

DASHING THE LITTLE ONES AGAINST THE ROCK.

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THE historical setting of the 137th Psalm is its complete vindication from the mistaken interpretation of believers in the Bible and from the severe charges brought against the Psalm by unsympathetic writers. Many a tender-hearted believer reading, "Happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the rock" (cliff), is at a loss for an interpretation that shall speak without malice, revenge and delight in the sufferings of others. The refined tenderness of the first verses, the love of Jehovah and His worship, the appeal to Him to whom alone vengeance belongs (Dent. xxxii. 39, 41; Ps. xciv. 1) cannot be harmonized with the often supposed brutal revenge of the last verses. Did the sufferings of the captives, who knew that they suffered for the sins of their own nation, bring forth no better fruit in them than prayer to Jehovah for and gloating over expected cruelties to little children who had never injured there? Did they bless God and curse men in the same breath of prayer? If they thus cursed men their sorrow for Jerusalem was divorced from all love and reverence for God. Ezekiel tells us that the captive Jews looked upon Jerusalem as "their stronghold, the joy of their glory, the desire of their eyes, on which they set their heart" (xxiv. 25); but this was only human patriotism, love of their homeland, for these same captives were idolaters in heart and deed in Judah and in Babylonia, and mocked at God's Word. Is Ps. cxxxvii only a patriotic song without a spark of true love and reverence for Jehovah, the song of these idolaters, rebels against God and Babylon? If so, it is the only song of idolaters among the Psalms. Unless we consider the Psalms as a mere helter-skelter collection of songs without regard to their meaning, which is disproved by all the other Psalms and by their careful arrangement, it is impossible to account for the preservation, by the prophets Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, and men of like minds, of this song of the idolatrous captives in Babylonia. It is equally impossible to account for this song of the idolaters being placed between

the preeminent song of the grace of God that endures for ever (Ps. cxxxvi and the song of thanksgiving for Jehovah's presence with his servant and for the coming day when all shall glorify Him (Ps. cxxxviii).

But on the other side, Ps. cxxxvii is as mere literature far from the songs of idolaters through ignorance, as any one may see by comparing it with the Babylonian songs. And it is still farther from the songs of apostate Jewish idolaters, whose hearts were hardened against Jehovah and all spiritual truth. For this Psalm is of melting tenderness and of the finest literary quality. Even translated into English its exquisite flavor is not wholly lost. Its unknown author had cherished in Babylonia, afar from the land of the Hebrew, his loved tongue in its best models, and has poured through its simple words a flood of grief that still moves to sincere sympathy those who read it. The whole picture of their lot, their surroundings, the heart-agony, the intense longing, the self-respect of the captives in the midst of mocking Babylonians, lies there embedded in its simple phrases. Whatever may be the correct interpretation of his words, there can be no doubt that the author was a poet in the first rank of those who can make the simplest words palpitate with the deepest grief of the heart as well as roll out the thunders of the storm against sin. Coming out from the shadows of the captivity by an unknown singer it has strong affinities with the greatest of all Christian hymns, the *Dies Irae*, that arose in exquisite truth and sublime power and melody during the captivity of the truth in the Middle Ages. The same tenderness of heart toward God, the same absolute reliance on His promises of grace, the same conviction of the certain terrors of His judgment against the wicked mark both of them. They are of the first flow of pure oil from God's olive trees hidden in His house.

In the righteous judgment of the Judge of the whole earth there come times when the poison, the corruption of sin reaches such a height that He must sweep oft from the earth those who defy Him. Such a time was the era of the Flood. Another time was from 700-500 B.C., when He swept off Assyria, Judah, Babylon, Edom; another was at the overthrow of Jerusalem by the Romans, and another was the crushing out of the Roman Empire by the hordes from Asia. With the exception of the Flood, God has used one wicked nation to punish another wicked nation. The nations pursue their own plans without any regard to, in defiance of God, and yet they work out God's will. So did Assyria and Babylon in their pride and lust of conquest over Israel and Judah. The day of their own punishment for their

corruption and defiance of God, was surely coming from the hand of the righteous Judge of all nations, over whose judgments of salvation and of destruction both heaven and earth sing (Jer. li. 48; Rev. xix. 1-7).

