

Psalm 137:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land?

Analysis

How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land? (איך נשיר את-שיר-יהה על) —The rhetorical question expresses impossibility, not mere difficulty. Eikh (how/in what manner) introduces lament elsewhere (Lamentations begins with this word). **The LORD'S song** (שיר-יהה) belongs to Yahweh and His sanctuary. **In a strange land** (על הארץ) —nekhar (foreign/alien) soil is ritually and theologically unclean for temple worship.

This isn't musical inability but theological integrity—Israel refuses to profane holy worship by divorcing it from covenant context. Yet paradoxically, synagogue worship emerged from this exile, proving God's presence transcends geography. Daniel prayed toward Jerusalem in Babylon (Daniel 6:10); Ezekiel encountered God's glory by the Chebar River (Ezekiel 1).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern religions tied deities to specific territories—conquest meant a god's defeat. Israel's faith uniquely claimed Yahweh as universal sovereign, yet worship centered on Jerusalem's temple. Exile created theological crisis: could God be worshiped apart from His 'dwelling place'? This question birthed Judaism's non-temple expressions.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. What worship feels impossible in your current 'exile'—and is that lament or unbelief?
2. How do you maintain theological integrity when culture demands spirituality on its terms?
3. Where has exile unexpectedly revealed God's presence beyond traditional 'sanctuaries'?

Interlinear Text

אָדָם תְּעַלְּלֵנָה אֶל־יְהֹוָה שִׁיר אֶת־נְשָׁיְרָה לְעַלְּלֵנָה

H349 **How shall we sing** H853 **song** the LORD'S H5921 **land**
H7891 H7892 H3068 H127

גַּם־
in a strange

H5236

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 22:12 (References Lord): And in that day did the Lord GOD of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth:

Amos 8:3 (References Lord): And the songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord GOD: there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence.

Hosea 9:4 (Sin): They shall not offer wine offerings to the LORD, neither shall they be pleasing unto him: their sacrifices shall be unto them as the bread of mourners; all that eat thereof shall be polluted: for their bread for their soul shall not come into the house of the LORD.

