

# THE PASTORS' PEN

articles from the elders of BBC

Do you ever find yourself avoiding certain portions of Scripture? I am tempted to do so. When I am harbouring anger and an unforgiving spirit, I like to stay clear of Ephesians 4 which exhorts, “*Be angry and do not sin.... Be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*” When I am feeling lazy, I don’t want to read Proverbs with its reminder of the industrious ant and the indolent sluggard. If I am feeling cold in my spirit, the genealogies of 1 Chronicles hold very little attraction for me. And when I am in need of comfort and grace, well, neither Ecclesiastes nor Jude are my first choice!

But there are other scriptures that I sometimes find less than appealing, like the *imprecatory psalms*. An example is Psalm 137, which concludes, “*O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, ... blessed*

*shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!*” Wow. That is probably not a memory verse that parents will teach their children; it is doubtful that someone will cross-stich it for a wall hanging. And it is probably not the best verse to read right after receiving a nasty email. In fact, sometimes it is wise to avoid some passages until we have a better-informed perspective.

But as I read Psalm 137 in my devotions, I was struck by another aspect of *avoidance*. Would it not be wonderful if Psalm 137 never needed to be written? After all, the theme of this psalm is exile in Babylon. God’s people were under the *chastening* hand of God. The covenanted people of God had disobeyed their covenant-keeping God—

their God who *had* kept covenant—and therefore they were carried into captivity for *their* unfaithfulness (Deuteronomy 28:45–51; Nehemiah 1:4–8; etc.). God keeps his promises. This is not always “good” news. God’s faithfulness can be very *painful*.

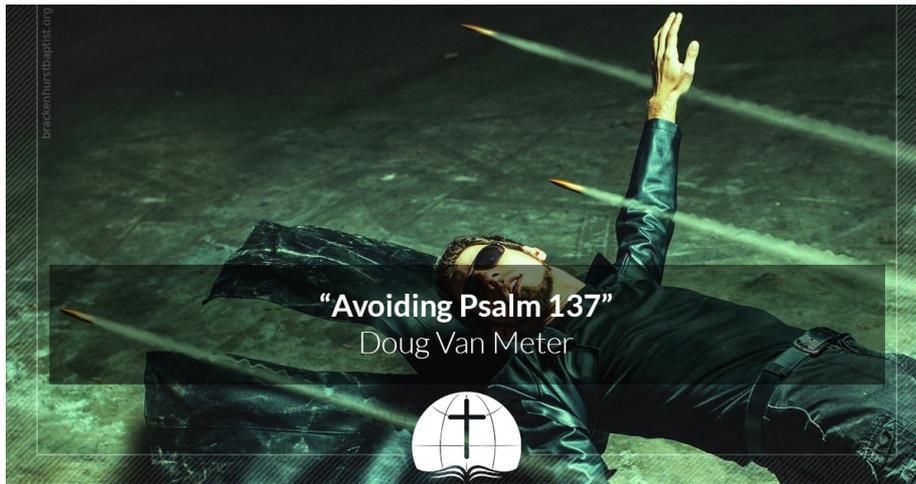
So, as I read the opening words—“*By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion*”—I thought, “What a shame that this was the situation; how sad that, because of their sin, they were now weeping because of loss.” And then I prayed, “Lord, please help BBC to avoid Psalm 137.” One way to do so is to *pay*

attention to Psalm 137!

The unidentified psalmist laments that God’s people have been removed from the place of God’s presence, Jerusalem, with its destroyed temple

(v. 1). He speaks of the silence of musical instruments that used to accompany the praises of God’s people (v. 2). He is grieved that the enemy mocks their memory of past blessings (v. 3). He then asks the heart-wrenching question, “*How shall we sing the LORD’s song in a foreign land?*” (v. 4). It *can* be done, but in doing so, it brings to mind the pain of forfeited blessings.

My brothers and sisters, let’s pay attention to this lament of lost blessings so that we might avoid our *own* lamentation. Let’s learn from the fall and failure of others in church history to remain faithful to our God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 10:1–6). Let’s humbly and dependently resolve to be covenantally faithful to the Lord, and to one another, thus avoiding the



“Avoiding Psalm 137”

Doug Van Meter



otherwise painful weeping of those who live on the shores of disobedience. As a fellow church member, and as one of your pastors, let me make the passionate appeal, *let's avoid Psalm 137!*

O that we might not be like the church of Ephesus, whose candle was removed because they lost their first love (Revelation 2:4-5)! O that our church will not veer from our devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ! O that our congregation will keep covenant with God, and with one another, and never need to weep because we have become less than what God has purposed us to be (v. 1)! O that God will favour us with his mercies and with his presence and with his power to grow in Christlikeness! O that we might prove faithful in a world of infidelity! O that our "harps" of praise might never be silenced (v. 2)! And, O how we should strive to live that we will never empower our enemies to mock our God or his gospel (v. 3)!

But before leaving this psalm, please note that it also warns those who are *not* God's people of what they can expect. (But, if they pay attention, perhaps they too will avoid Psalm 137.) The closing verses speak of sobering and serious judgement upon those who harm God's people. The Babylonians, tools of God's chastening of his people, are also going to be judged for doing so! The message is therefore the same to them: Avoid Psalm 137.

For those who choose to mistreat God's people, judgement is promised. This is not merely an old covenant reality, but also a new covenant reality. Paul exhorted the Corinthians to beware how they treat God's church when he wrote, "*Do you not know that you are God's temple ...? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy [set apart to God], and you are that temple*" (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

Paul is speaking of believers corporately, not individually (he addresses that in 6:19-20). He is counselling them to *not* be like the Babylonians. He is admonishing them, and us, to avoid the judgement of Psalm 137. When God's people are attacked, God designs much good for them (Romans 8:28-31). Yet at the same time, God will judge those who do so. How can those who are God's enemies avoid this? By becoming God's people by repenting and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. And then, they can continue to avoid Psalm 137 by living like God's people. So, let us pray, "God, grant us grace to *pay attention* to Psalm 137, in order that we might *avoid* it."

