

Grief that Goes Somewhere

The Psalms of Lament

Week 5: Psalm 137

- I. “Trigger Warning” and Lament
 - A. Trigger warnings in our culture
 - B. Trigger warnings and worship
- II. Introduction to Imprecatory Psalms
 - A. Review from last week
 - Imprecatory Psalms include: 35, 38, 83, 109, 137; in addition many of the lament psalms include an imprecatory prayer (such as Psalm 79 from last week).
 - B. How do we try to “whitewash” this material?
 - 1. Skip it
 - 2. Spiritualize it
 - 3. Sinful Psalmists
 - 4. Predictions but not prayers
 - 5. OT Obsolescence
 - C. Why do we try to “whitewash” this material?
- III. Psalm 137 for Israel
 - A. Walking through the Psalm
 - The Lament: vv. 1-4 (“we remembered Zion”)**
 - 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?

Notes:

The Pledge: vv.5-6 (“I will remember”)

- ⁵ If I forget you, 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.

Notes:

The Cry for Judgment: vv.7-9 (“Remember, O Lord”)

- ⁷ Remember, Lord, what the Edomites did
 on the day Jerusalem fell.
 “Tear it down,” they cried,
 “tear it down to its foundations!”
- ⁸ Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction,
 happy is the one who repays you
 according to what you have done to us.
- ⁹ Happy is the one who seizes your infants
 and dashes them against the rocks.

Notes:

B. Wrestling with the Psalm**1. The Covenant Context**

- a) Deut 27-28: Blessings and curses on Israel
- b) Deut 30: Curses on those who destroy Israel
- c) Jeremiah 51:56: “A destroyer will come against Babylon; her warriors will be captured, and their bows will be broken. For the Lord is a God of retribution; he will repay in full.”
- d) Praying for God to be faithful to his promises

2. The reality and hate-worthy-ness of evil
 - a) "God's kingdom cannot come without Satan's kingdom being destroyed" (Vos 138)
 - b) C.S. Lewis: "[These Psalms] serve as a reminder that there is in the world such a thing as wickedness, and that it ... is hateful to God." (Quoted in Vangemeren 954)
 - c) Hyperbole and proportionality

IV. Psalm 137 for Us

A. Interpretive Considerations

1. We know there is a final judgment by God.
2. Jesus reaffirmed and brought out what was already present in the Scriptures: the tension between "the requirement of love and the hatred of evil" (Vangemeren 954)
3. We are not Jews (different relationship to land and temple)
4. The centrality of the cross, where Jesus took the "curse" of sin upon himself (Galatians 3)

B. "Remember"

1. Remember our identity in this world
2. We pray for God to "remember" injustice
3. We stand in solidarity with those who are experiencing or have experienced real injustice and atrocities
4. Take sin and evil seriously

C. "Receive the impact" (Kidner 496)

1. Feel it
2. Brueggemann: "Could it be that genuine forgiveness is possible only when there has been a genuine articulation of hatred?" (63)

D. Give God even our anger and our hatred

1. Vengeance belongs to God
2. "It is an act of profound faith to entrust one's most precious hatreds to God, knowing they will be taken seriously." (Brueggemann, 64)
3. We surrender the last word to God

Sources:

- Brueggemann, Walter. *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984
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- Vangemeren, Willem A. *Psalms*. The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008
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