God was to punish the ten tribes of Israel for their three hundred years of turning from all His calls of grace, from all his bounties, to the worship of idols and to the iniquities beyond name and number they delighted in before their dead gods. And Jehovah let loose upon them the tiger lord of Assyria, whom they had loved better than Jehovah, but whose one desire was the conquest of Israel's land. When Assyria had finished the dread work in which it delighted, then came its own time of destruction from the presence of Jehovah (Isa. x. 12), and the Medes and Babylonians, long oppressed by the cruel Assyrians, rose up and made a desert where Assyria's cities and palaces had stood thick on the earth.

There was no nation where all that God hates and must destroy rose to greater heights and sank to lower depths than Judah. A hundred years previously the ten tribes had been carried into captivity and their land given to others, but even this did not stay Judah's plunge into deeper crimes. The Philistines had ever been the enemies of God and Israel, but the Philistines had never sunk as low as Judah (Ezek. xvi. 27). Sodom had been burned out of the earth by fire and brimstone from Jehovah in heaven because her sins cried to God for vengeance, and her name is left as a mark of the fire of God's wrath. And yet Sodom never trod in the depths Judah sought and loved (Ezek. xvi. 48f.).

In Judah God had set His earthly throne. In His temple He poured forth the evidences of His love and grace, that He might walk among and dwell with His chosen people (Ex. xxix. 45, 46; Lev. xxvi. 11, 12). The spiritual among His people saw in the symbol; of His house "His honor and majesty, His strength and beauty," and loved to go there and meditate on His word. For over Jerusalem, the earthly type, hung the abounding promises of that better city- where Jehovah eternally dwells (Ps. xlviii. 8), to which every pilgrim here through the valley of weeping, the valley of the shadow of death, whose strength is in God, shall at last come and appear before his Redeemer in joy unspeakable and full of glory (Ps. lxxiv. 7). There no want is known (Ps. lxxv. 4), there all tears are wiped away by the tender hand that led His host (Isa. xxv. 8), there the river of God's pleasure flows bankfull (Ps. xxxvi. 8, xlv. 4), there no enemy is ever seen (Isa. lii. 1, liv. 14, 15), and peace and joy and light and gladness find their everlasting abode (Ps. xvi. 11, xxxvi.9) and thanksgiving with praise is

the breath of all its inhabitants Ps. l. 14, 23). But Judah's kings and false prophets and people set themselves to make this earth their heaven, to do the desires of their wicked hearts, to cast out all thought of God and to fill Jerusalem with idols and all that idol worship means. So even while the beautiful temple of Solomon was still standing, and the appointed worship was regularly performed, and priests in white walked its courts and served the altar, Jerusalem was a closer approach to hell on earth than the world had ever seen (Jer. xxiii. 14; Ezek. xvi. 48). God compresses into the words of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, describing Jerusalem from B. C. 740 to 580, all the anguish and wrath of love and holiness and justice. Few were left who cared for Jehovah. The multitude of wicked priests and false prophets sneered and laughed at God and followed their sins. "The priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they stagger with strong drink. they err in vision, they stumble in judgment." "A wonderful and a horrible thing is come to pass in the land; the prophets prophesy a lie and the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so." "Ye trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder and commit adultery, and swear to a lie, and burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye have not known, and come and stand before me in this house that is called by my name, and say, We have been saved that we may do all these abominations?" "In the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing; they commit adultery and walk in lies . . . they are all of them become to me as Sodom." The temple itself had become the abode of vile priests who called themselves the priests of Jehovah, but sought the recesses of the temple to commit their unspeakable iniquities and turned their backs to the temple while they worshiped the sun. In the temple porticos degraded, licentious women sang the foul songs of Tammuz (Ezek. viii. 1-18). It was "the bloody city full of abominations," "infamous and full of tumult." Father, mother and children, they were all filled with hatred to God and mad upon their idols. They wrung from God the intense, piteous appeal, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate. Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your own souls, to cut off from you man and woman, infant and suckling, out of the midst of Judah, to leave you none remaining?" (Jer. xliv. 4, 7.) And at last, when He could no longer bear it (Jer. xliv. 22), God let loose upon them the Babylonians. "Slay utterly the old man, the young man and maiden, and little children and women" (Ezek. ix. 6). "Pour out wrath upon the children in the street, and upon the assembly of young men together, for even the husband with

