

Exegetical Paper:
Psalm 137 and Addressing Oppression in the Modern Church

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Introduction

Psalm 137 is applicable to a large demographic within the contemporary church setting. It specifically aligns with those who are directly impacted by the oppressive nature of social injustice in the twenty-first century. Many Christians believe that America has overcome its dark, and oppressive past related to slavery and the Jim Crow era, but there are others in the Church who feel otherwise. Cotton plantations may no longer exist in our modern context, but for many Christians who are members of minority and marginalized communities, the foul odor of social injustice continues to linger in the air.

Judah, the children of Israel of the southern kingdom, are the main characters in Psalm 137. The psalmist reflects upon the grim circumstances that accompanied the Babylonian captivity circa 597-538 BC, and paints a portrait of oppression, depression, and imprecatory retribution. There are Christians today who are members of minority and marginalized communities, and they are also almost exclusively members of non-white protestant churches, or as they have been labeled, “liberal” churches. I am not fan of the religious categorizations that are used today, because “many people equate Christianity with conservatism and secularism with liberalism...”¹, which is not true at all. Despite categorizations, there are Christians in the twenty-first century Church who fall victim to the oppressive winds of social injustice in America, and Psalm 137 communicates many of the same sentiments as did Judah in her Babylonian captivity, with the exception of imprecatory retribution.

¹ Laura M. Krull, “Liberal Churches and Social Justice Movements: Analyzing the Limits of Inclusivity.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 59, no. 1 (2020): 84–100. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12641>.

Additionally, there is an obvious parallel between the Babylonian captivity and slavery in the United States of America. For example, the enslaved people of God were asked to regale their captors with songs of joy, at which point they ask, “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” (Psalm 137:4, King James Version) In comparison, Christopher Gehrz and Beth Allison Barr tells the story of Frederick Douglass, who in 1852 was asked to give an uplifting speech about the Fourth of July. Douglass thought about the millions of slaves still in bondage and decided to quote as part of his speech, Psalm 137.² This is a clear example of the connectedness of this psalm with the struggles and oppression experienced by slaves, and the African American people, who may be “free” but still feels the impacts of slavery. It is true that slavery does not exist in America in the form it once did, but there are indeed undertones as well as overtones of its impact that persists in these modern times.

This paper is not a call for political activism, but it does address a very sensitive issue that is still not fully resolved in the twenty-first century. This work will explore the historical, cultural, and spiritual similarities between Judah’s Babylonian captivity and the social injustice confronting some Christians in the modern Church. The relevancy of this exegetical exploration is due the reality that even in our modern times, specifically, the year 2025, there are still elements of oppression in the unsaved world and in the church. In the unsaved world at large, racism and oppression persists because the world is the domain of Satan and his demonic influence upon the hearts and minds of mankind. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Ephesians 6:12, King James Version) The world’s

² Christopher Gehrz, and Beth Allison Barr, *Faith and History: A Devotional*, edited by, (Baylor University Press, 2020). *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6424533>.

oppression is at its core spiritual and in its implementation mental, emotional, economic, political, cultural, and social. In the Church, the world's oppression is mirrored, and is hidden behind the denial of its existence, and calls for the oppressed to forgive the sins of the past while still in the throes of inequality, inequity, and injustice.

For many African American Christians in the modern church, Psalm 137 is a reminder of the wise words of King Solomon, “The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 1:9) This passage is a vindication of the idea that oppression and social injustice can and does impact believers in the modern Church today. Oppression and injustice occurred under the Babylonian captivity, and it occurred again under the rule of the Roman empire. In more recent times, oppression and injustice occurred during slavery in America, and again during the Jim Crow era. In his book *Race, Religion and Resilience in the Neoliberal Age*, Cedric C. Johnson confirms, “Appallingly, African America’s protracted engagement with trauma is not limited to the experience of chattel slavery. It also includes untold acts of domestic terrorism committed during the period of American apartheid known as the Jim Crow era.”³ The affront continued during the civil rights movement, and yet again in the twenty-first century as African Americans are currently confronted with the erasure of our history, and the perpetuation of social injustice under the guise of making America great again.

