

Psalms 137:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept,
when we remembered Zion.

Analysis

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept (על נְהָרוֹת בָּבֶל שָׁם)—Geography becomes theology. The exiles sit by Babylon's irrigation canals (neharot)—life-giving waters in a foreign land that mock their thirst for Zion. Yashavnu (we sat) suggests defeated posture, not resting but mourning. Bakhinu (we wept) is collective lament. **When we remembered Zion** (בָּזְכָרָנוּ אֶת־זִוְּן)—memory intensifies grief.

This inaugurates Scripture's most anguished lament. The 70-year exile (Jeremiah 29:10) stripped Israel of land, temple, and worship—the covenant's visible expressions. Yet weeping by foreign rivers kept covenant memory alive. Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), and believers groan for the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:4).

Historical Context

Written during or shortly after the Babylonian exile (586-516 BC), this psalm captures the trauma of Jerusalem's destruction, temple desecration, forced deportation, and cultural erasure. Nebuchadnezzar's conquest fulfilled prophetic warnings but felt like covenant collapse.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What 'Zion' have you lost that makes present comforts taste like exile?
2. How does grief for what was stolen become an act of faithfulness rather than weakness?
3. Where do you need permission to weep rather than perform false contentment?

Interlinear Text

בְּ כָּלֵגְנָהָר וְתַּחַת עַל
H5921 By the rivers of Babylon H8033 there we sat down H1571 yea we wept
H5104 H894 H3427 H1058

כִּיְמִן אֶת בְּ זִיכְּרָנָה
when we remembered H853 Zion H6726

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 1:1 (Parallel theme): Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.

Ezekiel 3:15 (Parallel theme): Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days.

Luke 19:41 (Parallel theme): And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it,

Ezekiel 1:3 (Parallel theme): The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was there upon him.

Lamentations 3:48 (Parallel theme): Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people.

Psalms 42:4 (Parallel theme): When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday.

Jeremiah 15:17 (Parallel theme): I sat not in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced; I sat alone because of thy hand: for thou hast filled me with indignation.

Nehemiah 2:3 (Parallel theme): And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?

Lamentations 2:18 (Parallel theme): Their heart cried unto the Lord, O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night: give thyself no rest; let not the apple of thine eye cease.

Lamentations 1:16 (Parallel theme): For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me: my children are desolate, because the enemy prevailed.