the wife shall be taken, the aged with him that is full of days" (Jer. vi. 11). "I will dash them one against another, even the fathers and the sons together, saith Jehovah. I will not pity nor spare nor have compassion, that I should not destroy them." These terrible prophecies did not change the people. They only blasphemed God the more, and at last the century-long prophecies were fulfilled in the streets of Jerusalem. "Her young children are gone into captivity before the adversary." "The young children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city." "My virgins and my young men are fallen by the sword; thou hast slain them in the day of thine anger, thou hast slaughtered and not pitied" (Lam. i. 5, ii. 11, 21).

So Jehovah slew in Judah and Jerusalem parents and children, as Jesus says He will slay the unfaithful parents and children of His Churches (Rev. ii. 23).

Esau, the firstborn of Isaac, sold to Jacob his birthright for a single meal because he valued all the promises of God at less than that price. This bad bargain rankled in the minds of his descendants, the Edomites, and for a thousand years they were the bitter enemies of Israel, determined, with no more regard than Esau to Jehovah and His promises, to take Israel's land and destroy them from the face of the earth. They were ever in collusion with all the enemies of Israel, with the Philistines, with Tyre. When the Babylonians came to raze Jerusalem down to its foundations, then in glee and hope Edom rushed to help them in the slaughter. They beset the roads to cut off every fugitive. They carried away the spoils, and in assurance of speedy possession they cast lots for the ground and gloated over Zion's calamity (Obad. 11-14; Ezek. xxxv. 1-15, xxxvi. 1-5).

Jehovah's reply to Edom's defiance begins at the Exodus (Num. xxiv. 18), and continues increasing until it rolls in thunder tones for three hundred years before her ruin. In the great day of Jehovah's wrath upon all nations His sword shall come down upon Edom and be filled with blood (Isa. xxxiv. 5, 6). When He who "speaks in righteousness, mighty to save," treads the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of God the Almighty and stains all His raiment with blood, it is in Edom that God sets the winepress (Isa. ixiii. 1-6; Rev. xiv. 20. xix. 13-16. The violence done to Jehovah, His land. His people, shall be exactly returned to Edom, for it shall be desolate, destroyed forever by Jehovah thrust down to Sheol with the slain of Jehovah (Obad. 8-10; Joel iii. 19. Amos i. 11, 12; Jer. xxv. 17-21; xxvii.3. xlix. 13-22; Ezek. xxv. 12-14, xxxii. 29; Mal. i.4). After that destruction of the "perpetual enmity" Jehovah will restore His land and people and give them peace.

These were the battles of Edom against Jehovah. These were the prophecies of Jehovah concerning Edom and concerning the fair prospect when Edom, the enemy of God and His people, should be blotted out by the hand of Jehovah.

The day of Babylon was coming. Both in the Old and New Testaments Babylon is the synonym of every sin that exalts itself against God--of boundless wealth, of limitless pride, of hatred to God written in the blood of prophets and saints, of every blasphemous thought, of all the foulnesses of the crimes of the flesh. For two hundred years before her overthrow God had foretold it with all plainness. The terrible picture of that ruin by the hand of Jehovah includes the work of the heartless Medes, whose "bows shall clash the young men in pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb, their eye shall not spare children." "Prepare ye slaughter for his (evil-doer's) children for the iniquity of their fathers, that they rise not up and possess the earth and fill the face of the world with cities. And I will rise up against them, saith Jehovah of hosts, and cut off from Babylon name and remnant, and son and son's son, saith Jehovah I will sweep it with the sweep of destruction, saith Jehovah of hosts " (Isa. xiii. 1-xiv. 23. Comp. xxi. 1-10, xliii. 14, 15, xlvi. 1, 2, xlvii. 1-15).