Judah and their oppression under Babylonian captivity is the catalyst for Psalm 137. Her burdens, trials, and anguish are revealed in every word of the psalm. Judah’s sad response to the conditions they endured in their historical context is understandable, especially for African

³ Cedric C. Johnson, *Race, Religion, and Resilience in the Neoliberal Age*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=4716848>.

American Christians. Despite the ability to empathize with Judah, by virtue of the teachings of Christ we cannot be in agreement nor alignment with the idea of imprecation.

Passage Outline

The following outline of Psalm 137 is indicative of Judah's misery during the Babylonian captivity. In his book, *Psalms*, Robert Alden makes a powerful statement about this psalm, "This little psalm is, on the one hand, the most plaintive and, on the other hand, the most vindictive of all the psalms."⁴ Alden's statement is blunt, yet true without a doubt. The passage outline below paints a portrait of a people caught in the throes of warranted chastisement for sin, and their impassioned cry to God for help due to the conditions of their bondage. Israel in general are repeat offenders in terms of their being punished for disobeying God and then calling on him to deliver them from their calamity. In this case, Judah is not content with simple deliverance, instead, they want to see the utter destruction her enemies, including men, women, and children.

In her book, *God, I'm Angry: Anger, Forgiveness, and the Psalms of Vengeance*, Maggie Low refers to what Judah experienced as an expression of "Zion Theology". Zion Theology is built upon the idea of creation theology, in that it looks to God as sovereign king over his people, and as such provides protection, and if necessary, retribution for his subjects.⁵ Low says of Psalm 137, that it is a "response of faith stirred by Zion theology: it laments the enemies' mocking of God's kingship, yet it swears allegiance to Jerusalem, where God is still enthroned, and calls for

⁴ Robert L. Alden. *Psalms (Everyday Bible Commentary Series)*, Moody Publishers, 2019. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5719538>.

⁵ Maggie Low, *God, I'm Angry!: Anger, Forgiveness, and the Psalms of Vengeance*, (Langham Creative Projects, 2023). *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=7185992>.

God to judge the enemies.”⁶ This is yet another indication of the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual impact the Babylonian captivity had on Judah, and it continues to bear similarity and relevance to the experiences of the slaves in American, and the African American people in our modern context.

- I. Judah’s Captivity and Hope: 1-9
 - A. Judah’s Position of Lamentation: 1-4
 - 1. Judah Remembers and Weeps: 1
 - 2. Judah Relinquishes Her Praise: 2
 - 3. Judah Requested to Praise: 3
 - 4. Judah Returns to Weeping: 4
 - B. Judah’s Promise to Remember Zion: 5-6
 - 1. Judah’s Promises to Remember Jerusalem: 5
 - 2. Judah’s Promises to Prefer Judah: 6
 - C. Judah’s Plea of Imprecation: 7-9
 - 1. Judah Calls for the Decimation of Edom: 7
 - 2. Judah Calls for the Destruction of Babylon: 8
 - 3. Judah Calls for the Death of Her Enemy’s Children: 9

Historical Context

Authorship

Psalm 137 expresses in no uncertain terms, Judah’s anguish in captivity, her anger towards her captors, and her almost cruel aspiration to see the brutal demise of her enemies which included the execution of infanticide. While authorship of the psalm is uncertain, the language seems to imply a deeply personal sentiment regarding the Judah’s bondage, which could further imply the author literally experienced the Babylonian captivity. H.D.M. Spence-Jones agrees regarding the unknown authorship of this psalm when he states, “almost every commentator has felt it must have been painted by one of those who had experienced the reality.

⁶ Maggie Low, *God, I’m Angry!: Anger, Forgiveness, and the Psalms of Vengeance*, (Langham Creative Projects, 2023). ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=7185992>.

Then the writer lays bare to us the predominant feelings of his own heart.”⁷ The author is never named, but it is clear that whomever it was had personal and emotional ties to the event.

