Theology Themes of Isaiah

Isaiah’s ministry spanned fifty years as he prophesied and addressed the sins of the people during the reign of four different kings. As a messenger of God’s covenant, one of Isaiah’s primary roles was to remind the people what God expected of them. The book has a coherent structure, which can be divided into two parts, but written by one author. The first half, chapters 1-39, focuses on God’s judgment of His people, while the second half, chapters 40-66, focuses on the salvation of God’s people. Another key difference is the first half deals more with the Assyrian crisis while the second half deals with the Babylonian crisis and resulting exile. Despite these calamities, an overarching theme throughout the book of Isaiah is God’s special relationship with the nation of Israel and the unfortunate need of judgment and exile to bring about the future restoration of God’s people.

**GOD’S JUDGMENT AND SALVATION OF HIS PEOPLE**

Michael Wilkins explains, “The people of Israel understood that God was using them as a people to fulfill the prophecies of Isaiah; however, the problem was Israel, as a nation, had failed in its mission and as a result had become a blind

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Lord would use to pronounce judgment on Israel, but eventually the exile took place in 586 B.C., the Lord planned to use Cyrus, the Persian king, to allow the people to return home. As J. M. Roberts asserts, “Israel’s exile was due to the sins of her people (Isaiah 42:24-25). Their plight was well deserved, their coming salvation was due simply to Yahweh’s grace and the appropriate response was to return to Yahweh in trust and confidence” (Isaiah 43:22-44:2). Ultimately, the hope and salvation of Israel through their suffering, judgment, and exile.

RESTORATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE CITY OF JERUSALEM

Barry Webb explains, “The transformation of Zion is both the literary link and formal key that helps us understand the message of Isaiah.”[3] In chapter one, Zion, the unfaithful prostitute is reduced, but in chapter two, she is exalted and taken back, following the divorce/exile. This exilic litigation is a powerful reminder of God’s grace and the comparison being made is not between the new and old Jerusalem was equated with God’s judgment while the New Jerusalem was going to be a place of God’s blessing and a place where God establishes his kingdom forever.”[4] Roberts explains, “Isaiah’s transformation of the royal ideology and the Zion tradition became the wellspring from which the later messianic expectations and hopes for a New Jerusalem [and] the conception of a heavenly Jerusalem and a transhistorical view of salvation that includes even the ultimate victory over death (anose).”[5]

After the purging, John Watts shows, “The important thing about Zion is her reputation as Yahweh’s dwelling. It is Yahweh’s house, the place where God, which stands out, because He is present and active there.”[6] This is reminiscent of Isaiah’s vision again, as the glory of the Lord filled the temple. His holiness is overwhelming, as the seraphim are depicted covering their face and feet, calling out to one another, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isaiah 6:3). Watts adds, “Yahweh’s presence in the temple lifts its importance to supremacy and this has nothing to do with Israel or Judah, their kings or leaders. Purely because Yahweh is there, Zion attains the other nations.”[7] Then the imagery of beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks is profound. Here, Geoffrey Grogan explains, “The issues that set nations against one another do not disappear automatically but are settled by the supreme Judge, whose decisions are accepted. Thus there is no uneasy calm but peace based on righteousness.”[8]

The coming kingdom of God and the future restoration of Israel are dominant themes. Gary Yates states, “God is going to bring the people back to their homeland; there is going to be the restoration of the Davidic Dynasty, through the Messiah; the temple will be rebuilt; and as the nations see how God blesses Israel, they will come to the Promise Land to worship God.”[9] Sin still had consequences, so as the children of Israel return home from the Babylonian exile, they find themselves impoverished and living under foreign oppression. It is here, Yates asserts, “The future is not all there is, in the future they would have the right to exist and all that is not is undone by their sinfulness.

LORD AS KING AND HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL

Roberts states, “If there is any one concept central to the whole book of Isaiah, it is the vision of Yahweh as the Holy One of Israel [and] Isaiah’s vision… left a lasting impression on the prophet’s ministry.”[10] Isaiah’s vision in chapter six is profound as the glory of the Lord filled the temple and this encounter would shape his entire ministry and message. Isaiah desperately wanted the nation of Israel to have a similar experience and encounter, so that they too would find themselves undone by their sinful lives.

