**Remorse, Remembrance, & Recompense**

***Psalm 137:1-9***

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*April 6, 2022 p.m.*

Introduction: Ryrie calls this a “Song of the Exiles.” It was either written while the Jews were still in captivity in Babylon or perhaps shortly after their return from exile. That return took place around 536 B.C. The word *“there”* in verses 1 & 3 seems to suggest that the writer is no longer in Babylon, but pointing it out as distant from the Holy Land. This psalm is one of the imprecatory psalms, from the word “to invoke evil upon, to curse; to invoke judgment, calamity or curses upon one’s enemies or those perceived as the enemies of God.” Ryrie identifies 11 such psalms: 7, 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 109, 137, 139, & 140. Last week we considered Psalm 58, which I entitled “Justice for Unjust Judges.” I see three parts of three verses each in Psalm 137: remorse in exile (:1-3); remembrance of Jerusalem (:4-6); & recompense upon enemies (:7-9).

I. Remorse in (or after) exile (:1-3)

A. The mourning of the exiles (:1-2) >

1. *“We wept”* – mourned, bewailed, made lamentation. “There is no Hebrew word

more expressive of deep grief” (Plumer).

2. *“We hanged our harps”* – though music could soothe their sorrow, yet the demands

of their captors caused them to refuse to do so.

B. The mocking of the enemies (:3) >

1. Who? Their captors; *“that wasted us”* – devastators, spoilers, plunderers.

Note: “Of course the Jews should not have been there, & would not have been, had

they not grievously sinned against their God, their vocation, & their best traditions.

What they had suffered they had brought upon themselves” (Scroggie).

2. What? Their captors taunted: *“Sing us one of the songs of Zion”* in order to mock

them: “Where is your God now? Why did He not deliver you?”

Application: “Backsliding is a sad thing, & it exposes the Christian to the ridicule of

the world. Sighs, not songs, befit them who are away from God” (Scroggie).

3. Why? The captives refuse to sing the sacred (*“LORD’s songs”*) songs of the Temple:

Note: “To sing these for the amusement of their conquerors would have been the

grossest profanation of all that they held most dear; an act comparable to

Belshazzar’s use of the consecrated vessels at his feast (Daniel 5:2)” (Kirkpatrick).

Compare Matthew 7:6.

II. Remembrance of Jerusalem (:4-6)

A. The danger of forgetting (:4-5) >

1. They were dwelling in a strange land; captives in exile. They refused to “entertain”

these pagans with sacred songs.

Application: “How tragic it is today when music stars use ‘Amazing Grace’ or ‘The

Lord’s Prayer’ to entertain pagan crowds that know neither the Lord nor His grace”

(Wiersbe).

2. They would rather lose the skill of playing their harps than to forget Jerusalem. Their

captivity reminded them of what they had lost.

Application: “Sometimes we have to lose things to really appreciate them” (Wiersbe).

Our health? Opportunity to go to church? A loved one? A pastor?

B. The duty of remembering (:6) >

1. Jerusalem here represents the Lord, the Temple, the people, and even Israel’s ministry to

the world, as well as the city itself.

2. Psalm 90:12, *“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto*

*wisdom”* & cf. Psalm 66:13-14.

III. Recompense upon enemies (:7-9)

A. Edom’s crimes (:7) >

1. The Edomites descended from Esau, Jacob’s brother (see Obadiah & Amos 1:11-12).

2. “Occasions are revealing. How we act in a crisis may well disclose what we really are.

There are no feuds so bitter as family feuds” (Scroggie).

B. Babylon’s cruelties (:8-9) >

1. *“Daughter of Babylon*” is a personification of the city & nation of Babylon.

2. *“That rewarded thee as thou hast served us”* – the cruelty of the Babylonians against

Israel will be returned on them. This was prophesied in Isaiah 13:16 (see Jer. 51:56).

Illustration: “When in the reign of Darius the Babylonians had to endure a siege, to

make provisions last they agreed to cut off all unnecessary mouths among them, & so

they strangled all the women & children, wives, sisters, daughters, babes” (Scroggie).

3. *“Happy”* (:8 & :9) – sometimes translated “blessed” – but not in our sense of happi-

ness or as “favored by God” – rather, “morally justified” (as in Psalm 106:3, *“Blessed*

*are they that keep judgment, & he that doeth righteousness at all times”*).

Summary: “The law God gave to Israel is based on the *lex talionis* – the law of retaliation -

& retaliation is not revenge. It simply means ‘to pay back in kind’.” (Wiersbe). Compare

Deuteronomy 19:16-21, *“…eye for eye, tooth for tooth…”*

Application: “Let us be honest & admit that when nations today have done atrocious things -

the holocaust, for example – other nations have risen up in horror & demanded justice” (Wiersbe).

Russia today?

Conclusion: What lessons can we learn from this Psalm? Israel’s remorse in exile was the consequence of their disobedience. The disobedient (backslidden) Christian brings reproach upon the name of Christ. We also learn that we do not appreciate what we have until we lose it. Then, though we wrestle with the sentiments in these imprecatory psalms, we rest in the truth that the Judge of all the earth will do right (Gen. 18:25). We must remember that it was not the Jewish people individually who punished the Babylonians, but it was God who answered their prayers & vindicated His people. “One day, He will vindicate His church & punish those who have persecuted & slain His servants (Rev. 6:9-17)” (Wiersbe). Scroggie concludes, “So far from the Psalmist’s imprecation being vindictive & revengeful, it is the expression of a declared divine purpose. Even at this late date (writing in the 1940’s) we often hear expressions of sympathy with criminals rather than with their victims, but mealy-mouthed sentimentalists should face up to the principles of justice.”

But as we saw last week, we must keep in mind Matthew 5:43-48 where we are told to love, bless, do good to, & pray for our enemies (as well as 5:39, to turn the other cheek). Then consider the plight of Christians in Ukraine. How do you suppose they are praying today?