

# (How to Understand the KJV Bible) 12 Psalm 137

by Keith Simons

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*Keith Simons explores the profound themes of mourning and hope in Psalm 137, emphasizing the importance of remembering Jerusalem amidst captivity.*

**Duration:** 22:33

**Scripture:** Psalm 126:1-3, Psalm 137, Isaiah 14:4-23, Jeremiah 29:10-14, Lamentations 3:19-24, Ezekiel 36:24-28, Matthew 5:5, Romans 12:19, Revelation 18:21-24, Revelation 21:2

**Topics:** "KJV Bible", "Lamentation", "Prophecy and Restoration"

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## Description

Keith Simons teaches on Psalm 137, emphasizing its prophetic nature and the deep sorrow of the Israelites in Babylon after the destruction of Jerusalem. He explores the contrast between the luxury of Babylon and the mourning of the captives who long for their homeland, highlighting the significance of remembering Jerusalem. Simons suggests that the psalm serves as both a lament and a prophecy, reflecting the hope of restoration and God's judgment against oppressors. He encourages a deeper understanding of the text within the context of the King James Version and its historical implications. Ultimately, the message conveys the importance of remembering God's promises and the future restoration of His people.

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## Transcript

Welcome, my name is Keith Symons, I'm a Bible teacher from England and these are our talks on how to understand the King James Version of the Bible. Today we're going to be looking at Psalm 137, a short psalm but an important one. In the Book of Revelation, the great closing scene of John's vision, it's about two cities, about Babylon and about Jerusalem.

And we think that when John wrote the Book of Revelation, neither of those cities existed, they'd both been destroyed. Yet John saw the final scenes in this earth and in the new earth about being about two cities, Babylon and Jerusalem. And so in that context, this psalm, Psalm 137, takes on a new importance.

It becomes one of the great prophetic psalms, although on the face of it, it seems simply to be a psalm about mourning, expressing sadness at the destruction of Jerusalem. The date of this psalm is almost always given after the destruction of Jerusalem and I'm not sure that that's right. If you look at the history of Jerusalem and Judah, you find that several hundred years after King David, God permitted Babylon's

army to act against Jerusalem and to destroy it.

And that's clearly what this psalm is describing, and the captivity of Judah's people that followed the destruction of Jerusalem when they were taken to Babylon, many hundreds of miles away and forced to work for the Babylonians. Now, the psalm is clearly describing that instant, but is it describing it afterwards or beforehand? We know from the Bible that 100 years before it happened, Isaiah gave a prophecy that it would happen. When we look at the Bible, we've always got to remember that the passages may be speaking in prophecy about the future.

So I wonder whether Psalm 137 is a description in advance of what happened, a prophecy about what was going to happen, just as it is a prophecy about the end times and the future of the world. So Psalm 137, we're going to look at it as we always do, word by word, verse by verse, little sections at a time, looking at the meaning so that from it you can understand better not just the psalm but also the King James Version and the older writings of the great sermon writers of the past, men like Spurgeon and Wesley and Whitfield. First one begins, By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Sion.

By the rivers of Babylon, Babylon, this city of abundant streams of water, so different from Jerusalem. Jerusalem is on the top of a mountain. It has one small stream that runs by it.

It has a spring of water which provides the water which is needed in the city. But Babylon had abundant water. Babylon had rivers.

Babylon was a place of luxury and of comfort. The hanging gardens of Babylon, the great gardens of the palace of the kings, the emperors of are famous to this day as one of the great seven wonders of the ancient world. Yet this luxurious, this comfortable place was a great sadness for the people from Jerusalem and from Judah.

By the rivers there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Sion. Sion is another name for Jerusalem. It's the name of one of the hills on which Jerusalem stands.

It often has special reference in the Bible to the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, which after Judah's people had been taken from Jerusalem to Babylon, the temple was in ruins. A whole of Jerusalem was in ruins. Babylon's destroyed Jerusalem entirely and they took away its people to be their captives in a foreign country, many months journey away by foot from Judah.

And so Jerusalem's people are seen in this first verse, in a place of luxury, in a place of comfort, but knowing no comfort and knowing no joy. They're weeping because they remembered Sion. To remember is an important principle right the way through this psalm.

Verse two, we hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. Hanged, we normally say hung today, we hung our harps. Harps, musical instrument with strings, it's the instrument famously that King David himself played.

