

# Study and Discussion Guide for *Psalm 137*

*A Plaintive Song of the Exiles in Babylon longing for Jerusalem*

## The Structure of *Psalm 137*

- 1-3 The Sorrow and Torment in Babylon
- 4-6 An Oath of Total Commitment to Jerusalem
- 7-9 A Call for Vengeance on Edom and Babylon

## Some Questions for Listening, Meditating, and Discussing

1. All great cities in that day were located on rivers. The greatest of these was the great city of Babylon built on the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. One city with **no** river flowing through it was Jerusalem. So why does Psalm 137 begin with weeping for Jerusalem **at the river**? You'd think that the great rivers of Babylon would be some consolation. Reflect on Psalm 46:4-5 here and on the other Songs of Zion: Psalms 42-43, 48, 84, 122.
2. How do you picture the phrase, "we sat and wept" in verse 1? Read the following passages and notice if your picture changes any. What other verbs or adverbs would you use to liven up your picture? What do we ask people to do before we tell them bad news?
3. Can you imagine why the people of Babylon would ask the Israelite exiles to sing? The exiles experienced the request as intensifying their pain (like in Proverbs 25:20), but can you think of any other reasons to ask the exiles for a song?
4. How would you paraphrase "may my right hand lose its skill; may my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth" in current English?
5. How do you understand such intensity of feeling for Jerusalem: "consider Jerusalem my highest joy"? Intense homesickness is understandable. But what is this "highest joy" stuff? Why is Jerusalem so important to the Israelites?
6. What did the Edomites do to Jerusalem? See Jeremiah 49:7-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14; Ezekiel 35. What did the Babylonians do to Jerusalem? See 2 Kings 25:1-10; Ps 74:4-9.
7. The desire for vengeance expressed in verses 8-9 is only **asking** for someone else (presumably God) to "**repay**" (verse 8) evil for evil. See Jeremiah 50:15 and Ezekiel 16:43. Do you find those distinctions helpful? Can we say that our **getting revenge is sinful** because it is not trusting God to set things right, to do righteousness and justice, but that feeling **a desire for revenge is not sinful**—although very dangerous because we are strongly tempted to act on that desire and actually get revenge?
8. Isaiah depicts God as taunting the King of Babylon after his predicted fall from power in Isaiah 14:3-23. These taunts are echoed in Revelation 18—19:3. This *taunting* sounds like God is enjoying getting revenge. May we enjoy it too?
9. How do **you** reconcile these verses 7-9 with Jesus' instructions to turn the other cheek and pray for one's enemies? Do you ask God to **pay back** those who mistreat you?
10. War was cruel for women and children then as well as now. See 2 Kings 8:12; 15:16, 18; Isaiah 13:16; Hosea 10:14; 13:16; Amos 1:13; Nahum 3:10. (Don't read just before bed.)