

In a Strange Land (Daniel)

By the waters of Babylon

Foundation

Bible passage : Psalm 137

Powerpoint: ExileAndReturn-05

Psalms: The Old Testament book of Psalms contains songs and poems describing all sorts of different situations. Psalm 137 was written by people who had been carried away as captives to Babylon. It is a difficult Psalm because of what they ask God to do to their enemies. But it is part of the Bible and Jesus taught us that the Bible is the Word of God and his apostles said that all Scripture is useful for teaching, training and so on. Therefore, Christians have continued to read this Psalm in worship, despite its hard words.

Refugees: It is estimated that there are around 30 million refugees and asylum seekers in the world today, fleeing from war, unrest, famine or persecution. The Israelites had been taken captive to Babylon over a period of about 20 years with Daniel and his friends (units 1-4) among the first of three main deportations.

There may be children who have been or are refugees, but others may be able to imagine what it must be like.

Sadness: In verses 1 to 6 we read about the sadness and pain of the people of Israel. They were far from home and were “tormented” by their captors. The Psalm seems to hint that they were far away from the Lord, perhaps at times they felt like that, but it is actually a prayer, so they also felt He had not abandoned them.

Vengeance: Verses 7 to 9 are a prayer for justice and indeed vengeance. The part about dashing babies on rocks is particularly difficult. But, whilst it is easy to say that we should not feel

The 1970 song “Rivers of Babylon” changed the words of Psalm 137 to fit Rastafarian belief. But the 1978 hit version by Boney M. reverted to the Biblical words.



like this the fact is that sometimes people do. People become so angry they want to do bad things. Psalm 137 shows us that we can pray about such things to God, but we are also told “be angry, but do not sin” (Ps 4.4/Eph 4.26). In praying to God we are recognising that He is judge and will judge justly, rather than wanting to take revenge ourselves.

“Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”

However, Jesus also taught that we should love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Mtt 5.44). It is better to pray than to take revenge, but better still to remember that we can be forgiven through Jesus and be read to forgive others and pray for them.

God is King: Recognising that God is King means praying to Him, but it also means recognising that some things belong to the Lord and not to us - “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’” (Rom 12.19).



Psalm 137 shows us the sadness and anger which the refugees felt, but they knew God was king and so prayed.