A hundred years pass away and the world-quaking roll of Isaiah's thunder peals out again in Jeremiah with the vivid lightning strokes of the final catastrophe. Again it is the Medes, gathering many nations under their banner, who are to deluge her with the waves of her own blood. The words of Jehovah, the supreme though unrecognized commander of the mighty host of the Medes, are paralleled by God's commands at the final destruction of the world's Babylon in the Book of Revelation. "Do according to all that I have commanded." "Destroy her utterly, let nothing of her be left." "Recompense her according to her work, according to all that she hath done unto her, for she hath been proud against Jehovah, against the holy one of Israel." "Surely they shall drag them away, even the little ones of the flock. Surely he shall make their habitation desolate."

There was something far more than Israel's deliverance concerned in Babylon's fall. From its first building (Gen xi. 1-9), when for daring defiance of God He scattered her builders over the face of the earth, until its fall it ever remained the sorceress of the world, of kings and all peoples. And now He, who had borne with her for thousands of years, to whom alone vengeance belongs, arose to smite His implacable, unyielding foe. "It is the vengeance of Jehovah, take vengeance upon her, as she hath

done do unto her"; "the vengeance of Jehovah our God, the vengeance of his temple." "It is the time of Jehovah's vengeance, he will render unto her a recompense." "For Jehovah hath both devised and done that which he spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon." "I will render unto Babylon, and to all the inhabitants of Chaldea, all their evil that they have done in Zion in your sight, saith Jehovah." "Behold, I am against thee, O corrupting mountain, saith Jehovah, that corruptest all the earth, and I will stretch out my hand upon thee and roll thee down from the cliffs and make thee a mountain burned up" (comp. Rev. viii, 8, xviii, 21).

In that day Jehovah will put into the mouth of Zion and Jerusalem these words, "The violence done to me and to my flesh be upon Babylon, shall the inhabitant of Zion say; and my blood be upon the inhabitants of Chaldea, shall Jerusalem say. Therefore thus saith Jehovah, Behold, I will plead thy cause, and take vengeance for thee" (Jer. li. 35, 36). And out of the roar, the tumult, the crash of the assault on Babylon He calls His people to flee from her and save themselves from the fierce anger of Jehovah, and, fleeing fast from her, "remember Jehovah from afar and let Jerusalem come into your mind," over which hung the promises of redemption, of favor, of the power of God to purify His people and make them dwell with Him in plenty and peace.

All these prophecies were written out in Jerusalem by Jeremiah in the early years of the exile, and about 594 B.C. a special copy of them was made and given to Seraiah, one of the high court officers, the brother of Baruch, the faithful scribe and follower of Jeremiah. Seraiah was going in the train of Zedekiah, the vassal kin, who went to pay vassal's duty to the proud monarch of Babylon. "And Jeremiah said to Seraiah, When thou comest to Babylon, then see that thou read all these words and say, O Jehovah, thou hast spoken concerning this place to cut it off, that none shall dwell therein, neither man nor beast, but that it shall be desolate forever. And it shall be, when thou hast made an end of reading this book, that thou shalt bind a stone to it and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates: and thou shalt say, Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise again because of the evil that I will bring-upon her."

These things were known in Jerusalem by the believers, who knew Jeremiah to be God's prophet, seven years before the destruction of Solomon's temple and more than forty years before the fall of Babylon. They were known and treasured by the small number of the true servants of God in Babylonia, by Ezekiel the prophet, the younger contemporary of Jeremiah, who

was well acquainted with all Jeremiah's prophecies. They were known by Daniel, who studied Jeremiah's words and foretold to Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar the destruction of the kingdom, and knew by Jeremiah's words the length of the captivity. They were known by Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the faithful companions of Daniel; and also by all those who, like them, wept over their own sin and the sin of their people, and the ruins of Jerusalem, and sought Jehovah their God and inquired. "Concerning Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come ye, and join yourselves to Jehovah in an everlasting covenant that shall not be forgotten."

