

150 Days in the Psalms

*“O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed,
blessed shall he be who repays you
with what you have done to us!
Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones
and dashes them against the rock!” Psalm 137:8-9*

At first glance Psalm 137 looks extremely problematic. The very notion of enacting revenge on little ones seems egregious and counterintuitive to the message of the Gospel. Oftentimes this verse is used by non-believers to show in their minds that scripture is inconsistent in its portrayal of who God is. How can He be a loving and merciful God yet desire that these infants be dashed upon the rocks? It can be understandable why they got to this conclusion by looking at verse 9 alone, but they fail to see this verse in light of the rest of the psalm. This verse must be placed in its proper context in order for us to understand it.

The psalmist who penned these words appears to be in intense pain. He cries by the river banks in the city of Babylon remembering what once was that now is gone. The psalmist was ripped away from his home and brought against his will to the city of his enemy where he and his people are being mocked and treated cruelly. No doubt he had witnessed the atrocities that the Babylonian committed against his people during the siege of Jerusalem. He would have witnessed his friends and family starving to death as the three year siege went on. He would have witnessed his people being slaughtered by the thousands, their bodies stacking up in the streets. He would have witnessed exactly what he describes in the psalm; babies being dashed against the rocks. While he is in captivity he and the other Jews are being forced to sing their songs of praise to Yahweh for the amusement of the Babylonians. They mock and torture the Jews by forcing them to sing songs that remind them of Jerusalem and the temple which have both been destroyed.

We need to remember that the psalms are written by real human beings who are expressing real human emotions. He experienced heinous atrocities and the pain he feels easily comes across in this poem/song. We cannot take away the human element to Psalms otherwise we will never fully understand the range of emotions that they convey to the listeners. When he cries out *“Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock”*, he is not calling his fellow country men to arms in order to slaughter all the Babylonian children they can find. This is not a commandment that advocates Christians to slaughter children. He is praying to God that He would enact vengeance on those who have hurt His people. Out of the pain and trauma that the psalmist faced he uses the most extreme language he can think of.

For the psalmist, the Babylonians deserve to face the same fate as those they slaughtered mercilessly. They killed the children of Judah so therefore they deserve that same fate. The important part of this psalm is that he leaves this vengeance to God. While the psalmist wishes that vengeance would come and that they should suffer just as those who suffered at their wicked hands, he does not advocate that the people should

enact this revenge, he leaves it to God. The psalmist would easily have known what God says about vengeance in Deuteronomy 32,

*“Vengeance is mine, and recompense,
for the time when their foot shall slip;
for the day of their calamity is at hand,
and their doom comes swiftly.”*

The psalmist lays his concerns before God and he leaves it to Him. He knows that God hates evil and that He will eventually destroy it for evil cannot stand before God. The acts of the wicked will indeed be punished. The Lord will enact vengeance as He sees fit according to His divine will.

This Psalm also serves as a prophecy of Babylons future. The Babylonians would eventually face retribution for their wicked deeds when Cyrus the Great and the Persian army wiped the Babylonian empire off the face of the earth. Their mighty empire would come crashing down and their lineage would be cut off. It is possible that verse 9 might just be a harsh way to pray that their empire would be totally destroyed and that their empire would never rise again. The graphic image of babies being dashed might serve as a crude symbolic representation of an empire that will be wiped out of existence. If there are no babies left then there can be no new generations to keep the empire alive. The psalmist could have been using this symbolic phrase to both pray for and prophecy the total destruction of the Babylonian empire and that it would never rise again.

When we look at verse 9 through the lens of the rest of Psalm 137 everything becomes more clear. There is no advocating of the killing of children as some presume. These are the cries and prayers of a man who has gone through much pain and trauma who fully understands and confesses that God will destroy evil and enact vengeance for His people (and we confess the same). He uses words and phrases that are quite intense because he knows that the Babylonians deserve the same punishment that Judah faced, but he also understands that vengeance is the Lord's only and he places his trust in Him.

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Luther's commentaries on the Psalms were translated by Bruce Cameron in his 1991 STM thesis "Luther's Summaries of the Psalms (1531)--A Model for Contemporary Psalm Interpretation". The thesis is, in part, a translation of *Summarien fiber die Psalmen*, is published under a Creative Commons 4.0 license.