Unfortunately, Israel had to learn the hard way, despite God’s sincere desire to enter into a relationship with His people. Instead of pouring out his blessings, as a result of righteous behavior, the Lord would use the exile to purge all the unholy traits from the people. God is the one the people should have put their trust in exclusively, but the people, instead, chose to rely on political and military alliances for protection. The main issue throughout Isaiah was Israel’s failure to deal with its own spiritual apostasy and no alliance made with any other nation could protect them from the Lord’s wrath. The holiness of the Lord demanded a proper response from His children, but as Roberts explains, “If Israel refused to look to Yahweh, to trust in the quiet waters of Shiloah, God would send the raging waters of Assyria against them to reveal the vanity of their trust in human power.”[11]
LORD OVER ALL NATIONS

Roberts further illustrates how, “Before Yahweh would fight against her (Isaiah 31:4-5). Jerusalem would be humbled and humiliated, but in the hour of her desperation, when Yahweh had cleansed her in the fiery judgment, God would intervene to save her from her arrogant enemies (Isaiah 31:4-5). Then Jerusalem would be exalted and glorified.”[12] While God used Assyria and Babylon as tools to purge Judah and Israel of sin, he used by God would face judgment themselves because they failed to recognize Yahweh as Lord over all. When reading Isaiah 45, part of which focused on the fact that God is the one who “Forms light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates calamity. I am the One who does these things.” This portion of Scripture is amazing, especially considering most people do not normally think that God has anything to do with the darkness. In fact, most people define darkness as the absence of light, so Isaiah is making a profound assertion here that God declares that He is even in the dark chaos of this world, and for this reason, followers can have peace, even in the darkness, because He is Lord over all. John Oswalt explains, “What Isaiah asserts is that God, the creator, is ultimately responsible for everything in nature, from light to dark, and for everything in history, from good fortune to mistfortune. No other beings or forces are responsible for anything.”[13] Even in darkness and chaos, God is with every true follower, and the darkness will eventually give way to the light of day. “For the light has shone already into the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.” (John 1:5).

FUTURE MESSIAH AND SUFFERING SERVANT

Instead of leading the people of other nations to Yahweh, the people of Israel often did the exact opposite by worshipping the false gods of other nations. In the midst of this apostasy, Isaiah promises that God would provide a solution to the problem which was the raising up of an individual Servant who would restore the national servant, the nation of Israel. Richard Averbeck explains, “The Lord’s concern for the nations, not just Israel, is declared in the larger context of Isaiah 49:6-7; 56:6-7 and now the same sacrificial redemption and restoration applies to them as well.”[14] This means the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 brought redemption and restoration, as Averbeck says, “To the Jew first, but also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16). Roberts further explains, “The plan of salvation, centered in the vicarious death of Jesus Christ is dependent on Joseph.” Isaiah’s portrayal of the Suffering Servant, and the NT emphasis on the receptions of that salvation through faith picks up and continues the Isaianic demand for faith.”[15]

In light of the entire canon of Scripture, God still has a plan for the nation of Israel and while they were spiritually blind to the Suffering Servant’s arrival, Isaiah 61:1-3 indicates the first coming of Jesus began the restoration of Israel and the second coming will finish it. Jesus quoted these words in Luke 4:14-19 and as He read to the people in the synagogue, He stopped in the middle of 61:2 after the words, “The time of the Lord’s favor has come.” Rolling up the scroll, He said, “The Scripture you have just heard has been fulfilled this very day.”[16] While the world is now under God’s favor; His wrath is yet to come.

Robert Hughes and J. Carl Laney explain how Isaiah 61:1, “Revealed that the Messiah, who ministered salvation at His first coming, will also minister comfort for redeemed Israel at His second coming.”[17] By His death and resurrection, Jesus instituted and inaugurated a new phase of God’s kingdom, some of which is now, and some of which is still to come, when Christ returns.