All this is the background of the picture in the Psalm. Of the multitudes who were carried into captivity the majority changed their sky but not their mind. They had loved idolatry in the temple of Jerusalem, and they were at home and contented and growing rich in Babylonia. It was difficult, when the way was open to return, to find even four of the twenty-four courses of priests willing to go back. These Babylonian Israelites tripped lightly up to Ezekiel the prophet in the captivity, laughing and saying to each other, "Come and hear what is the word that cometh forth from Jehovah." "And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but do them not. For with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their gain. And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that path a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words, but they do them not " (Ezek. xxxiii. 30-32).

But there was a small number sent from Jehovah into captivity whom God loved and who loved God. Over them God promised to watch and to bless and to bring back some of Israel to His land (Jer. xxiv. 5-7). Among these faithful few were Ezekiel and Daniel and their companions. Neither captivity nor high office during captivity turned their hearts from the deep conviction of their own sin and the sin of their people, which brought on and continued the captivity. Righteousness belonged to Jehovah, but to them confusion of face. Yet Jehovah was the God of grace and pardon. And they prayed, "O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, let thine anger and thy wrath be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, because for our sins and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are round about us. Now, therefore, O our God, hearken unto the prayer of thy servant and to his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline thine ear and bear; open thine

eyes and behold our desolations, and the city that is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not for thine own sake, O my God, because thy city and thy people are called by thy name" (Dan. ix. 16-19). The hearts of these few faithful were set for God, His pardon, His promises bound up with the city and people called by His name. This is the part of the Israelites in Babylonia from whom alone the Psalm could have come. The others were far from the thoughts and the feelings that find intense expression there. These were the only ones, from Daniel beside the throne to the day laborer in the fields, who saw through the glamor of the captivity, its opportunities of wealth, of comfort, of respect, of high office and power. They remembered what brought about their captivity and continued it, and what was to be its end. Like Nehemiah in later days, all the splendor of luxury and high office were naught to them and not worth a moment's possession when Jerusalem lay in ruins and God was reproached for the captivity of His city and people. To them, as to prophets and psalmists before them, as well as to all who after them have known and loved God, a reproach cast upon God, His word, His grace, was a more bitter trial, a more intolerable burden, than reproach of themselves.

Henry Martin, the saint and missionary, near the ground where the 137th Psalm arose, could bear any reproach against himself, but when God was blasphemed by one of his hearers he burst into tears and left them. To reproach the spiritual-minded exiles was to reproach men who knew and confessed to God more of their own sins than any others knew of them. To reproach God was to stab their dearest friend, to crucify and blaspheme Him who was all their salvation and all their desire. It is this reproach of God that lies heavy upon the hearts of the singers of the 44th, 69th, 74th, 79th, 83d, 89th, 102d, 119th Psalms. It is this reproach that weighed down Ezekiel among the captives, that was the swelling burden of Daniel's prayer, that in the midst of prosperity and peace in Babylon made them hang their harps upon the willows and weep, for when God was reproached all joy was dead.

With gay light-mindedness, ignorant deep sorrow that dwelt in the bosom of these captives, men around them asked them to make merry with a song of their city Zion, as the Babylonians made merry with their songs of Babylon. The desolation of Zion was the gaping, festering wound of the sin of Israel, the reproach of His recreant people. Till that wound was healed there could be no joy over Zion for those who knew God. Their