It must have been a popular instrument to play in Judo. But these people were not playing their musical instruments. They just hung them upon the willows.

Willows are a tree, a tree that grows where there's plenty of water. They hung up their harps. They didn't want to play them anymore.

The music just didn't sound right in a foreign country. Strange that they took the instruments with them from Jerusalem. They couldn't take much.

Maybe they thought that the music would bring them some comfort in a foreign country. But no, it couldn't bring them any comfort because it reminded them of Jerusalem. It reminded them of the temple.

It reminded them of the closeness which they could have had with God, but which because of their sins, because of their evil deeds, they had been separated from. Verse three, for there, they that carried us away captive required of us a song. They that carried us away captive, the people who took us away as captives from our native land, the people who forced us to live in a foreign country, they demanded that Jerusalem's people should sing.

Sing a joyful song in that place. They wanted to hear the music for which those harps were intended. They wanted to hear the music of Jerusalem.

And they that wasted us, second half verse three, required of us mirth. Mirth means happiness. They that wasted us is those that robbed us, those that destroyed our city, those that forced us away from our homes to this place where we have nothing.

They wanted happiness. They wanted joyful singing from us. They wanted us to entertain them.

And how horrific, because what they wanted to be entertained with was the army of Babylon were saying, sing us one of the songs of Zion. Zion, God's temple, famous for its songs. Even these foreigners had heard of the joyful songs that people sang at the temple, and they thought that it would be good, it would be good entertainment to hear those songs.

But Jerusalem's people, they can't sing the joyful songs of Zion, because the joyful songs of Zion are not songs for parties or for entertainment that they might have sung. But verse four, how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? These songs, these holy songs belong to God. They are sacred songs.

And we, for our sins, we've been taken away from his dwelling place, from the place of his temple, from the place where we should have enjoyed such a close relationship with him. So is it right now that in a strange land, a foreign country, we should sing the songs that belong to God? Now, sometimes, of course, it is right in sadness to be praising God. It can be right.

It's always right to praise God. It's always right to give honour to God. But to sing the joyful songs of God at a time when we should be sorrowful for our sins, at a time when we should remember the hardship of the country and the suffering of our country, at a time when we should remember Jerusalem, we should remember the temple, we should remember and desire so eagerly to return to that right relationship with God.

Then how can we sing those happy songs as if nothing has happened, as if we still are in that place of joy and rejoicing with God? No, they say. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? We shan't, because we will instead remember Jerusalem. Although Jerusalem lies in ruins, although it seems like it can never be rebuilt, yet there is a God in heaven and there is hope.

And what is more, God can return us to that place and God can rebuild that place. And as we'll learn later in the Bible with Nehemiah, God did return them there and God did allow them to rebuild the temple. But that was for a later generation.

For the moment, for this generation in Babylon, they make a promise, a serious promise, an oath before God. Verse 5. If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. I'm not going to forget Jerusalem.

I'm going to make a promise, even by Jerusalem, that I'm not going to forget it. And if I do forget it, says this person brought from Jerusalem by force, well, then let my right hand forget too. Forget what? Well, you'll see the words her cunning got in italics, slanted type.

That means they're not there in the Hebrew. And the King James writers didn't want to just forget that, let my right hand forget. They thought it needed to say what the right hand should forget.

And they gave the answer, her cunning, her skill. The hand is called her here. You'll see objects sometimes in the King James Bible referred to as him or her.

The son is sometimes called he and right hand here is called her. Let my right hand forget its cunning, we would say today. Let my right hand forget its skill.

If I'm going to forget Jerusalem, of course, then I can't play the harp at all, because I need my hand to play my harp. But if I'm going to forget Jerusalem, I don't want my hand to have the skill to play my harp anymore. No.

And as a song needs to be sung, verse 6. If I do not remember thee, that's Jerusalem, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth. If I don't remember Jerusalem, I don't want my hand to be able to play my harp and I don't want my tongue to be able to sing the joyful songs. It should instead cleave or stick to the roof of my mouth.

It should stick, the tongue should stick to the top of my mouth so that I cannot sing. If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy, there should be nothing that I consider more joyful, more good, more wonderful than Jerusalem. Jerusalem, true, that lies in ruins.

Jerusalem that's been destroyed. No. Jerusalem that God will allow us to rebuild.

Jerusalem that I trust God to give us the opportunity to rebuild. And the temple wants more to be there. And then with joy and thanksgiving, I will go or my descendants will go to the house of God to worship God there.