CONCLUSION

While this student does not agree with Roger’s conclusion on the matter of multiple authors of Isaiah, nonetheless, Rogers does offer considerable insight on the overarching themes in the book that bears his name. Upon reading Isaiah, there is no denying the special relationship God had and has with His children, but while they were supposed to be a light and witness for God, they fell victim to greed and apostasy. God wanted the best for them, yet the nations of Judah and Israel chose to find their own versions of “God’s best” outside of God’s will. As a parent punishes a child, Yahweh too is forced to pronounce judgment before He is able to provide salvation. This salvation ultimately finds its initial fulfillment in the arrival of the Suffering Servant, the Messiah, but even then, as Isaiah prophesies, “He would be despised and rejected by man” (Isaiah 53:3). The words written by the eighth century prophet are just as relevant today and must be applied to nations, like America, by heeding what was revealed in these oracles against foreign nations. These declarations can directly be traced back to the Abrahamic Covenant, which God made with man and are unconditional promises by God. Christ is coming back, a future kingdom will be established forever, and the Lord will rule over all, as every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Isaiah 45:23; Philippians 2:11). In addition to Isaiah having multiple dominant themes, it also is the only Old Testament book to predict the virgin birth of Christ (7:14), the ministry of John the Baptist (40:3-5), and contains one the most
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Testament’s clearest statements on the Trinity (48:16). Next to Deuteronomy, Isaiah presents the most detailed information on the person and work of God and also the Messiah’s role as both sacrificial lamb and ruling lion. Christ was obedient and empowered by the Father and He will return one day as the anointed one of the Lord and victorious warrior (63:1-6).

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An Exegesis on Psalm 137:1-9

DECEMBER 8, 2016 by JEFF DAVIS

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Calling for God to bash the heads of young children against the rocks makes Psalm 137 one of the most troubling chapters in the Psalter. However, the bloodthirsty hatred found within this petition, invoking the wrath of God, and hurling curses towards one’s enemies is what imprecatory psalms are commonly known for. As a result, many interpreters either discount their use and/or reject any modern-day relevance or application because, on the surface, imprecatory psalms seem to contradict the loving nature of God found within the New Testament. However, God, through the Holy Spirit inspired all Scripture, so only by understanding Psalm 137 in its original historical-cultural and literary context can the interpreter fully appreciate a passage that seemingly contradicts the love and forgiveness taught by Jesus.

The chief aim of this exegesis is to show why Psalm 137 is just as relevant to the church today as it was to its original recipients and how it is possible to harmonize imprecatory psalms with the teachings of Jesus by viewing them in light of God’s purpose, in light of the psalmist’s attitude, and in light of New Testament revelation. Sin and lack of repentance separated the Israelites from God’s presence, leading to captivity in Babylon. As a result, the exiles questioned whether the Davidic covenant was still in place. This led to weeping and a loss of desire to sing, but the psalmist shows God is faithful and that the Israelites must not forget God’s blessing and His covenant. From the assurance found in the Abrahamic Covenant, the psalmist calls upon the righteous God to execute swift justice on the oppressors of God’s people: the Edomites who taunted the Jews when Jerusalem fell and the Babylonians, who while used by God used to bring judgment on Israel, now enslaved them.

**HISTORICAL-CULTURAL CONTEXT**

Why the psalmist wrote this psalm is the most important aspect to understanding the historical-cultural context. Richard Belcher Jr. illustrates, “Psalm 137 arises out of the experience of the community in exile in Babylon following the destruction of the temple and completely commits their situation into the hand of God, [based upon His covenant promise.]” The fall of Jerusalem had deep ramifications, since it was much more than the capital city; it was the dwelling place of God. Philip Stern highlights the importance of this psalm, because “Psalm 137 is one of the few songs that deals with an event that we can be certain occurred in history.” Karl Keil and Franz Delitzsch believe this psalm has the appearance of being a psalm, not so much belonging to the exile, but written in memory of the exile. Keil and Delitzsch seek to illustrate how the vivid imagery and picturesque scenery in the opening verses portrays how; “[a] bank of a river is a favorite place of sojourn of those whom deep grief drives from the bustle of men into solitude. The boundary line of the river gives to solitude a safe back, the monotonous splashing of the waves keeps up the dull, melancholy alternation of thoughts and feelings and cool water exercises a soothing influence on the consuming fever within the heart.”