Recipients

The audience of Psalm 137 is not specifically named in its contents, but it is clear who they are based on implicit references to the captivity and explicit use of first-person grammar, for example, the use of “we”, “us”, and “I” throughout the psalm. The implicit references are evident in the psalm’s tone of remembrance of the bitter impacts of the Babylonian captivity. According to Nāsili Vaka’uta, the psalm “repeatedly mentions memory and remembrance with reference to Zion, Jerusalem and God. Israel is called upon to remember who they are not only as chosen people, but also as former slaves delivered by God.”⁸

Dating

Among other uncertainties about Psalm 137 is the specific dating of the psalm. John Barry approximates the dating, “This corporate lament psalm (meant for group settings) depicts Israel’s despair during the Babylonian exile (ca. 586–539 bc). The psalmist focuses on the destruction of Jerusalem (586 bc).”⁹ Some scholars widen the range to ca. 597-538 bc, but most are content with the ca. 586 bc dating of the psalm.

⁷ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., [Psalms](#), vol. 3, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 296.

⁸ Nāsili Vaka’uta. “Psalm 137: A Kau’i-talanoa Reading.” In *Psalms: My Psalm My Context*, edited by Athalya Brenner-Idan and Gale A. Yee, 231–235. Texts @ Contexts. (London: T&T Clark, 2024), Accessed April 4, 2025. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9780567710840.0048>.

⁹ John D. Barry et al., [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Ps 137:1–9.

Literary Context

Psalm 137 most accurately fits the poetic genre because of its rhythmic, repeated alternation of thoughts within the pericope, which can be clearly seen in the outline presented above. The psalm is written in a very direct and explicit manner, so it only makes use of one figure of speech, a “metonymy of adjunct” in verse seven, where the phrase “the day of Jerusalem” not only refers to the subject of the verse but is also literally the subject of the verse.

This psalm is primarily about the mocking of the Hebrew culture. Judah’s name means “celebrated” or “praise”, and her culture is exploited by the Babylonians when they require songs of praise from a people who lost their joy when Jerusalem was destroyed. It is within this historical context that Psalm 137 emerges with its tone of imprecation. Wei Huang describes the historical scene as “a vivid image of a group of homesick captives sitting and crying by the rivers of Babylon. Their sorrows are sharply contrasted with the scenario that follows, when the Babylonians request the Judean deportees to sing a homeland song for pleasure...”¹⁰

Contrasting Psalm 137 With the Modern Context

Slavery in many forms exists today, and from 1619 to 1865, slavery was legal in America. As a direct descendant of slaves, I have knowledge of how my ancestors were treated during this very dark period in American history. Some of the stories my grandmother told me sounded like an African version of Psalm 137. Even today, in some countries around the world, human beings are enslaved and oppressed the same as Judah was under the Babylonian captivity. Whether it was early American slavery or modern slavery today, weeping was a factor,

¹⁰ Wei Huang, "Psalm 137: Emotions of the Exiles in a Foreign Land." In *Psalms: My Psalm My Context*, edited by Athalya Brenner-Idan and Gale A. Yee, 236–239. Texts @ Contexts. (London: T&T Clark, 2024), Accessed April 6, 2025. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9780567710840.0049>.

remembering better times was a factor, being required to sing and dance for the masters was a factor, hopes of deliverance was a factor, and feelings of retribution was also a factor. Though the sentiments, words, and phrases found in Psalm 137 are relatable to American history, we cannot assume that the language used in this passage is a one-to-one match with the language we used during American slavery, nor in our modern context where slavery exists in the world now.

Crossing the Principizing Bridge

It is possible that the meaning of the words and phrases in Psalm 137 are in alignment with the sentiments and expressions regarding more recent slavery events. To be sure, we must discover the overarching theological principle behind the passage to determine if there is etymological, cultural, and historical agreement with more recent events similar to those of the Psalm. The theological principle can be found because it should be 1) reflected in the text, 2) not tied to a specific situation, 3) not culturally bound, 4) corresponds to the teaching of the rest of Scripture, and 5) relevant to both the biblical and the contemporary audience.¹¹

The theological principle of Psalm 137 is three-fold, first there is the idea of lamentation (Verse One), next is that of remembrance (Verses Six and Seven, and lastly is that of imprecation (Verses Seven through Nine). This Psalm is all about a specific situation, Babylonian captivity, so the principle of not being tied to one is not applicable in this case. While the Psalm is about Judah's captivity, the idea of slavery and its impacts are cross-cultural. An imprecatory Psalm such as this only corresponds to other parts of scripture where the same conditions exist. These same conditions can be found in previous captivities of the Children of Israel in general. Lastly,

¹¹ J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, [*Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*](#), Fourth Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 29.

because captivity has spanned the spectrum of history and time, the message of Psalm 137 is indeed relevant to both the biblical and contemporary audience.