Psalm 134

Monday



The 134th Psalm is a psalm of instruction. It teaches and admonishes the priests and spiritual ones of their office. They should indeed worship God faithfully and diligently, day and night praising God, preaching, and occupying themselves with His word. As St. Paul also says to Timothy they should continue faithful in their office. They should not concern themselves that men despise the word and turn themselves from it to fables, etc.

For where one discards God's word, there both spiritual and worldly will fall as well--at the least, fall into error, and abandoned by God, fall into the devil's power.

However, where one continues with preaching, there He who made heaven and earth is always present to bless. For the sake of the word, He helps and gives all blessings even to the unworthy and the unthankful. Let this psalm be sung by you pastors, preachers, bishops, and whoever sits in a spiritual office.

Psalm 134

Come, Bless the Lord

¹Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord,

who stand by night in the house of the Lord!

²Lift up your hands to the holy place

and bless the Lord!

³May the Lord bless you from Zion,

he who made heaven and earth!

Prayer

Lord God, heavenly Father, Your Son gathered the little children to Himself that He might bless them. Strengthen the parents of our congregation that they may faithfully bring up their children in the nurture and instruction of the Lord by a life of prayer and devotion to You and Your Word; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Psalm 135

Tuesday



The 135th Psalm is a psalm of thanks. It calls the priests to give thanks, preach and praise God for His wonders, shown to the people in Egypt and Canaan, so that they may never forget God and seek idols or other gods. This happens, and must happen, when one does not occupy oneself with--and diligently hold to--preaching and the praise of God, as it says in the next psalm. But when He judges His people, that is, preaches, and teaches, and disciplines them, there He is certainly gracious to His servants. But where His word is silenced and He does not judge or teach, there must truly be great anger and no grace. Therefore think, you servants in the house of the Lord, and preach diligently of God and His works, etc.

Psalm 135

Your Name, O Lord, Endures Forever

¹Praise the Lord!

Praise the name of the Lord,

give praise, O servants of the Lord,

²who stand in the house of the Lord,

in the courts of the house of our God!

³Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good;

sing to his name, for it is pleasant!

⁴For the Lord has chosen Jacob for himself,
Israel as his own possession.

⁵For I know that the Lord is great,
and that our Lord is above all gods.

⁶Whatever the Lord pleases, he does,
in heaven and on earth,
in the seas and all deeps.

⁷He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth,
who makes lightnings for the rain
and brings forth the wind from his storehouses.

⁸He it was who struck down the firstborn of Egypt,
both of man and of beast;

⁹who in your midst, O Egypt,
sent signs and wonders
against Pharaoh and all his servants;

¹⁰who struck down many nations
and killed mighty kings,

¹¹Sihon, king of the Amorites,
and Og, king of Bashan,
and all the kingdoms of Canaan,

¹²and gave their land as a heritage,
a heritage to his people Israel.

¹³Your name, O Lord, endures forever,
your renown, O Lord, throughout all ages.

¹⁴For the Lord will vindicate his people
and have compassion on his servants.

¹⁵The idols of the nations are silver and gold,
the work of human hands.

¹⁶They have mouths, but do not speak;
they have eyes, but do not see;

¹⁷they have ears, but do not hear,
nor is there any breath in their mouths.

¹⁸Those who make them become like them,
so do all who trust in them!

¹⁹O house of Israel, bless the Lord!
O house of Aaron, bless the Lord!

²⁰O house of Levi, bless the Lord!
You who fear the Lord, bless the Lord!

²¹Blessed be the Lord from Zion,
he who dwells in Jerusalem! Praise the Lord!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, God of all grace, govern our hearts that we may never forget Your blessings but steadfastly thank and praise You for all Your goodness in this life until, with all Your saints, we praise You eternally in Your heavenly kingdom; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Psalm 136

Wednesday



The 136th Psalm is a psalm of thanks and is perhaps the text to show priests how they should sing and preach. Namely, they should sing and preach of God and His wonderful deeds, that He is gracious and merciful and a true Savior. Therefore in each verse he repeats the line, "His goodness endures forever," with which the psalm is nearly overwhelmed. Truly nothing but grace, not the works or doctrines of men, should ever be preached. For the works and words of men have done no wonders such as these. They are not deserving of this worship, but rather only the grace and pure goodness of Him, who gives all. Gift! Gift, he says! Gift free of charge! And Christ also stands hidden in the phrase. Such doctrine keeps in the people a pure faith and a right understanding of grace and the forgiveness of sins, against the factious and stiff-necked work-saints, etc.