Psalm 137 overwhelmingly displays the torment brought on by the Babylonian Captivity and while an exact date of its writing is not known, a large number of scholars believe it was composed near the end of the exile, before any of the Israelites were allowed to return to Jerusalem, following the edict of Cyrus. However, some scholars believe it was written shortly after the first wave of Jews returned to Jerusalem but before Babylon was destroyed. Alexander Kirkpatrick
psalmist is also looking to Mosaic Law and the principle of vengeance upon his petitions; instead, he is calling upon God to fight his battles for him. The critical factor to understanding these psalms is realizing the psalmist is not acting often the response to extreme violence and the absence of divine justice. Another

With over thirty psalms containing some form of imprecation, it is important to indicating a setting for the psalm during or just after the Babylonian exile."

DeClaissé-Walford et al. agree, "Psalm 137 is a community lament in form, placing it in a specific genre, the reader must recognize: (1) These were prayers of protection; (2) The Israelites were people of the covenant; (3) These were prayers for justice, not vengeance; (4) They model the necessity to pour one's heart out to the Lord; and (5) They emphasized God's holiness."

John Day explains, "The imprecatory psalms have been explained as expressing evil emotions, either to be avoided altogether or to be expressed and relinquished, as with the Old Covenant but inconsistent with the New Testament, or words appropriately uttered solely from the lips of Christ, and consequently only by His followers through Him." Still, other scholars have totally written imprecatory psalms off as not being divinely inspired. C. Hassel Bullock explains, "They insist that the psalmists are literally expressing their own vindictiveness toward their enemies, and God had nothing to do with inspiring their words." So while it is correct the Bible contains hateful words that do not directly convey divine truth, it is the context of those words that gives them the perspective that makes them the Word of God. Ultimately, while some of the words may not be appropriate to be spoken out of context, Bullock is correct in asserting, "The message of divine justice, which is an expression of his character, is nevertheless clear and quite in order [and] God spoke through the psalmist, providing a perspective that highlighted the human need for justice and divine commitment to it."

Psalm's final form came into existence post-exile and when interacting with this

As Frank E. Gaebelein explains, "the psalmist is praising for God's vengeance on those who are responsible for his misery" and DeClaissé-Walford et al. agree, "Psalm 137 is a community lament in form, placing it in a group of psalms called 'imprecatory,' in which the psalm-singers invoke the wrath of God upon a foe. In the case of Psalm 137, the foe is clearly Babylon, indicating a setting for the psalm during or just after the Babylonian exile."

Psalms was composed over a one thousand year time span and is the most quoted book in the New Testament. Psalm 137 is found in Book V and vv. 1-3 provide the setting of the lament; v. 4 illustrates the central words of lament; vv. 5-6 declares an oath in answer to the lament; and vv. 7-9 issue imprecatory words in answer to the lament. Nancy deClaisse-Walford et al. illustrate, 'Psalm 137 highlights the distinction of having one of the most beloved opening lines and the most horrifying closing line of any psalm. There is no way to soften the words or alter the sentiment nor should we try to.' This earnest lament sung to God, sought His supreme justice, even in spite of complete despair and hopeless:

"It is a song of revenge sung on behalf of the victims of Babylon's destruction." In form, Psalm 137 takes on characteristics of both a lament and an imprecatory psalm and it reveals the painful consequences of sin. Despite the covenant God made with David, because of ongoing sin and the lack of repentance, the Israelites were allowed by God to be taken away from Jerusalem, the very place where God's presence dwelt. This particular psalm demonstrates when believers continue to sin, fellowship with God is cut off and the joy of God's presence departs. Additionally when believers are cut off from God, the painful wounds of sin also drown the joy of salvation out.

