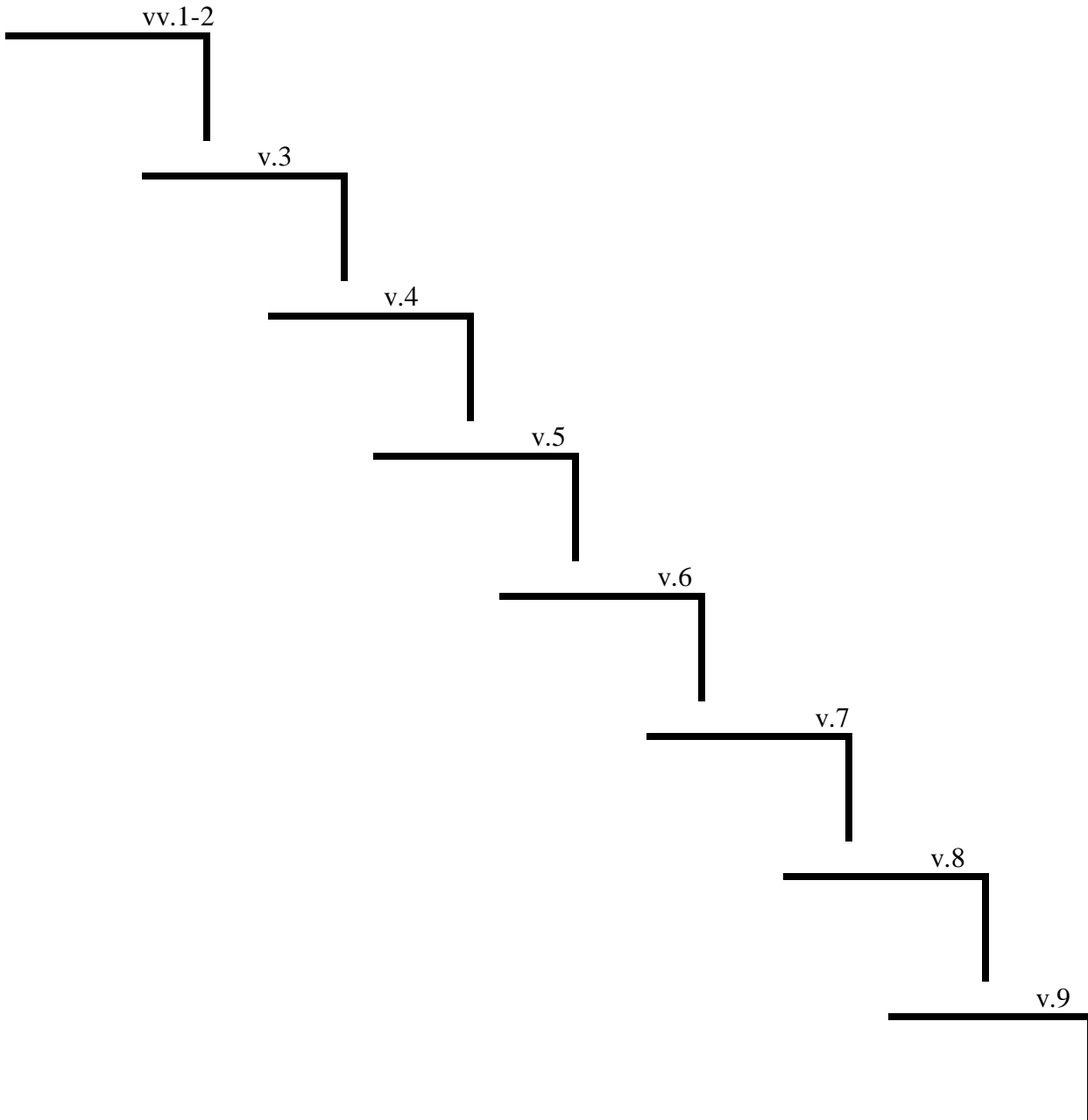


Benediction and Imprecation

Psalm 137

JACOB'S/BABYLON'S LADDER

- A. Psalm 137 evidences _____ parallelism (note the repetition of words and concepts which advances the Psalm in a downward/upward? direction:
Babylon//Zion; wept//mirth//chief joy; sing//song; foreign land//Jerusalem; forget//remember; repay//recompense; how blessed).



By the rivers of **Babylon**,
There we sat down and **wept**,
When we **remembered Zion**. (v.1)

Psalm 137

²Upon the willows in the midst of it
We hung our **harps**. (v.2)

For there our captors demanded of us **songs**,
And our tormentors **mirth**, saying,
“**Sing** us one of the **songs of Zion**.” (v.3)

How can we **sing** the **LORD's song**
In a **foreign land**? (v.4)

If I **forget** you, O **Jerusalem**,
May my right hand **forget** her skill. (v.5)

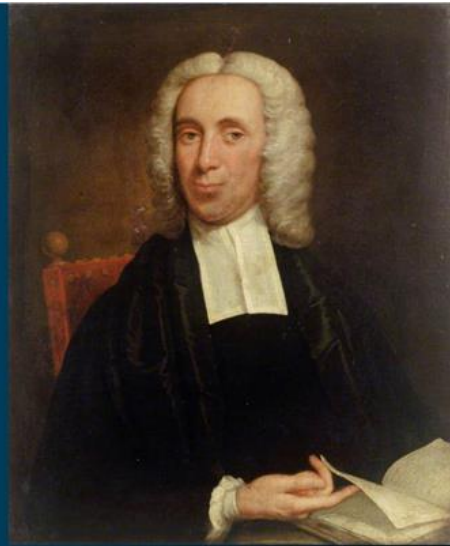
May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth
If I do not **remember** you,
If I do not **exalt Jerusalem** Above my **chief joy**. (v.6)

