

GOD'S HOUSE LEFT DESOLATE

*“Does God’s House of abode grip our heart with the conviction that nothing else will do?
Do we cry for the Lord’s House or are we more than glad to accommodate our worship?
Do we bow at the feet of God’s Son, the Lord Jesus Christ?”*

Psalm 137

- 1 By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.
- 2 We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.
- 3 For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.
- 4 How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?
- 5 If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.
- 6 If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.
- 7 Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Raze it, raze it, even to the foundation thereof.
- 8 O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.
- 9 Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

I want us to take a look at one of the saddest, but very profound, of the Psalms. It is one of the imprecatory Psalms. That is, a Psalm asking God to bring suffering on someone. In our New Testament churches, we are generally taught this is a Psalm of the past. One from an age of ignorance on the character of God. We are told God is loving, so these were early, barbaric tolerations God allowed among His people. The study of why the Psalm-styled imprecatory prayers are actually part of a truly godly walk, is rarely taught. It is a study that goes beyond the limits of this message, and must be saved for another day. For today, I want to consider the great weight that is seen in Psalm 137. The foundation of grief it covers, is one that should be rending our hearts today. It mourns the desolation of God's House.

1 By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

This first verse takes us to the time of Judah's being carried into Babylonian captivity. The captives were marched into the Babylonian region. The Psalmist recalls having entered this area.

For a moment, imagine being one of these captives. Your homes destroyed. Your children slaughtered by the soldiers around you. You are being carried to serve as slaves of these people. That is what we would tend to be meditating in our grief. This Psalmist does recall that, but his heart is ultimately somewhere else. He is recalling Zion. Not just Jerusalem. Zion particularly has God's dwelling place in view.

2 We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.

To me, this is such a compelling image. That is why I created the picture on the front of this article. Just imagine coming along the shore of this river of Babylon and hearing the random plucking of strings somewhere. You follow the twang, tong, twong and come upon this scene. You scratch your head and wonder, "What on earth! Why would anyone hang these out like this?" Those instruments would symbolize the abandonment of joy, and sorrow over the destruction of God's House.

These "harps" were actually lyres. Consider that you were being forced on this long march. You would only take the most valued and necessary treasures. You've got to carry it, remember. These musicians obviously treasured them greatly, so wouldn't flippanantly abandon them. This abandonment is revealing of how important the worship of God was to them. Suddenly, something dawned upon them as they began to enter the environs of Babylon.

3 For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.

The worship of God alone is not complete in it-

self. Where we worship Him is also important.

The sight of these abandoned harps is where these captives were aroused to the impact of just how far-reaching this destruction was. It was the "vulgarity", of the enemy's request, that opened their eyes to the impossibility of playing for God outside of His holy city.

The "*required of us mirth*" is an old way of translating the call to perform some joyful songs. You can hardly blame the captors. They too would be tired of the long military campaign. They were almost home and thought they would enjoy some intriguing music of foreign charm. After all, hadn't these prisoners brought along their musical instruments? They must intend on playing them, *so play!* It was that simple request that hit the grieving hearts. They saw the complete inappropriateness of singing God's songs of worship outside of God's dwelling. They saw that as long as they were in the devil's territory, they could not carry on as if the place didn't matter.

4 How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

5 If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.

6 If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.

Their dawning shock verbalized itself in these lines. Verse 4 answered back to the soldiers. The next two verses turned the sight, and heart, to Jerusalem. These verses called for a curse upon their playing and their singing skills. It bound them under a curse, if they forgot the whole reason they performed their songs.

Here, we need to consider why any particular city should be so important. After all, most of the world has never even been to Jerusalem. We live our lives content in our cities. What is so special about Jerusalem that no substitute could do? What could possibly be so important the compromise of some new center couldn't be established?

For most readers, we just can't relate, so we loose the whole gravity bound up in this Psalm. Until we understand the "WHY?", we will not be able to grasp the horror of the substitute ourselves. In fact, that very substitution is practiced weekly across this nation by Christians today. They don't see the horror and are quite pleased with their substitute centers. In fact, they are sure these substitute centers are God's new work.

Look at a couple verses that shine here:

LORD, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.

Psalm 26:8

and

One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple. Psalm 27:4

The irreplaceable importance of Zion was the fact that God's temple was there, and there only. God's temple is God's house. The place where God's honor dwells, is where God has said He will abide. David, in Psalm 27, expressed the "*one thing desired*". The request from one king presented before THE KING.

If you were to go before God to be granted just one request, what would that be? After contemplation upon what you would request, what do you think should be your request? David shows us in 27:4. Such a request could not really be appreciated by us today, because our hearts are content in this world. David was a man who crossed over this line. His heart transcended and entered into the presence of God. He beheld His glory in His habitation. This is the crux of the matter.