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With over thirty psalms containing some form of imprecation, it is important to understand how these psalms express deep and raw emotions and how they are often the response to extreme violence and the absence of divine justice. Another critical factor to understanding these psalms is realizing the psalmist is not acting upon his petitions; instead, he is calling upon God to fight his battles for him. The psalmist is also looking to Mosaic Law and the principle of vengeance upon his petitions; instead, he is calling upon God to fight his battles for him. The critical factor to understanding these psalms is realizing the psalmist is not acting...
means, "eye for eye and tooth for tooth." Fee and Stuart illustrate: What the psalmist has done in Psalm 137 is to tell God about the feelings of the suffering Israelites, using hyperbolic language of the same extreme sort found in the covenant curses themselves [and] it is God who is the actual hearer of these angry words.

The placement of Psalm 137 is interesting, especially considering Psalm 135 and 136 are community hymns and partners in praise, which celebrate the steadfast and unchanging love of the Lord enduring forever. Then, Psalm 138 is the first of a collection of eight psalms classified as individual hymns of thanksgiving. DeClaissé-Walford et al. illustrate how in Psalm 138:

The psalm-singer gives thanks to the Lord for answering when he cries out and are generally made up of three parts: (1) an introduction, in which the psalmist declares the intention of giving thanks and praising God; (2) a narrative, in which the psalmist tells what has happened to the psalmist that has prompted the words of praise; and (3) a conclusion, in which the psalmist praises God for all that God has done on the psalmist’s behalf.

Thus, the placement of Psalm 137 between these bookends of praise and thanksgiving is by no accident and further demonstrates the covenant faithfulness of God and His steadfast love being present, even in the midst of captivity or exile.

THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

Sin Separates and Exiles People from God (vv. 1-4)

By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our lyres. For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land? Psalm 137:1-4 (ESV)

The psalmist immediately reveals those in Babylonian captivity wept for Zion. This imagery forces the reader to view the Israelites as prisoners of war. Knowing the captivity lasted seventy years provided ample time to reflect upon and realize God’s presence and His blessing were lost as a result of the nation’s sin. The psalmist contrasts of the waters of Babylon with the hills of Zion and uses these landscapes to demonstrate the dramatic change of environment. When the psalmist says on the willows they hung their harps, he is including himself with the repentant exiles that had lost all desire for music and the image of a weeping-willow adds to this imagery, emphasizing the time for joyous songs was long since past. This could be from the result of feeling God’s judgment, but the primary reason seems to be related to the Babylonians demanding the Israelites to play the joyful songs of Zion and God’s greatness, but given their torment, the exiles could not envision singing while absent from the presence of God.

Must Never Forget God’s Blessing and Covenant (vv. 5-6)

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! Let 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! Psalm 137:5-6 (ESV)

Despite the persecution and tormenting the Israelites faced, the psalmist switched back to the singular person to make two pledges. First, he says it is better to have a paralyzed hand than to forget Jerusalem and then he says it is better to have a paralyzed mouth than not to consider Jerusalem the greatest joy. The psalmist, no doubt, was a highly trained harpist and singer of the psalms but he makes the oath he would rather lose the ability to play the harp and to sing rather than use those gifts to allow the Lord’s enemies to belittle him andmock the Lord. For the psalmist, Jerusalem was much more than just a place; it represented where the temple once stood and where the Spirit of the Lord dwelt. This conviction led the psalmist to never allow the Babylonians to take away the sanctity and holiness of Zion. If this psalm was written near the end of the exile or just following the return to Jerusalem, this would have meant, either the psalmist was very young when taken into captivity, or that he was born while in captivity. In either case, his vow to not forget Jerusalem takes on an entirely different meaning when viewed from these perspectives.

