

Playlist: Bad Blood
Psalm 137
Small Group Discussion

Intro Questions:

- Ask everyone to share about a time when they felt wronged and wanted justice. How did they get through that? (Caution: try to stay away from anyone sharing about someone else in the group—encourage that conversation to happen in private first).
- Reminder: As a collection, the Psalms offer us *language to communicate with God, to have life-long friendship with God, in any circumstance that life could bring.*
- Today we're looking at Imprecatory Psalms, also called Psalms of cursing or vengeance. They give us insight into how to deal with our anger and hatred.

Setting: The writer of Psalm 137 is writing from Exile in Babylon. His city (Jerusalem, sometimes called "Zion") has been taken over and his loved ones murdered. The Babylonian Empire had come and laid siege to Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah (the Southern Kingdom of Israel), causing a 3-year famine, and finally in 586 BC, the Babylonians totally destroyed the city—the houses, the palace, the Temple, everything, and they carted off the survivors to Babylon, except for a few poor farmers who they left to tend the land. The writer of Psalm 137 is one of these exiles who has lost everything.

1. Read Psalm 137:1-6.
 - How would you describe the emotions of this writer? What are all the sources for his pain?
 - Can you identify with his longing for his city (vv. 4-6)? Why was the city of Jerusalem exceptionally significant for the exiled Jewish people? Why would its destruction mean that all hope had apparently been lost?
2. Read v. 7, then read the book of Obadiah (only 21 verses in all) to get a sense for the role of the Edomites in the destruction of Jerusalem.
 - What essentially, is the author asking when he asks God to "remember the Edomites?" Has God forgotten what happened?
 - How does God's statement in Deuteronomy 32:35 factor into this prayer?
3. Read Psalm 137:8-9, then discuss.
 - What is your initial reaction as you read these verses? What emotions does it bring to the surface?
 - Why do you think this Psalm was included in the divine hymnbook (Psalms) when it was assembled? Why not leave this one out?
 - Pastor Josh said that this Psalm (and others like it) teach us to **pray our anger**. What is significant about the fact that the Psalmist is saying these things to God, instead of acting them out?
 - What is the significance of the phrase in v. 8, "according to what you have done to us?" Hint: it has to do with the *lex talionis*, or Law of Retribution, which Pastor Josh mentioned on Sunday. (Apparently, when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, they also murdered Jewish children).

- How is this prayer asking for more than just vengeance? How is it asking for a more just, peaceful society?
 - Fee and Stuart (Bible scholars) have written about this psalm and other psalms of cursing. **Discuss** their claim: the gift of the imprecatory Psalms is that they “channel our anger to and through God verbally rather than to or at anyone else.... [they] harness our anger and help us express it.... In a related way, [they] help us, when we feel anger, not to do anger.” How do these psalms help us to not “do anger?”
 - What scenarios in today’s world (or your lives) might prompt this kind of prayer?
 - How do you feel about the idea that God invites us to pour out our raw, unfiltered anger to him?
4. On Sunday we also saw that Psalm 137 and the other imprecatory Psalms **move us past our anger, when we see them in light of the Big Story of the Bible.**
- Commentator Derek Kidner writes about this fact when he says, “It would be better, in fact, to speak of [the psalmist] attuning our ears to the gospel than of our adjusting to their situation, for *we cannot truly hear [the gospel’s] answers until we have felt the force of their questions.*” What do you think he means?
 - How does the horror of Psalm 137 attune our ears to the gospel, or help us to appreciate the gospel’s answers?
 - One helpful analogy is as follows: Imagine that your friend Jacob tells you that he is overwhelmed because he owes back taxes to the IRS. You later learn that another friend, Alicia, paid off Jacob’s debt. It seems like a nice gesture, but you don’t think much of it until you learn that Jacob owed not a few hundred dollars, but \$500,000. And that Alicia had to sell her house to come up with the money to bail out Jacob. The magnitude of Alicia’s sacrifice becomes overwhelming because your ears have been *attuned* to it by the greatness of Jacob’s debt.
 - In a similar way, when the horror of Psalm 137:8-9 causes us to feel the great need for justice, the desperation of a world so broken that babies are dashed against the rocks, it causes us to realize how great the magnitude of Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross really was.
 - How can this realization move us past our anger?
 - When we realize what Jesus took for us on the cross, how does it enable us to pray for and even forgive our enemies? What “emotional resources” does the gospel offer us for this challenging task?
 - How does this realization apply to the anger you may be feeling currently?

Sharing and Prayer:

- Share about any prayer needs you may have. Pray for one another based on those needs and what has been shared throughout your meeting.
- If your group is close enough, use this opportunity to make space for people to pray their anger. Help them to voice it to God. (If yours is a new group, you may not be ready for this level of intimacy).