everything when they left their homes. David actually speaks of a cruel and righteous hatred for his enemies.

The Edomites had been a cruel and pesky enemy for many years. They rejoiced over the destruction of Jerusalem in 722 B. C. They would likewise do the same at the fall of Judah. The people were just asking God to remember what they did and how they hated Zion.

In verse 8 there is a joy in knowing that someone else would repay them for these deeds of hatred. Paul tells us in the NT to leave room for God's wrath. Vengeance is mine says the Lord. It is not our job as NT Christians to repay. When we retaliate, we are getting revenge. The Lord will repay, and it will be done according to His righteous anger, not ours. That's vengeance, not revenge. If that seems unacceptable to you, just remember that God can do a better job in judgment than you ever could. We must also remember that we are as guilty as the rest.

Verse 8 tells us the Babylonians were doomed to destruction. Just be glad your name is written in the book of life. I have always said that Christian's have a right to defend themselves if they can, but retaliation, once we get the upper hand, is not God's way. Oh how the flesh wants to get even.

Verse 9 is quite difficult to accept. The biblical mandate at times was for the armies of Israel to go in and destroy every living thing in the idolater's country. The reason for this is that even the children would grow up and be idolaters. The return to warfare would never stop unless a people group was destroyed. I am not condoning the killing of anyone, but this is in scripture and I don't have to defend the decisions of God. We are actually seeing the destruction of America right now because of the wicked. God will judge in His time and His way. This is the teachings of Habakkuk.

Our job at this point is to pray and trust God's plan and will. You may pray for God's judgment upon the wicked but please pray for their salvation first.

The Prodigal Sons **Luke 15:11-31**

Introduction: R. G. Lee has said that God is the hound of heaven. The Psalmist has said the exact words (Psalm 139:7) many years ago. We see the picture of the compassion of God in the story of Gomer and Hosea as Hosea is told to go after an unfaithful wife. Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost. The story that unfolds in this passage is one of interest and hope to us all.

The context of this passage should not go unnoticed. Jesus is speaking to the tax collectors and sinners. Jesus was always around sinners. There were also others there who looked down on the sinners. He seeks the lost and the lonely. Many try to decide if this parable is about the backslider or the lost man. The context will tell us how to proceed. Look at the scripture.

Luke 15:7

"I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

The context tells me that Jesus is speaking to sinners. If you fall into that category, then this is for you... whether you are saved or lost.

Outline:

A Prodigal is Made: Verses 11-13

1. Selfishness: He asked for his portion of the estate.
2. Loss of Contentment: The son had all and wanted more.

Proverbs 12:9

"Better to be a nobody and yet have a servant than pretend to be somebody and have no food."

3. Tunnel Vision: He looked only at his circumstances and not at reality. He had a distorted worldview (Jeremiah 17:9).
4. Impatience: Notice the phrase "not long" in verse 13
5. Removal of Accountability: He wanted to go to the "broad country" or "far country" to act out all his sin. The broad country in Matthew 7:13-14 speaks of a place without fences. He removes authority and accountability in his life.
6. Irresponsibility: Notice that he took all he had. He was not planning on coming back. He trusted flesh rather than God.

Jeremiah 17:5-6

*“This is what the LORD says:
Cursed is the one who trusts in man,
who depends on flesh for his strength
and whose heart turns away from the LORD.
He will be like a bush in the wastelands;
he will not see prosperity when it comes.
He will dwell in the parched places of the desert,
in a salt land where no one lives.”*

Word studies: The word for **“wasted or squandered”** is used mostly of scattering something. This prodigal spread around his wealth. The picture is clear; it is like a farmer throwing seeds around with abandon. The picture can also be seen in a drunk in a bar that buys everybody in the bar a drink and he does not know who they are. I have seen men take their grocery money and buy liquor with it and deny their own children.

The word for **“wild or riotous”** means to live unsparingly. There is no thought for tomorrow. It is used in Ephesians 5:18 as the word **“in excess.”** The LXX (Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT) uses the word lasciviousness as a synonym for wantonness and indecency. We call it debauchery.

A Prodigal is Broken: Verses 14-16

1. God Changes the Circumstances: Just like the Jewish family (The book of Ruth) who went from Bethlehem (The House of Bread) to Moab (God’s Wash Pot), the prodigal went to the far country and the circumstances changed. It is better to stay with God in the famine than to leave for better real estate and die. There will always be a famine in the far country.
2. God Causes Need to Arise: Sin is full of unexpected circumstances.

Proverbs 29:3

*A man who loves wisdom brings joy to his father,
but a companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth.*

Psalms 37:16-25

*“Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked; for the power of the wicked will be broken, but the LORD upholds the righteous.
The days of the blameless are known to the LORD, and their inheritance will endure forever. In times of disaster they will not wither; in days of famine they will enjoy plenty.
But the wicked will perish: The LORD’s enemies will be like the beauty of the fields, they will vanish--vanish like smoke.
The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously; those the LORD blesses will inherit the land, but those he curses will be cut off.
If the LORD delights in a man’s way, he makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand.”*

I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.”

3. Dignity is Lost: The lowest a man can go is when he participates in that which he himself hates and detests. The Jewish boy is feeding pigs. (1 Corinthians 6:15)
4. Loneliness Sets in: Notice that “no man gave him anything.” The man who owned the pigs cared more for the pigs than the boy. When the money is gone the bar tender and prostitutes don’t find the wayward boy so much fun anymore. ***There was once a boy who could have had anything that his father had and he wanted more; now he has nothing and will settle for anything.*** He will even eat carob pods to fill his stomach. When the soul is empty the body will fill itself with anything.

Proverbs 14:20

*“The poor are shunned even by their neighbors,
but the rich have many friends.”*

Proverbs 19:4,7

*“Wealth brings many friends,
but a poor man's friend deserts him...
A poor man is shunned by all his relatives--
how much more do his friends avoid him!
Though he pursues them with pleading,
they are nowhere to be found.”*

A Prodigal is Repenting: Verses 17-19

1. Truth is Revealed to Him: Verse 17 shows how his conscience starts to work. He gets custody of himself. The Holy Spirit wakes him up. He comes to his senses. The servants have more than he does and he is a son.
2. He Takes Responsibility for His Sins: He knew that he had sinned against heaven and earth.
3. He Realizes that He is not Worthy of Forgiveness: Grace never saved a good man. He must know that he is coming back home on God’s terms not his. When you see humility, genuine brokenness, and sorrow displayed you can know your prodigal is coming home. If you come back a servant, He will make you a king.
4. He Changes Direction: He got up. He repents and turns towards home.

A Prodigal is Accepted: Verses 20-24

1. The Father is Always Watching: The compassion of God teaches that His arms are always open.
2. Compassion: God’s compassion is there because of the blood of Christ. He can cleanse all of the vilest sin.
3. The Father Gives Life: “He was dead and now is ALIVE. You can come back as a son.

The Resident Prodigal: Verses 25-32

1. Always at home but far from the Father's heart.
2. Bitter and cold.
3. Angry at the repentance of the lost.
4. Feels like a slave instead of a son (v. 29).
5. Thinks too highly of himself, never disobeyed (v. 29).
6. Ignorant of all he has, "all is yours" (v. 31).