Ask Righteous God to Execute Swift Justice on Oppressors of God’s People (vv. 7-9)

Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem, how they said, “Lay it bare, lay it bare, down to its foundations!” 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 137:7-9 (ESV)

In the final verses, the psalmist appeals to the righteous God to execute swift
There are Christians all over the world experiencing torture and death, Jerusalem is so much more than just a physical location because of what it represents. There is a geographical name for this, but it could also be called a spiritual location. The psalmist emphasizes the importance of never forgetting Jerusalem, no matter the cost. Even then and especially now, places today are representative of Babylon, because the desire to remain with the worldly practices and things Babylon possessed. Many lifestyles and values in the world today are the same as those of Babylon, and just as the Babylonians were guilty of sins, so the people around us are guilty of sins. This presents somewhat of a paradox, since the Babylonians were acting as agents of God because of Israel’s sin and refusal to repent. This further demonstrates God can use anyone and anything to accomplish His plans, as He did with Cyrus and Babylon. Just as the psalmist prayed for the judgment promised against Edom, he prays the Lord fulfills the same promise over Babylon. Against Babylon, the psalmist goes one step further and pronounces a blessing on the agent God uses to fulfill His promise. The psalmist’s final plea is shocking because of the brutality of the request, but he is simply praying for reciprocity because this is exactly what the Babylonians did when Jerusalem was invaded and plundered. Picturing the cries of babies being killed against rocks and the screams of the mothers is an image engrained in the mind of the reader. As Warren Wiersbe points out, “Our human emotions can become strongly inflamed when we think about the cruelty of wicked people toward others. Our rage is even fiercer when we are personally involved, or when the victims are our loved ones, fellow-citizens of our communities or nation, or our brothers and sisters in Christ.” DeClaisé-Walford et al. remind the readers “of the basic human desire for revenge, when those we love have been wronged, God does not ask us to suppress those emotions, but rather to speak about them in plain and heartfelt terms. In speaking out to God, we give the pain, the helplessness, and the burning anger to God. And we trust that God’s justice will be done.” This point of view allows the final verse to harmonize with the first and permits the reader to fully appreciate the attitude of the psalmist and understand the nature of God’s faithfulness and covenant love.

MODERN APPLICATION

Erich Zenger writes that, “Psalm 137 is an attempt, in the face of the most profound humiliation and helplessness, to suppress the primitive human lust for revenge. The word of judgment is presumed to be so universally just that even those who pray the psalm submit themselves to it.” Knowing and understanding this principle illustrates how one of the first observations from this psalm relates to both the righteous and the wicked suffering the judgment of God. Even though not everyone turned away from Yahweh, the nation suffered together. Sin in essence is rebellion of God, so the second application from this psalm relates to the consequences of sin. Without the presence and Spirit of God, the people suffered physically, by having to leave the promise land and they suffered spiritually because they refused to listen to the prophets and repent of their sins.

Another interesting principle stems from the Israelites who chose to stay even when allowed to return home. While Jeremiah instructed them to make the best of the situation, he did not want them to become complacent and ensnared with the worldly practices and things Babylon possessed. Many lifestyles and places today are representative of Babylon, because the desire to remain corrupt, and godless and in principle, Babylon exists all over the earth. Wherever wickedness stands opposed to the truth claims of God and the gospel message is rejected represents Babylon. The psalmist emphasizes the importance of never forgetting Jerusalem, no matter the cost. Even then and especially now, Jerusalem is so much more than just a physical location because of what it represents. There are Christians all over the world experiencing torture and death, just as those who were in Babylon experienced. The psalmist prayed that God would fulfill His promise. The psalmist calls for God’s judgment against the people who had enslaved and slaughtered the Israelites. John Ahn explains, “There is clearly a heightened and more dramatically unrehearsed emotional outburst of pain as verse seven begins with imperatives.” The compositional style no longer holds the lyrical poetic beauty that was present in the previous sections. It is slightly more terser, and the vocabulary theme, and images become unilaterally children-based, war-oriented, and specific to locales. This presents somewhat of a paradox, since the Babylonians were acting as agents of God because of Israel’s sin and refusal to repent. This further demonstrates God can use anyone and anything to accomplish His plans, as He did with Cyrus and Babylon. Just as the psalmist prayed for the judgment promised against Edom, he prays the Lord fulfills the same promise over Babylon. Against Babylon, the psalmist goes one step further and pronounces a blessing on the agent God uses to fulfill His promise. The psalmist’s final plea is shocking because of the brutality of the request, but he is simply praying for reciprocity because this is exactly what the Babylonians did when Jerusalem was invaded and plundered. Picturing the cries of babies being killed against rocks and the screams of the mothers is an image engrained in the mind of the reader. As Warren Wiersbe points out, “Our human emotions can become strongly inflamed when we think about the cruelty of wicked people toward others. Our rage is even fiercer when we are personally involved, or when the victims are our loved ones, fellow-citizens of our communities or nation, or our brothers and sisters in Christ.”