Remember, O LORD, against the **sons of Edom**
The day of **Jerusalem**, Who said,
“**Raze it, raze it To its very foundation**.” (v.7)

O **daughter of Babylon**, you devastated one,
How blessed will be the one who **repays** you
With the **recompense** with which you have **repaid** us. (v.8)

How blessed will be the one who
seizes and dashes your little ones
Against the rock. (v.9)

“Some of them [psalms] are almost opposite to the Spirit of the Gospel; many of them foreign to the state of the New Testament, and widely different from the present circumstances of christians. Hence it comes to pass, that when spiritual affections are excited within us, and our souls are raised a little above this earth in the beginning of a psalm, we are checked on a sudden in our ascent toward heaven, by some expressions that are most suited to the days of carnal ordinances, and fit only to be sung in the worldly sanctuary. When we are just entering into an evangelic frame, by some of the glories of the gospel presented in the brightest figures of Judaism, yet the very next line perhaps which the clerk parcels out unto us, hath something in it so extremely Jewish and cloudy, that darkens our sight of God the Saviour” (quoted in Robin Leaver, “Isaac Watt’s Hermeneutical Principles and the Decline of English Metrical Psalmody.”



Isaac Watts (1674-1748)
"Father of English Hymnody"

B. Before we judge Psalm 137 and blot it out from our memory, we should keep in mind that this Psalm was part of Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem and its destruction in AD 70.

“The words “dashes [your infants] against the rocks” are usually regarded as being so contrary to the teachings of the New Testament that there is little need to discuss the matter any further. Curiously enough, these very same words are repeated in the New Testament by no one less than our Lord (Lk 19:44). In fact, the verb in its Greek form is found only in Psalm 137:9 (in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew text) and in the lament of our Lord over Jerusalem in Luke 19:44. This is the clearest proof possible that our Lord was intentionally referring to this psalm. Moreover, our Lord found no more difficulty in quoting this psalm than he did in quoting the other two psalms most filled with prayers of imprecation, namely, Psalms 69 and 109” (Walter Kaiser, *Hard sayings of the Bible*, 281).

C. The structure of Psalm 137 is reminiscent of Jacob’s ladder. Here, it is Babylon’s ladder (see Genesis 12:1-3; 22:16-18).

“...Cursed be those who curse you, And blessed be those who bless you.”
(Genesis 27:29)

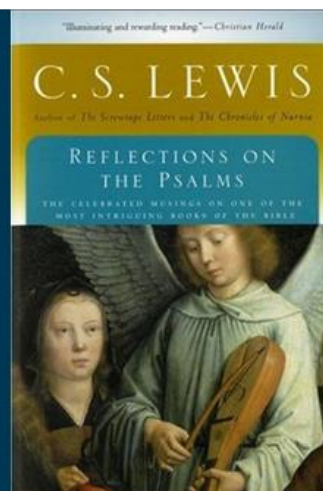
THE OMNIPRESENCE OF EVIL IN THE PSALTER

- A. Cursing is not limited to the imprecatory Psalms (Psalm 35; 58; 69; 83; 109; 137).
- B. It has been estimated that _____% of the Psalms make mention of enemies, adversaries, foes, causers of evil, wicked ones, haters, pursuers, evildoers, men of blood, men of deceit, treacherous ones, fools, idolaters, falsehood, deceit, subduing, murder, mouths who speak lies, lawless, tents of wickedness, those who hate me, and hidden traps.
- C. What dangerous animals lurk in the Psalms?
- D. There are hostile nations and taunts in the Psalms.

In 1920 Anglican Bishop Herbert Edward Ryle (son of J.C. Ryle) headed a committee that proposed that some of the imprecatory Psalms be omitted and that 346 verses be deleted from other Psalms, “either because of the unsatisfactory condition of the text from which translations must be made, or because of the “Hatefulness” of the spirit of the passage” (“No Hell, No Heathen”; *Time*, March 24, 1923).

- E. Enemies, imprecations, and prayers for judgment are found in some of the most “beloved” Psalms! (Psalm 1:5,6; 8:2; 23:5; 42:9; 63:9,10; 104:35; 139:19-22)

“Worst of all in “The Lord is my shepherd” (23), after the green pasture, the waters of comfort, the sure confidence in the valley of the shadow, we suddenly run across (5) “Thou shalt prepare a table for me *against them that trouble me...* The poet’s enjoyment of his present prosperity would not be complete unless those horrid Joneses (who had used to look down their noses at him) were watching it all and hating it. This may not be so diabolical as the passages I have quoted above [e.g. Psalm 69; 109]; but the pettiness and vulgarity of it, especially in such surroundings, are hard to endure” (C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 21).



F. The imprecatory Psalms can bring out the _____ in us!

HOW ARE THE IMPRECATIONS TO BE UNDERSTOOD?

A. Some people:

1. _____ the songs of Zion.
2. believe we learn more about the anger/sin of the _____ than wrath of a holy and righteous _____.
3. call the imprecations “dia_____” like C.S. Lewis.
4. point out that we are dealing with poetry.

B. The imprecations are best understood when we remember that they are an essential part of the _____.

Genesis 3:15 says, _____

APPLICATION

FOR FURTHER READING/STUDY

James Adams, *War Psalms of the Prince of Peace*. P&R.

Chalmers Martin, “Imprecations in the Psalms”, republished in *Classical Evangelical Essays*, ed. by Walter Kaiser, Baker Books.

R.L. Dabney, “The Christian's Duty Towards his Enemies” in *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*. London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1890 (reprinted 1967), Vol.1:706-721.

J.G. Vos, “The Ethical Problem of the Imprecatory Psalms.” *Westminster Theological Journal*, May, 1942, 123-38.