

## Will Groben: Psalm 137: A Lament of the Community

### A. Parts of the Lament

- vv.1-2 Introductory Cry to God
- vv.3-4 Lament
- vv.5-6 Confession of Trust
- vv.7 Petition
- vv.8-9 Vow of Praise

### B. Parallelism

vv.1,2,4,5, 6a-b, 7a-b, 9 Formal Relationship: the phrases build to one thought without actual parallelism.

- vv.1-2; 8b-9 External Synthetic Parallelism: v.2 builds on and illuminates the idea of weeping, with the hanging of the harps in the trees.
- v.3 Synonymous Parallelism [preceding]: saying the same thing two different ways adds emphasis and locks in meaning; the third line could be thought of as synthetic parallelism to the previous parallel [in same verse], as it builds on the idea, clarifying that the desire was for a song of Zion.
- v.8 Antithetical Parallelism [precedes]: contrasts evil Babylon with blessed antagonist of Babylon.
- vv.3c-4a I would not call this Antithetical Parallelism, but there is a sort of contrast in 4a to 3c.
- vv.5-6b External Chiastic Parallelism: the two pairs say essentially the same thing, but in reverse order, adding emphasis in a way that aesthetically pleasing.
- v.6b-c Climactic Parallelism: the two middle phrases share three words and then finish with similar thoughts, providing emphasis and clarification.
- v.7c-d Incomplete Parallelism without Compensation: the last line echoes the end of the previous line, emphasizing it and providing insight to the extent of the thought of razing.

### C. Explanation of v.9

Vv.8-9 look forward to God's judgment of his enemies [those who have rejected his revelation], specifically, in this verse, those who had conquered and exiled his people. V.9 suggests this judgment will include the little children. The vivid image of dashing them against the rock is symbolic for the extinguishment of life, both earthly and spiritually [eternal condemnation]. The one who will be blessed to do this judgment is Jesus, God the Son, to whom falls the role of judge for all peoples.

Some people might claim this psalm shows a merciless character in the author. However, what the author is looking forward to is judgment of God's enemies, not judgment of the author's enemies. As the author is one of the exiled Hebrews, his enemies are the same as God's enemies, but his motivation is to see justice done, not to exact his own personal revenge. Another thought to consider is that the author of the psalm was inspired by God to write this psalm. While it is true that *characters* express wrong thinking and do wrong things in the Bible's narratives, the *authors* would never express wrong thinking if they were inspired as we believe they were. Some might also question God's mercy if this is inspired writing, but we must remember that God's holiness demands justice, which entails judgment for those who are not righteous. In his mercy, God has provided a way out of eternal condemnation through Christ's sacrifice, but the Babylonians would not avail themselves of this safe harbor, for they would not look to God in faith, would not trust in his provision or trust him enough to obey. They proved themselves enemies of God, not only in their own lack of relationship with him, but by abusing God's chosen representatives, his people.

The psalmist lived in the Old Testament era, and could thus look forward to an actually physical deliverance from his oppressors and to witness judgment upon God's enemies. Today, we live in a different dispensation. Though Christ has come and been crowned king, he has chosen to delay judgment to mercifully allow time for more people to choose to believe in him. Thus, when we look forward to judgment of God's enemies or for our own deliverance from them, we have to know that we might not see these things come to pass in our lifetimes. That we should look forward to the time of Christ's return, when he will bring judgment on his enemies, is testified by numerous New Testament examples. However, simultaneously, Christ calls on us to love our enemies, to hope and pray and work for their salvation.