Biblical Principles Identified

Psalm 137 is part of the collection of biblical poetry in the Old Testament (OT). Because of the poetic nature of the book in general, “Christians throughout the ages have turned to Psalms, for example, for encouragement in difficult times, and their spirits have been lifted and their hearts refreshed by the colorful and powerful poetry of the Psalter.”¹² Even Psalm 137, though imprecatory in nature has something to offer its readers that will help to enrich their spirituality and walks with God. For example, there are three principles found in Psalm 137 that provide wise insight and inspiration for an enhanced perspective on living a Godly life under oppressive circumstances. Here are the principles, 1) Remember the past for motivation, 2) Rely on God for vindication, and 3) Refrain from imprecation.

Remember the Past

For Judah in Psalm 137, remembering the past brought fond memories of past freedom now contrasted with present calamities. The memory of what must have been recalled as their “good old days” evoked overwhelming emotion and weeping. It must be forgotten though, that the reason for the Babylonian captivity was their own disobedience, unfaithfulness, and sin. It just may have been that their recollection of their past inspired repentance and change for their future. In the 1930’s, El Salvador, Spain, and the Dominican Republic allowed themselves to

¹² J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, [*Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*](#), Fourth Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 405.

become so internally violent that it almost destroyed the nations. To help stave off future iterations of this traumatic time in their history, these countries created commemorative sites to remind them of their past challenges and hopefully inspire future change. Robin Maria DeLugan writes regarding El Salvador, “Memory sites and practices are described that not only connect the past violence to present-day dynamics but also to ways of imagining the future of the nation.”¹³ A national effort was undertaken to help the government, and the people use the grim realities of their tainted past to jumpstart a reimagined future.

For African Americans, especially those who are Christians, our past greatness pre-slavery, should always remind us of our rich history and culture, and our ability to survive slavery and Jim Crow should remind us of our strength and resilience. The memory of our past exploits and power should be used to motivate us to be better than we were before, and sometimes, better than we have allowed ourselves to become.

For Christians in general in our modern context, the memory of the effectiveness and power of the early Church, and their ability to literally impact and change the world, should motivate us to regain the unity, love, and faithfulness of days gone by – we must become better.

Rely on God

In Verse Seven of Psalm 137, Judah calls on God to remember those who supported the onset of their captivity when they should have and could have helped them. Although this call to God was imprecatory in nature, the principle of calling on God in times of distress and relying on his power to save is always valid and recommended. This principle is reinforced by New

¹³ Robin Maria DeLugan, *Remembering Violence: How Nations Grapple with Their Difficult Pasts*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6378548>.

Testament Scripture, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” (Romans 12:19) Christians are not to seek retribution for the wrong that is perpetrated against them, but we are to call on God to stand in the gap and fight our battles.

Refrain from Hatred

The most serious and egregious imprecatory sentiments in Psalm 137 are found in Verses Eight and Nine, where utter hatred is expressed in the idea of one being happy to see revenge played out in reciprocal treatment and infanticide. It is difficult to read these verses knowing that it is the people of God who wish this level of harm upon others. Though the words of this Psalm are inspired Scripture, it is clear that these sentiments are only applicable within the historical context they are expressed. Under the Old Covenant, God’s sovereign will permitted Judah to harbor these emotions and release them in a shocking rant that the New Covenant of grace can in no way support.

Biblical Principles Applied

Remember the Past

A particularly heinous and egregious sin is currently being committed against African American people – the attempted erasure of our history in America. In 2025, our immediate historical context, the American government is vehemently engaged in the process of removing references of the existence of slavery from historical records throughout the country. Textbooks and other literary materials are being modified or banned altogether, references to the achievements of black people are being removed from websites and other forms of print media,

and national museums that share historical information about slavery, and about the resilience of black people to thrive despite its attempts to cause our demise are being targeted for closure. This is all being perpetrated because of the current administration's view that basically states that the history of slavery in this country makes America look bad.