Psalm 136

His Steadfast Love Endures Forever

¹Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

²Give thanks to the God of gods,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

³Give thanks to the Lord of lords,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁴to him who alone does great wonders,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁵to him who by understanding made the heavens,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁶to him who spread out the earth above the waters,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁷to him who made the great lights,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁸the sun to rule over the day,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁹the moon and stars to rule over the night,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁰to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹¹and brought Israel out from among them,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹²with a strong hand and an outstretched arm,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹³to him who divided the Red Sea in two,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁴and made Israel pass through the midst of it,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁵but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁶to him who led his people through the wilderness,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁷to him who struck down great kings,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁸and killed mighty kings,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁹Sihon, king of the Amorites,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

²⁰and Og, king of Bashan,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

²¹and gave their land as a heritage,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

²²a heritage to Israel his servant,

for his steadfast love endures forever.

²³It is he who remembered us in our low estate,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

²⁴and rescued us from our foes,

for his steadfast love endures forever;

²⁵he who gives food to all flesh,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

²⁶Give thanks to the God of heaven,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

Prayer

Almighty God, whose steadfast loves endure forever, we praise You for Your gift of life and the world that sustains us and all the living. Grant that seeing Your even greater gift of deliverance from the disfigurement of sin and the promise of the renewal of Your original design all people may come to repentance and faith in Your gracious invitation through Jesus Christ, risen and victorious over death; in Jesus name we pray. Amen

Psalm 137

Thursday



The 137th Psalm is a psalm of prayer in the person of captives in Babylon. It is a prayer for Jerusalem, that is, for God's word and spiritual rule which lay completely destroyed; for thus it was assumed (with great reason) especially by those who fear God, as this psalm shows. Although Babylon and Edom greatly rejoiced at this destruction and mocked at those who lamented it, yet they should not thereby escape, unrepentant and blameless, but rather shall be torn to pieces in return. Their children also shall be dashed on the rocks and they shall have no descendants. This indeed happened to Babylon and shall also happen to our Edomites and Babylonians, who today rejoice, mocking both the poor church, torn to pieces, and the destruction of God's word and worship. But, for all that, Israel and God's word shall remain forever and ever.

Psalm 137

How Shall We Sing the Lord's Song?

¹By the waters of Babylon,
there we sat down and wept,
when we remembered Zion.

²On the willows there

we hung up our lyres.

³For there our captors

required of us songs,

and our tormentors, mirth, saying,

“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

⁴How shall we sing the Lord’s song

in a foreign land?

⁵If I forget you, O Jerusalem,

let my right hand forget its skill!

⁶Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth,

if I do not remember you,

if I do not set Jerusalem

above my highest joy!

⁷Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites

the day of Jerusalem,

how they said, “Lay it bare, lay it bare,

down to its foundations!”

⁸O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed,

blessèd shall he be who repays you

with what you have done to us!

⁹Blessèd shall he be who takes your little ones

and dashes them against the rock!

Prayer

Almighty God, we know and confess that vengeance is Yours alone. We pray, as we do in the prayer that Your Son has given us, that Your would deliver us from evil on this day. We also pray that you would thwart the wicked plans of the Evil One and all who seek to harm us and the church; In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Psalm 138

Friday



The 138th Psalm is a psalm of thanks in general for a variety of deliverances from the enemies. The psalmist wishes that Christ's kingdom would come and kings would receive His word and doctrine and give thanks for it and worship Him aright. These must learn that Christ's kingdom exists, that it sits on high, and that He helps the lowly who are stuck in woe and fear, and comforts and rescues sinners and the miserable. It closes with the prayer that God would not abandon His kingdom and work thus begun, but bring them to fulfillment in eternity.

Psalm 138

Give Thanks to the Lord

¹I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart;

before the gods I sing your praise;

²I bow down toward your holy temple

and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness,

for you have exalted above all things

your name and your word.

³On the day I called, you answered me;

my strength of soul you increased.

⁴All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O Lord,

for they have heard the words of your mouth,

⁵and they shall sing of the ways of the Lord,

for great is the glory of the Lord.

⁶For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly,

but the haughty he knows from afar.

⁷Though I walk in the midst of trouble,

you preserve my life;

you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies,

and your right hand delivers me.

⁸The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me;

your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever.

Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Prayer

We implore You, O Lord, that Your abundant blessing may be upon Your people who have held the passion and death of Your Son in devout remembrance, that we may receive Your pardon and the gift of Your comfort, and may increase in faith and take hold of eternal salvation; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Psalm 139

Saturday



The 139th Psalm is a psalm of thanks in which he praises God that He has provided for them so wonderfully and still reigns in all of His works, words, thanks. Whether the psalmist stands, walks, sleeps, or wakes--yes, even in his mother's womb, before he was made, God had been with him as he was being formed and will be with him as long as he lives.

It is as if he should say: every ability or power in man--how he lives, what he does, speaks, think , wherever and whenever, from where and to where he should go--it is all clearly nothing but God's work and art. What then do the abominable ungodly do, who do not believe this, but want to make themselves pious through their vexatious work? They want to have done what they do and then want to receive worship, honor, and glory from God on account of it. But they do not create so much as one word by themselves, indeed cannot create one thought by their own power. Moreover, they do not understand what they do, how they are created, how they live, speak, and think. Since then all that we are and do are God's work and power, how can men consider it to be their own most noble work to make themselves godly, praise their free will, and deliver themselves from sin and death, etc.? Such people cannot rightly speak about God and His work. Protect us from this, o God and bless my heart, so that I may remain in the true way which stands forever, etc.

Search Me, O God, and Know My Heart

¹O Lord, you have searched me and known me!

²You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.

³You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.

⁵You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.

⁷Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?

⁸If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

⁹If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

¹⁰even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.

¹¹If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,

and the light about me be night,”

¹²even the darkness is not dark to you;

the night is bright as the day,

for darkness is as light with you.

¹³For you formed my inward parts;

you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.

¹⁴I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works;

my soul knows it very well.

¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you,

when I was being made in secret,

intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶Your eyes saw my unformed substance;

in your book were written, every one of them,

the days that were formed for me,

when as yet there were none of them.

¹⁷How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!

How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸If I would count them, they are more than the sand.

I awake, and I am still with you.

¹⁹Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God!

O men of blood, depart from me!

²⁰They speak against you with malicious intent;

your enemies take your name in vain!

²¹Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?

And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?

²²I hate them with complete hatred;

I count them my enemies.

²³Search me, O God, and know my heart!

Try me and know my thoughts!

²⁴And see if there be any grievous way in me,

and lead me in the way everlasting!

Prayer

Almighty God, heavenly Father, You have called me into the work of Your vineyard and lavished upon me Your grace and all manner of spiritual and eternal gifts. Help me to live unto You in humility and patience, to hope in Your pure grace and faithfulness, to abide in Your house, and to praise and magnify Your glorious grace forever; through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Psalm 140

Sunday



The 140th Psalm is a psalm of prayer against the proud, wicked, saints who place many traps and annoyances in the right way, against God's word. They also threaten and rage powerfully against all those who do not praise and follow their errors. The psalm prays that their plans may not succeed, but rather may fall on their own head. It will happen to them as to Pharaoh in the Red Sea, that storm may hurl them into the sea and they may be drowned. Thus may such evil mouths be silenced and the believers remain before God forever.

Psalm 140

Deliver Me, O Lord, from Evil Men

¹Deliver me, O Lord, from evil men;

preserve me from violent men,

²who plan evil things in their heart

and stir up wars continually.

³They make their tongue sharp as a serpent's,

and under their lips is the venom of asps.

⁴Guard me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked;

preserve me from violent men,

who have planned to trip up my feet.

⁵The arrogant have hidden a trap for me,
and with cords they have spread a net;
beside the way they have set snares for me.

⁶I say to the Lord, You are my God;
give ear to the voice of my pleas for mercy, O Lord!

⁷O Lord, my Lord, the strength of my salvation,
you have covered my head in the day of battle.

⁸Grant not, O Lord, the desires of the wicked;
do not further their evil plot or they will be exalted!

⁹As for the head of those who surround me,
let the mischief of their lips overwhelm them!

¹⁰Let burning coals fall upon them!
Let them be cast into fire,
into miry pits, no more to rise!

¹¹Let not the slanderer be established in the land;
let evil hunt down the violent man speedily!

¹²I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted,
and will execute justice for the needy.

¹³Surely the righteous shall give thanks to your name;
the upright shall dwell in your presence.

Prayer

Lord God, heavenly Father, we offer before You our humble prayer for the well-being of Your Church throughout the world. Guide and govern it by Your Holy Spirit that all who profess themselves Christians be led into the way of truth and hold the Christian faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in the righteousness of life; in Jesus name we pray, Amen

