

“Hanging Up Your Harps” **Psalm 137:1-6**

Introduction: In this Psalm, we see the Israelites weeping beside a river in Babylon because of their captivity. Israel has lost their song and the Babylonians are taunting them because of that. The joy and mirth that Israel once enjoyed has been lost through their bondage to the Babylonians. Knowing that we can learn lessons from the Israelites, we observe that they represent the backsliding Christian. As we view the first section of this psalm, notice what backslidings will bring in a person’s life.

1. The Cry of the Israelites v. 1- *“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion”*
 - a. Weeping by the River- *“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down”*
 - (1) “Water courses were abundant in Babylon, wherein were not only natural streams but artificial canals: it was place of broad rivers and streams.” (Treasury of David)
 - (2) “Euphrates, Tigris, Chaboras, etc., and the canals which intersected the country.” (Treasury of David)
 - (3) “Sat down implies that the burst of grief was a long one, and also that it was looked on by the captives as some relaxation and repose.” (Treasury of David)
 - (4) “Glad to be away from the noisy streets, the captives sought the river side, where the flow of the waters seemed to be in sympathy with their tears.” (Treasury of David)
 - b. Weeping because of the Remembrance- *“yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion”*
 - (1) “It was some slight comfort to be out of the crowd, and to have a little breathing room, and therefore they sat down, as if to rest a while and solace themselves in their sorrow. In little groups, they sat down and made common lamentation, mingling their memories and their tears. The rivers were well enough, but, alas, they were the rivers of Babylon, and the ground whereon the sons of Israel sat was foreign soil, and therefore they wept.” (Treasury of David)
 - (2) “Those who came to interrupt their quiet were citizens of the destroying city, and their company was not desired. Everything reminded Israel of her banishment from the holy city, her servitude beneath the shadow of the temple of Bel, her helplessness under a cruel enemy; and therefore her sons and daughters sat down in sorrow...” (Treasury of David)
 - (3) Lamentations 2:18- *“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”*
 - (4) Lamentations 3:48- *“Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people”*

2. The Condition of the Israelites v. 2- *“We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof”*
 - a. Their Withdraw in Babylon- *“We hanged our harps”*
 - (1) “It speaks of weeping in the remembrance of Zion; it speaks of harps hung upon the willows by exiles who have no heart to use them; and yet the very telling of these sorrows, of this incapacity for song, is a song still.” (Treasury of David)
 - (2) “They have no heart for singing. They have quit singing now. They will not have a choir there. There won’t be any song service there. They are wailing instead of singing. They have put their harps upon the willows; they won’t be needing them anymore. They couldn’t sing the songs of Zion by the rivers of Babylon! It was yonder at the temple in Jerusalem where they went to sing praises to God. Now by the rivers of Babylon they hanged up their harps. These instruments of praise they put up on the willow trees—weeping willows.” (J. Vernon McGee)
 - b. Their Willows in Babylon- *“upon the willows in the midst thereof”*
 - (1) “We may use this (willow tree) as a type of sorrow in separation.” (Wilson’s Dictionary of Bible Types, pg. 510)
 - (2) “Its drooping leaves and branches indicate the depressed and drooping spirit of those who have been separated from the things they love.” (Wilson’s Dictionary of Bible Types, pg. 510)
 - (3) “So is it with the believer in darkness. He hangs his harp upon the willows, and cannot sing the song of the Lord. Every believer has got a harp. Every heart that has been made new is turned into a harp of praise. The mouth is filled with laughter--the tongue with most divine melody.” (Treasury of David)
 - (4) “Every true Christian loves praise--the holiest Christians love it most. But when the believer falls into sin and darkness, his harp is on the willows, and he cannot sing the Lord's song, for he is in a strange land.” (Treasury of David)
3. The Captivity of the Israelites v. 3- *“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 Zion”*
 - a. Taunting Requiring Music- *“For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song”*
 - b. Taunting Requiring Mirth- *“and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion”*
4. The Complaint of the Israelites v. 4- *“How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land”*
 - a. Because of the Lyrics- *“How shall we sing the LORD'S song”*
 - (1) “The Christian cannot sing in captivity. So it was with ancient Israel. They were peculiarly attached to the sweet songs of Zion.” (Treasury of David)
 - (2) “They reminded them of the times of David and Solomon--when the temple was built, and Israel was in its greatest glory. They reminded

them, above all, of their God, of their temple, and the services of the sanctuary. Three times a year they came up from the country in companies, singing these sweet songs of Zion--lifting their eyes to the hills whence came their help. But now, when they were in captivity, they hanged their harps upon the willows; and when their cruel spoilers demanded mirth and a song, they said: 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?'" (Treasury of David)

- b. Because of the Location- *"in a strange land"*
 - (1) When a believer falls into sin, how can they sing?
 - (2) They cannot sing the Lord's song because they are in a strange land.
 - (a) "He loses all sense of pardon." (Treasury of David)
 - (b) "He loses all sense of the presence of God." (Treasury of David)
 - (c) "He loses sight of the heavenly Canaan." (Treasury of David)
5. The Cunning of the Israelites v. 5- *"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning"*
 - a. Concerning a Place- *"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem"*
 - b. Concerning a Playing- *"let my right hand forget her cunning"*
6. The Cleaving of the Israelites v. 6- *"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"*
 - a. The Recollection- *"If I do not remember thee"*
 - b. The Remedy- *"let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth"*
 - c. The Reason- *"if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy"*

Body: Many a people have hanged up their harps because of the captivity they have brought on themselves. They have lost their joy of serving Jesus. They are captives to the wickedness of the Babylonians. However, as we study the Scriptures, we see that the harp represents different things. Observe what people hang up when they hang their harps on the willows.

- I. The Harp Represents A Talent Genesis 4:21- *"And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ"*
(Not everyone can handle the harp. It takes talent.)
- II. The Harp Represents A Touch I Samuel 16:23- *"And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him"*
- III. The Harp Represents A Triumph Psalms 33:2- *"Praise the LORD with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings"*

Conclusion: The only hope for a harp that has been hung is for the musical melodies from Zion to flood the heart of the player. Somehow, the songs must be in the player again in order to see the harp plucked once more.