captivity was the sign that "his anger was not turned away, but his hand was stretched out still." The day of redemption surely promised had not yet dawned, when "they shall come and sing on the height of Zion, and they shall flow together to the goodness O Jehovah, to the grain and to the new wine and to the oil, and to the young of the flock and of the herd. And their souls shall be as a watered garden and they shall not sorrow any more at all. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and old together, for I will turn their mourning into joy and will comfort them and make them rejoice from their sorrow " (Jer. xxxi. 12, 13). Knowing all this, it would have been a sin against Jehovah and hypocrisy to sing Jehovah's song of gladness and delight in His worship in Zion while Zion was in ruins, the temple burned up and no worship could be celebrated there, and they were captives in a foreign land because of the sin of Israel. But though Zion, Jerusalem, was in ruins, yet with her were inseparably interwoven the glowing promises of redemption, return and peace. "Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion." "Thy servants take pleasure in her stones and have pity upon her dust." For the time shall come when Zion shall hear the voice of her God, saying, "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion ; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake thyself from the dust; arise, sit enthroned, O Jerusalem; loose thyself from the bonds of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion." The day of the enthronement of Zion is also the day when Babylon, "the mistress of kingdoms," shall be stripped for the meanest slavery. "Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, O slaughter of the Chaldeans I will take vengeance, I will spare no man. "For these captives to forget that Zion should yet be enthroned above all nations, and the house of God be the fountain of life for Israel and for all nations, would be to forget God himself and the living water that was their life in captivity. That were living death, when the hand loses the chords of God's harp and the tongue withers from all thanks and praise. They had known the time when God sent out His light and truth, and these led His glad worshipers to His holy hill and to His tabernacles, and they went to the altar of God, to God their exceeding joy (Ps. xliii. 3, 4). To that exceeding joy, that chief joy, found only in Zion, they hoped again to come. But it was impossible to hope for that promise without also hoping for the promise, always joined by God with it, of the overthrow of their bitterest enemies. And so, true to God's words,

they recall His own prophecies that He would remember Edom, and return to her as she had done to Jerusalem and put away forever "the perpetual enmity." Not the Jews or the Medes or any human hands were to direct the requital of Edom, but Jehovah, the righteous Judge, who shall "come to judge earth; he shall judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity."

What no human foresight could imagine under the reigning world-power, this singer grasps with absolute faith, that the long-heralded prophecies of God would be fulfilled by the coming fall of Babylon. Jehovah, his God, would bring Babylon to the ground. It was Jehovah's promise. It would be Jehovah's work. And as sure as Jehovah lived He would fulfill His word. The psalmist uses the very words of God, "Daughter of Babylon" (Isa. xlvii. 1 ; Jer. l. 42, li. 33); "that art to be destroyed" (Jer. li. 48, 53, 55, 56, Am. Rev.). The Hebrew is stronger than the translation. As Jeremiah long before it came to pass saw the destruction of Babylon as though it were passing before his eyes, and speaks of it in the present and past tenses, so this singer sees God's word bound to her. She is now marked by God as "The destroyed." Her destruction is as sure as though it were already accomplished.

"Happy" is the rendering of a Hebrew word that occurs twenty-six times in the Psalms and in nineteen instances is translated "blessed" and seven times it is translated "happy." There is no good reason for the change, because the word in all the Old Testament is used only of men who trust God, whose strength, delight, hope are in God, whom God instructs by chastening, who do His will, and are supremely blessed by God. Blessed shall he be who is called by God to bring Babylon to the dust, fulfilling Jehovah's promise and command to do to her as she in despite of God has done to Zion.

"Blessed (by God) shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the rock." This is the verse that is said to be so contrary to the teachings of the New Testament that it could not occur there. But the learned men who have made this charge have made it without examining the clearest proof to the contrary. Jesus quotes this very verse, the very words "dash thy little ones," in His lament over Jerusalem. Only in Luke xix. 44 does the Greek verb found in Ps. cxxxvii. 9 (Septuagint) occur in the New Testament. The New Testament Greek and English "children" is a better translation of the Hebrew than the Old Testament English "little ones," The Saviour says "thine enemies . . . shall dash thee to the ground, and thy children within thee." Be found no more difficulty in quoting this Psalm than