In his statistically data-heavy and immensely informative journal article, Robert L. Reece makes it clear that it is impossible to erase black history in America, "The idea that chattel slavery enriched certain white Americans seems relatively straightforward and uncontroversial; after all, they literally owned the slaves and the plantations."¹⁴ Despite the historical evidence, facts, and statistical information, African Americans are being required to forget our past. This cannot and will not happen simply because we do remember; we remember the stories our grandparents shared, we remember the photos and news articles that celebrated the oppression of black people, and we remember why the Constitution of the United States had to be amended to include black people as equal members of American society.

This principle of remembering the past is a gift from God, one that gives black people our launchpad of hope for the future. Because we remember how God has delivered us in the past, we are emboldened to maintain our faith that he will do so again, and again if necessary. This is the primary application of this principle – never forget!

Rely on God

In Psalm 137:7, Judah is relying on God to exact harsh and imprecatory judgement against her enemies, including Edom, her own relatives. From this we can extract the root

¹⁴ Robert L. Reece, "Whitewashing Slavery: Legacy of Slavery and White Social Outcomes." *Social Problems* 67, no. 2 (2020): 304–23. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26991044>.

principle that we can and should always rely on God in times of difficulty, pain, and oppression. However, it would be a blatant violation of Christian instruction and ethics to ask God to decimate our enemies because of what has been done to us. The lesson to be applied from Psalm 137 is opposite of the message it portrays. Judah wants God to completely destroy her enemies, including the children who are the offspring of their oppressor. The application that believers today should glean from this psalm is to trust in the Lord, do not lead to our own understanding, and to acknowledge God in all our ways so that he can direct our path. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

James H. Cone, also known as the father of Liberation Theology, makes a statement supports the idea that believers, African American or otherwise should ultimately rely on God to address the injustices that confront us. Cone says, “We must love the neighbor because God has first loved us. And because slavery and segregation are blatant denials of the dignity of the human person, divine justice means God will call the oppressors to account.”¹⁵ I wholeheartedly believe God will hold those who espouse the oppression of others accountable, but I also believe that God works through people to accomplish his will. This is not to say that Christians have any kind of imprecatory authority, because we do not, but we do have an obligation to do what we can in the spirit of love to inform, educate, and protest injustice, inequality, and inequity. We rely on God to hold people accountable for their wrongs in terms of punishment and judgement, but we work through the Spirit of God to voice our concerns and convince our oppressors that their ways will eventually lead them down an unwelcomed eternal path.

¹⁵ James H. Cone, “God and Black Suffering: Calling the Oppressors to Account.” *Anglican Theological Review* 90, no. 4 (Fall, 2008): 701-12, <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/god-black-suffering-calling-oppressors-account/docview/215255091/se-2>.

Refrain from Hatred

The closing verses of Psalm 137 though poetic, are an expression of bitter hatred against the enemies of Judah. Our new covenant with God is one of grace, mercy, and forgiveness as expressed by Jesus himself, “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you...” (Matthew 5:44) The message Jesus is sending is in no way implied, instead it is an explicit charge and mandate to forgive those who have wrought evil and injustice against marginalized communities of people. How does one love someone who hates them? How can one look beyond the faults of an oppressor, and see their need for love and reconciliation? The answer lies in our ability to allow the love and life of God to flow through us as Christians. H.D.M. Spence-Jones writes in *The Pulpit Commentary*, “The nearer we draw to God, the more we shall learn to imitate his all-embracing love. The Lord is loving unto every man. Rain and sunshine preach charity and love to all.”¹⁶ To apply the principle of refraining from hatred, we must give ourselves over to a spiritually ontological change into the image of Jesus Christ. (Romans 12:1-2)

Exegetical Overview of Psalm 137

Lamentation, sorrow, anger, and bitterness are just some of the emotional expressions prevalent in Psalm 137. In Verses Two through Four, we can plainly observe the mental, emotional, and spiritual condition of Judah. They “sat down”, or in the Hebrew, יָשָׁב *yâshab* meaning to quietly dwell in a place, and in this case, their dwelling place was in Babylon. We

¹⁶ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., [*St. Matthew*](#), vol. 1, *The Pulpit Commentary* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 178.

