

Perhaps the most difficult type of suffering is suffering that you know that you should not have had because you brought it on yourself. When we are experiencing the consequences of our sin and we know that this is why we are hurting, it is tough.

God does permit His people to reap the consequences of their choices. But what God's people need to realize is sinful choices will not ever bear good fruit. Sinful choices will not leave you happy and fulfilled. They will leave you depressed and miserable. If a believer chooses to rebel against God, the road is long and hard.

It is obvious that Psalm 137 was written when Israel was being held captive by the Babylonians (137:1, 8). The first question that must be asked is why was Israel being held captive by the Babylonians? Well the answer to that question is found in multiple passages like Jeremiah 25:8-11.

Why did all of this happen? Because she did not obey God's Word. The people of Israel disobeyed God. They had rebelled and were miserable. There is a very important lesson to learn from this Psalm:

WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE CHOOSE TO DISOBEY GOD, THEY WILL END UP MISERABLE AND NOT HAPPY AND FULFILLED; BUT IF THIS PEOPLE WILL HONESTLY AND HUMBLY REPENT OF THEIR SIN, THEY CAN EXPERIENCE THE DELIVERING POWER OF GOD AND WILL EXPERIENCE GREAT JOY AND HAPPINESS ONCE AGAIN.

A person may choose to go their own way and totally and completely do just the opposite of what God's Word says one shall do. This person will never end up happy. This person will end up experiencing great emotional sorrow and pain. But there is a way out. Remember Psalm 136? God's mercy is everlasting. If one is sorry for the sin and the wrong choices and turns to the Lord, he can experience great joy and great power.

Now we want to work our way through this Psalm. There are certain key things we want to see:

OBSERVATION #1 – God's people sat down in Babylon and remembered Zion. **137:1**

Now I am going to make an assumption that some of the musical leaders of Israel, who had been responsible for Temple worship, sat down and reminisced about the way it used to be. These leaders would have used their harps and their voices to sing the beautiful praises of God. Apparently they were sitting by the "rivers" in Babylon thinking about this.

We know that one of the rivers was the Chebar river, mentioned by Ezekiel. Actually the Babylonian Empire sat between two great rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. Furthermore, the land was filled with various tributaries that offered plenty of water to those living there.

Apparently one day some of God's leaders just sat down and wept because they remembered Zion. Zion refers to the land of Israel; it refers to the people of Israel; it refers to Jerusalem the key city of Israel and it refers to the Temple Mount, which is the place of worship for Israel.

God's people were enslaved in Babylon and they were reflecting on their home land and the blessings they once had and they wept. Instead of looking at the Mediterranean or the Jordan, they were looking at rivers in Babylon.

OBSERVATION #2 – God's people are forced to sing songs that remembered Zion. **137:2-3**

Apparently these were musicians that had been captured and now instead of using their harps for beautiful music, they literally would hang their harps on the willows by the rivers of Babylon. There was no cause to use the harps, they were not happy so in their sorrow they hung up their harps.

There is some integrity in this. In our day, if the people at church were taken captive by heathens, the musicians would just use their instruments to form a rock band. They would not be sad, they would be happy.

Not only were the harps hanging on the plants, but it was even worse than this. According to **verse 3**, the Babylonians were taunting God's people and forcing them to sing songs about the greatness of Zion.

They were taunting them to get their harps and sing us one of your songs about how great and powerful your God is that you worshipped in Zion.

God's people had to sit there among God-mockers and were forced to sing songs about God and Zion as entertainment for the Babylonians. It gave them a good laugh.

What made this so sad is that these Israelites knew that the reason for their suffering was their own rebellion and sin. Had they been willing to deal with their own depravity, they would not have even been in this position.

There is nothing that God-mockers and scoffers love more than to make fun of Christians who have fallen into sin. When one has sinned against God and non-Christians learn about it, they have a field day. Just think of the jokes that are made about Christians who fall into immorality or those who get caught stealing or lying. The world loves that and they laugh at that.

If you are the one who did the wrong when this happens you will feel the weight of that.

Now look carefully where the sin of God's people led them. Not into laughter or happiness or joy, it led them into tears. Sin will not ever leave you laughing, it will leave you crying.

OBSERVATION #3 – God’s people cannot sing the praises of God in a foreign land. **137:4**

When the Jews were being butchered by Hitler in the prison camps, how many praise songs do you think you would hear sung? Zero.

You cannot praise God when you are in an environment of people who are dominating you and mocking God. This is not the context for a hymn sing about the greatness of God.

When one is in rebellion against God there is no singing. There is no joy. Now in the case of Paul and Barnabas, when they were doing the will of God in Philippi and got locked up they did sing because they weren’t there for rebellion, they were there for obedience.

Israel was not in Babylon because she obeyed God. She was there because she was in rebellion against God and His Word and that will never lead to happiness.

OBSERVATION #4 – God’s people remember what worship once was in Jerusalem. **137:5-6**

Even though these leaders of Israel were far away from home, they never wanted to forget about Jerusalem. They knew the promises of God for Israel and they knew the importance of Israel. They were living in a “foreign land” (**137:4**), but they would not forget Jerusalem. **Sometimes you really don’t appreciate something until it is gone.**

In fact, they said if I do not remember God and exalt Jerusalem, then their right hand should forget the skill of playing the harp and the tongue that used to sing praises to God should cling to the mouth.

The “chief joy” (**v. 6**) of these leaders was Jerusalem and even though they were far away, it was the place they wanted to be. These leaders had a tremendous desire to use their skills and worship God in Jerusalem.

When you are living in a foreign land and living a comfortable and good life, it is easy to forget about God and His place of worship. We see people who say they love the Lord get in the world and live life and forget about God, His Word and His church.

Some Practical insights:

- 1) One cannot worship God until one is at the proper place of worship. These Israelites could not ever enjoy worship in Babylon like they could in Jerusalem.
- 2) No one can have real contentment until one is in a proper place of worship.
- 3) One cannot worship God if one is being held captive by someone or something.

OBSERVATION #5 – God’s people petition God for deliverance. **137:7-9**

When we find ourselves in sad and depressing times, the one thing God’s people can always do is pray.

There are basically two requests that are made:

Request #1 - Remember the evil of the enemies. **137:7-8a**

There are two enemies who are specifically named: Edom and Babylon. Both thought lightly of Jerusalem and Israel.

For the most part the Edomites and the Babylonians were Arabs. These Arabs hated Israel and were responsible for bringing devastation to Jerusalem and to the Temple.

Request #2 - Remember the blessing of payback. **137:8b-9**

God is a God who does pay back those who do bad things against His people. God delights in giving remunerative paychecks against those who have mocked Him and His people.

Now the one who will repay is identified as the “blessed one” who is none other than Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ will ultimately give remunerative justice to those who did evil things against His people.

Verse 9 has been criticized by liberals as being so harsh a verse. But let us remember that when Babylon took Israel captive, this is exactly what she did to Israel. She brutalized her children so God says I will pay her back and I will punish the world for its evil—Is. 13:1, 11, 16.

Now some might think well this is just O.T. stuff. Well turn to Romans 12:19. God promises that He will repay enemies of His people and will handle every single case of retribution.

One may be in a horrible condition because of sin. One can always cry out to God. God can save and God will deliver.