Where do we fail in this sight today? Consider that God's temple is in us individually as Christians in one sense (*16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? 1 Corinthians 3:16*), but it is also in us corporately as members of the body of Christ (*19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22; also see Ephesians 4:4,15,16*)

God's temple, in the corporate body of the Church, is substituted today in denomination after denomination. Christ will dwell in our midst when we gather in His name. If we gather under the denomination's name, we fail to do that. In Psalm 137, the temple of God, that the Psalmist's heart ached for as his chief joy, is missing from our midst. He refused to sing the praises of joy in the substitute place. We, on the other hand, are quite happy to accommodate the demands of the enemy and sing anywhere. Who cares whether it is God's promised habitation? God has said He will dwell in the midst of the assemblage of His body. We see this isn't a popular ground to assemble upon so settle for gathering on some sectarian ground. We don't care if it is God's promised temple dwelling site. We don't care if it is founded in the only place and way He said it could be founded. We do not echo the grieving cry of the writer of Psalm 137. His words are alien to our ears.

To some, the words I have said seem agreeable. If you have the eyes to see, you must make a choice. What good does hearing and perceiving the truth of a matter do if you do not obey! You may have to abandon your close "church" fellowship to stand alone, but if you don't, how can you live with your conscience before God? Compromise is the name of the game folks! The Chris-

tians in America are more than willing to play to make the soldiers of the enemy glad. The soldiers say, "Pull out the harp!", and we say, "Which number of the hymnal would you like to hear?". We say, "It doesn't matter upon what ground we stand, Jerusalem or Babylon, its the fact we can sing that matters." The Psalmist put it quite differently. He called for a curse upon himself if he should compromise for that position! When will we do the same?

7 Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Raze it, raze it, even to the foundation thereof.

8 O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.

9 Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

If we could sing the first part of this Psalm, we would most certainly abandon these last three verses. Oh, to our greatest folly. When will we learn?

The Edomites were the brethren of Israel. They were the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother. They are recalled first. This brethren neighbor of Israel was eager to see God's habitation destroyed. The relatives of our flesh. The brethren of our own country, who delight to see God's church torn to the ground, are not to be looked upon as, "Come here, let me give you a hug." Whatever ties we may have with anyone who desires to see God's House destroyed, should be rightfully counted as vile. The affections that would seem natural, through the fleshly connections, will be forgotten when we see that one hates the House of God. If we love God, we will be jealous for His Church, His promised habitation! We will be enraged at anyone, group or organization, that endeavors to set up its own collective temple in substitute of God's ordained House of Worship.

The final two verses take us to the enemy who is not our close kin. This enemy is Satan's very stronghold. The place where the enemy wanted the same old songs of worship to continue. This Babylon is the place where mankind originally sought to unify, in abhorrence of the true God. In this unity, that the world lusts for, they will be quite glad to accommodate the worshippers of Yahweh. All they require is that they sing their songs by the waters suppling the life force of Babylon. SUCH A COMPROMISE SHOULD TERRIFY A TRUE BELIEVER! NEVER, NEVER WILL WE SING IN SUCH A PLACE!

These last verses are so heart-rending! Now why do you think God would want such a passage to be included in the inspired collection of scripture? Do you think it was negligence that left it there? Think again folks. This is an incredible lesson we need to pay attention to.

There are two sides that need to be considered

in verses 8 and 9. The first will take us back to Israel in Egypt. They had suffered great oppression and cried to God. God raised up a deliverer in Moses. Any enraged leader in Israel might have attempted to take it upon himself to lead Israel from under Egyptian oppression. Such would not have been God's deliverance. The salvation had to wait for God's "anointed" man of the hour. It had to be accomplished by the man called of God, such as was Moses. In these verses, we can see a looking toward that same deliverance that God would have to provide. In point of fact, it was not the Jews who actually rendered such brutality, it was the Media Persians who were called of God for this purpose. We find this in Isaiah's prophecy of Cyrus (See Isaiah 45:1-8 - Read and tremble!).

The second point of consideration, is a looking back at the brutality these Jews suffered at the hands of Babylonian soldiers. The focus of destruction here is on the children. Babylon, spiritually the stronghold of Satan, had apparently committed this horrendous slaughter. When Satan gets into our midst, the result will be his destruction of the newborn Christians, just as Babylon perpetrated against the Jews. Through Satan's success in this, the church is doomed. There won't be a next generation to replace the servants of Yahweh. Satan's destruction is merciless and brutal. We simply cannot afford to forget his brutality. We must remember, so we will take the necessary precautions in faithfully following God now, to save the future children of God.

This Psalm holds such a powerful, soul-wrenching message. We are intended to look upon it and remember. It doesn't have to be our destiny. Their whole problem started earlier, when they did not see with the clarity they saw at the river. Before Jerusalem was overthrown, they could have changed its ultimate course if they had valued the abiding presence of God in their midst. Being a holy people, consecrated to His service. We must start with that corrected desire of heart. We must treasure God's presence in His corporate temple of believers now. If we don't deal with our apathy in this now, we will be singing our own version of Psalm 137 from personal experience.

The answer: Pray for God to grant you the right heart in this matter. Pray for Him to give you the vision of:

33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Matthew 6:33

(The *things added* referred to the basic needs of life, not the sufferings covered in Psalm 137.)

Now look at the picture on this article and ponder, "Does God's house of abode grip my heart with the conviction that nothing else will do? Do I cry for the Lord's house, or am I more than glad to accommodate my worship? Do I bow at the feet of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ?"