can see that their sorrow lead to much weeping and recollection of good times now gone, but as it is with proper theological approach, I must ask the question, “How did God’s people come to such a miserable state?” I think it is prudent to remember that God would not allow such conditions without purpose and cause. In fact, “the curse causeless shall not come.” (Proverbs 26:2) There is always a divinely justifiable reason for the onset of God’s heavy hand upon our lives. In this case, the cause was Judah, the people themselves are the catalyst for suffering they must endure; it was their sin, their disobedience, and disregard for the righteous will of God. As Verse Two concludes, the weight of depression can be so impacting that one will find it difficult to express any degree of Joy, instead, they hang up their harps, they lay aside the instruments of praise, and they relegate themselves to a life of bitter hatred for their oppressors. Allan Ross says, “So great was the exiles’ grief that even the singers were silent.”¹⁷ It is indeed a sad occasion when life’s challenges are able to quell the gifts that God has given us to expound.

The Babylonian captivity was a demoralizing event for a proud people such as Judah. In Verses Five through Seven, the verses reveal that remembrance can fuel the flames of a desire for revenge. Judah’s promise to herself is that she will never forget the painful invasion of Babylon under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar. (2 Kings 24) Judah will never forget how Jerusalem was besieged, how the temple was desecrated, and how their children were confiscated like contraband. In Verse Seven, Judah vows to remember the children of Edom, their own kin who instead of joining in the effort to stave off the invasion, they shouted their support for it, “Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.” (Psalm 137:7) These are the memories led to a spiritually dark place for Judah – imprecation.

¹⁷ Allen P. Ross, [“Psalms,”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 890.

One is in a seriously bad place in life when they can happily seek the demise of another, and in Verses Eight and Nine, this is exactly what we see. Judah, with a smile on her face revels in idea that her oppressors will receive reciprocal treatment and that not even their “little ones” will be spared the brunt of the divine retribution. Such feelings are antithetical to the teachings and attitudes we learn under the teachings of Jesus Christ and His requirements of love and grace, even for our enemies.

Conclusion

Psalm 137 is highly emotional and imprecatory in nature, but within the scope of its bitter lamentations, one can also find glimpses of hope and inspiration. Oppression and injustice are hard pills to swallow for anyone, but Benjamin F. Chavis has found that faith in God can provide power to get through them. Chavis says of this psalm in particular, “Psalm 137 was my prayer affirming the gift of God’s grace and love to seek to “push forward” for justice, freedom, and equality. Faith overcomes the inertia instilled at times by fear, disillusionment, alienation, and hopelessness.”¹⁸ This is a powerful statement of faith that provides an alternative perspective of this imprecatory psalm, and its desire for death and destruction. Instead of retribution, decimation, and infanticide, oppression and injustice can be quelled by the powerful forces of love and faith in God who is not just able to deliver, but who is also willing to do so. Chavis does not see Psalm 137 as a theological license to hate and seek vengeance, rather, he sees this psalm as an opportunity for the oppressed to gain inspiration to “push through” while trusting in the love and grace of God, who will deliver his people.

¹⁸ Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr., *Psalms from Prison*, (Pilgrim Press, 2024), ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=7295332>.

Psalm 137 teaches powerful lessons about how Christians should respond to oppression. Whether the oppression is experienced physical, spiritual, social, etc., people who claim to have a salvific relationship with God through Jesus Christ, should demonstrate love and forgiveness. There are some realistic thoughts to consider about forgiveness, one of which is shared by Reinhard Hirtler in his book, *The Power to Forgive: How to Overcome Unforgiveness and Bitterness*. Hirtler says, “Forgiveness is a choice, but healing is a process. To begin the process of healing, we must first forgive all those who wounded us.”¹⁹ I am the first to admit that Hirtler is indeed correct, and I also admit that his assessment is difficult journey that requires a sanctified life and the power of the Holy Spirit. The reality is, we can forgive, we have the power to do so because of the indwelling Spirit of God. But I also believe in taking action to confront racist oppression, and stand against it in the spirit of love, in hopes that those who perpetrate social injustice and oppression have an opportunity to change their thinking, their behavior, and their relationships with God.

¹⁹ Reinhard Hirtler, *The Power to Forgive*, (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 2009).

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