

DISPLACED

Psalms 137 ¹ By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. ² There on the poplars we hung our harps, ³ for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" ⁴ How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land? ⁵ If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. ⁶ May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy. ⁷ Remember, O Lord, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. "Tear it down," they cried, "tear it down to its foundations!" ⁸ O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us— ⁹ he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks

This is the psalm of the backslider. It paints one of the saddest pictures in the Old Testament. The children of Judah were taken captive by the Babylonians around 587 BC. The prophets had warned them continually that God would judge their sins in this way. Now it had happened.

They find themselves displaced in a foreign country. They were not there in the will of God but because of sin. God would use the "strange land" to bring them back to their senses.

Matthew Henry said, "What we love, we love to think of." When the Judeans were safely in their homelands, they did not consider God and His principles very important. Now, captive in Babylon, they weep with homesickness for their land and their old lives. When the heart song is required from their captives, they find that they cannot "sing the Lord's song in a strange land." Let us examine this psalm in an expository study, and see the parallels with the Christian life today.

I. The oppression that comes from displacement. v1

- A. We sat
- B. We wept
- C. We remembered Zion

They remembered the temple worship, the peace of God, the joy of being in their homeland.

II. The oppressor's demand of those displaced

³ for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

- A. The Jews were known as a joyous and happy people.
- B. Their singing and worship style was unparalleled in the

ancient world. Their worship was real because their God was real.

C. The harps were instruments of worship in the temple services.

The intent was to worship God. Their tears had revitalized their patriotism. Someone began to play. But there was no use.

⁴ How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?

D. It is impossible to worship God when you are out of His will. God desired repentance, not worship. Like the New Testament's prodigal son, the Jewish captives have come to emptiness and poverty of spirit.

III. The **determination** of those that are displaced.

In verses 5-6, the Jews are back home in their land. This psalm is designed to remind them of the senselessness of their past captivity and the importance of true worship. There are three great "ifs" in these verses that reveal the depth of feeling that these Jews shared.

A. A Promise "If I forget thee..."

"If I forget..." means to cease to care, or to ignore. That is exactly the condition of heart that caused God to judge them. They ignored and ceased to care about the things of God. The temple worship was not important. The idolaters, who had their places of sacrifices in the "high places," were of no concern to them before the captivity. But now, the psalmist promises not to forget. "Let my right hand forget her cunning." He means that he will lose the steadiness of his hand before he forgets Jerusalem again. Steadiness of hand was imperative in a man's warring and working. He would be useless without a steady hand.

B. A Preference "If I do not remember..."

"If I do not remember thee..." means to consciously bring to remembrance. It means to keep in remembrance as keeping a memorial. This is a deeper promise than the first. Not only does the psalmist promise not to forget, but now he promises to consciously remember the things of God.

C. A Pre-eminence "... if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy."

is a promise to keep God preeminent in his life. Here we have the secret to a holy and spiritual life. "consider" here means to ascend, to go up, to excel, to follow after. The word "highest" means the choicest or the best. Do you see what he is saying? The service of God will not be a drudgery or a boring exercise. It will have his full attention in both mind and heart.

Dear Christian, what is your "chief joy?" Is it a job, a hobby, a wife or child? Is it even a ministry of some kind? Our chief joy should be Christ Himself.

IV. The judgment of God upon those who afflict the displaced.

⁷ Remember, O Lord , what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. "Tear it down," they cried, "tear it down to its foundations!" ⁸ O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us— ⁹ he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks

A. The Edomites rejoiced at the fall of Jerusalem

The children of Edom were the descendants of Esau. They had a common heritage, but the Edomites had denied both God and God's people. These Edomites correspond with the liberal and modernist today. We have common ancestors, but the religious liberal refuses the God of the Bible. They attempt to destroy the truths and principles that historic Christianity was built upon.

B. Babylon will reap what they have sown.

Isaiah 13:16 says about Babylon, "Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished." The Babylonians had done this to the little Jewish children and the sight of it had naturally horrified the Jews. The Medes fulfilled this prophecy and did exactly what this verse says to the Babylonians.

The safest place in the world is to be in the will of God. Never take for granted the favor of God, the worship of God, the presence of God. Repent and return to his will today. Learn from the error of your ways.