Remember. It's our key word in this psalm and it occurs again with a very different suggestion in verse 7. Remember, O Lord. So this is a prayer now.

Remember the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem who said, raise it, raise it, even to the foundation thereof. The children of Edom doesn't mean children. It means the people of Edom.

The Edomites, we call them often. They were distant relatives of the Israelites, the people in Israel. But they turned against Jerusalem and they turned against Israel and they became enemies of it.

They should have been its supporters, its friends. They were relatives. And yet they turned totally against Jerusalem's people and participated in its destruction.

And in the book of Obadah, we see a terrible prophecy against Edom. But what did they say? They said, raise it. Now to raise with an eye in means to build up or to go higher.

But to raise without that eye in, to raise a building is to destroy that building totally, typically by fire. And that's what happened to the buildings of Jerusalem. They were destroyed and they were burnt down by fire.

And the people of Edom apparently said, raise it, raise it, destroy the city, destroy it completely, even destroy it to its foundation, its base. So the children of Edom must be remembered by God because God must give his judgment against them. If they will not turn from their evil deeds, then they will face the judgment of God and the punishment of God.

But what about those who were mainly responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem? What about Babylon's people? Well, now the psalmist speaks to Babylon itself. He calls it, O daughter of Babylon. That doesn't mean a woman in Babylon.

That means the city itself of Babylon, its people. And it's against them that this terrible prophecy is given. O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed.

In other words, Babylon one day will be destroyed. One day this great city to which we've been brought, which has caused so much trouble to Jerusalem, it's going to be destroyed. God's judgment is against it and will be complete and utter.

And he continues, the psalmist, happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou has served us. Well, to reward nowadays means to do a good thing in return, but clearly this isn't a good thing. And to serve someone means to do a good thing for someone, but this isn't a good thing.

Happy shall he be that punishes thee, that returns on you the same things you've done against us, that deals with you in the way you've dealt with us. That person who does that is going to be happy. That person who does that is going to rejoice that they are acting against this cruel, cruel country, Babylon.

In fact, they're going to be so happy. Verse 9, happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones. This is awful.

Thy little ones means the children, the little children. And soldiers would take little children and throw them down to kill them. And the psalmist says that when that happens, the person who does that will be happy about that.

Why will they be happy? Because Babylon will no longer be able to rise again and be a powerful nation to oppress the other nations of the world. Babylon took control over every nation in the known world across a vast area of country and treated them all in the most cruel way. And so the psalmist says the person who takes vengeance, the person who punishes Babylon will be pleased to punish Babylon.

So what happened? Often people call this a Psalm of revenge. Is this a Psalm of revenge? Did Jerusalem's people go to Babylon and try to act towards it as cruelly as Babylon acted towards them? Well, look at the history and you'll find they didn't. You'll find they worked hard and productively in Babylon.

They supported the country. Daniel and his three friends became important government officials and leaders in Babylon. And eventually even the deposed king of Judah was given a place of honor in Babylon.

Israel's people, many of them, remained there a long time and they remained there supporting that country. It wasn't a case of Jerusalem's people hating Babylon. It was a case of a judgment against another Babylon.

Read the end of the book of Revelation and you find what that means. It means Babylon is a picture of the enemies of God's people. Babylon is a picture of those who act cruelly and in an evil way in the world.

Babylon is a picture of the systems of this world, its sources of power, its sources of military strength, its sources of money, its financial power. All of those systems working against God and against his people and all of them in the book of Revelation are in the end destroyed so that Christ the Messiah can come and rule the world in righteousness and bring God's good government to the world and eventually Jerusalem to be replaced by the new Jerusalem on the new earth which the end of the book of Revelation describes the home of God's people forever. Forever remembered, forever there, forever glorious and standing to the honor of God.

Let me read you the whole psalm. Firstly I'd like to give you my email address because it will be interesting to hear from you, to hear where in the world you are and to hear your comments on our podcast. 333kjb@gmail.com. That's 333kjb at gmail.com. Now here's the whole psalm.

Psalm 137. By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down, yea we wept when we remembered Sion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.

For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song and they that wasted us required of us mirth saying sing us one of the songs of Sion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth.

If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem, who said, raise it, raise it, even to the foundation thereof. O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed, happy shall he be that bewardeth thee as thou hast served us.

Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

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