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all in the name of Christ. What the psalmist is declaring is each believer must count the cost and determine if nothing is worth forgetting what Jerusalem stood for and what the personal presence of God means. Persecution is something that will only continue to grow the closer the return of Christ comes, so Christians must learn how to stand up for God and against the enemies of the Lord, in order to not fall for things of this world. Matthew Henry illustrates:

What we love, we love to think of. Those that rejoice in God, for His sake make Jerusalem their joy. They steadfastly resolved to keep up this affection. When suffering, we should recollect with godly sorrow our forfeited mercies, and our sins by which we lost them. If temporal advantages ever render profession, the worst calamity has befallen him. Far be it from us to avenge ourselves; we will leave it to Him who has said, Vengeance is mine. Those that are glad in calamities, especially at the calamities of Jerusalem, shall not go unpunished. We cannot pray for promised success to the church of God without looking to, though we do not utter a prayer for, the ruin of her enemies. But let us call to mind to whose grace and finished salvation alone it is, that we have any hopes of being brought home to the heavenly Jerusalem.[37]

Imprecations against the wicked do not just appear in the Old Testament; in fact, numerous passages in the New Testament reaffirm the validity of continuing to cry out for justice and judgment of the wicked.[38] However, when someone prays for the judgment of the wicked, Gary Yates demonstrates, "[he or she] are in fact praying for the full realization of God's kingdom rule on earth and are praying in anticipation of God's complete removal of evil from the new creation. God will be glorified in the destruction of the wicked and the ungodly.[39]

There was also not a complete understanding of Sheol or of life after death, when the psalmist prays for God to act swiftly and to severely judge the wicked in this life. Today, through the New Testament and a Christological lens, the interpreter is able to pray with a greater understanding of how God's judgment will make all things right, even if that judgment is deferred until after death. Yates further demonstrates, "Since they are righteous prayers, the imprecatory psalms have many benefits for the believer today and should not be removed from either our private or public worship. These psalms remind us of God's holiness and of His righteous and perfect hatred of all evil."[40] Imprecatory psalms teach the severity and finality of God's judgment and they demonstrate the price of sin. The world is full of evil and these psalms serve as a reminder for the need to cry out to God for only His divine justice and His supreme righteousness. The psalmist knew the importance of crying out for God to purge evil from our own lives because as Yates establishes, 'Hating evil in the world without hating its presence in our lives is an indication that we have been blinded by our own self-righteousness. [41]

CONCLUSION

Fee and Stuart are correct in their assertion that, 'Understood in their context as part of the language of the lament and used rightly to channel and control our potentially sinful anger, the imprecatory psalms can indeed help keep us from harboring or displaying anger against others [and] they do not contradict Jesus's teaching to love our enemies.'[42] This exegesis has shown why Psalm137 is just as relevant to the church today as it was to its original recipients, by showing how it is possible to harmonize this and other imprecatory psalms with the teachings of Jesus, when they are viewed in the light of God's divine purpose. Once the psalm is understood in light of the psalmist's attitude and in light of New Testament revelation, the reader is able to comprehend how the psalmist completely entrusted all hatred and desires for revenge to God. While sin and the lack of repentance separated the Israelites from God's presence, the psalmist shows God remains faithful to the assurances found in the Abrahamic Covenant[43] and how it is always appropriate to call upon God to be stay faithful to His promises.

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[42] Fee and Douglas Stuart, How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth, 221.


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