in quoting the other most imprecatory Psalms (lxxix and cix), of which the Holy Spirit was the author (Acts i. 16, 20). They are not foreign to Christ's spirit. But Christ goes further. He bestows upon him who shall overcome by keeping and doing His will "authority over the nations," "to rule them with a rod of iron as the vessels of the potter are dashed to pieces," quoting Ps. ii (Rev. 11. 26, 27); as the Saviour Himself is to dash in pieces with a rod of iron His enemies (Rev. xii. 5, xix. 15). Does any intelligent reader interpret literally these sayings by the Saviour and of the Saviour? Is he to take men and dash them in pieces with a rod of iron and find delight in that work? Are not His words expressive of the terrible results of men's own sin, precisely as Jeremiah's breaking the earthen jar before men was a visible type of the ruin sin would bring? If no intelligent reader interprets literally the words quoted by the Saviour, why should these same words be interpreted literally in the passages of the Old Testament from which they are quoted? But more than this. God has through the ages been "dashing in pieces" His enemies and the enemies of His people. He began at the Red Sea (Ex. xv. 6), and "dashed in pieces" Pharaoh and his host when He destroyed them by the waters. Within the bounds of His chosen people He dashed in pieces Ephraim, the ten tribes of Israel, "the mother was dashed in pieces with her children," because of their unbridled hatred of God and preference of idols (Hos. x. 14, xiii. 16). He placed in Zion itself the firm rock of His word, that those who stumble at it may be broken to pieces (Isa. viii. 9, 15). He alone summons the Medes against Babylon, whose bows shall dash the young men in pieces. They shall have no pity upon the fruit of the womb. Their eye shall not spare children (Isa. xiii. 16, 18). For Babylon is to be God's threshing-floor, wholly trampled to the ground (Isa. xxi. 9, 10; Jer. li. 33). And Judah and Jerusalem, the last of His chosen people, for sins that rent the heavens with cries of defiance and agony, He will break as a potter's vessel, breaking it in pieces without sparing (Isa. xxx. 14).

God also uses the same expression respecting the course of His redeemed and purified people who do His will. They are to "thresh," "beat in pieces" many peoples; they are to "thresh and beat small" the mountains, all opposing difficulties (Mic. iv. 13; Isa. xli. 15, 16). They are to be Jehovah's "battle axe and weapons of war," and with them Jehovah would "break in pieces" kingdoms, "man and woman," "the old man and the youth, the young man and the maid" (Jer. li. 20-23), though redeemed Israel never had a hand in the destruction of Babylon

and never is to have a hand in the destruction of others except by testifying the word of God, "the sword of the Spirit."

There is one instance mentioned in the history of Judah when the idolatrous Amaziah conquered Edom, a country of high mountains, and threw down from the top of a high cliff ten thousand of the people and they were broken to pieces (2 Chron. xxv. 12). Since that time war in all lands, even to the last century, has signalized its victory by similar atrocities. To "dash down by the cliff" is a metaphor that has not imagination but a terrible fact for its basis. But that it is used metaphorically by the author of our Psalm, long resident by Babylon's myriad willow-bordered canals, is proved by the fact that Babylonia is a perfectly flat alluvial country where no hill, nor stone, nor rock, nor cliff is to be found. If the children of Babylon were literally to be thrown down from the cliff, they must have been carried hundreds of miles out of their own country to Elam or Media or down into Arabia to reach the place of execution. Babylon, the city, was built on the low alluvial plain on both sides of the muddy Euphrates. Yet God says, "I will stretch out my hand upon thee and roll thee down from the cliffs " (Jer. li. 25). No intelligent dweller in Babylonia, heathen or servant of Jehovah, could fail to understand the metaphor of Babylon's being hurled from her exaltation in pride and power, for the literal interpretation is ridiculous, no cliffs or rocks or mountains being anywhere near.

And close by Ps. cxxxvii, in Ps. cxli. 6, is another plain proof of the metaphorical use of the same phrase. "Their judges are thrown down beside the cliff, and they shall hear my words for they are sweet. "If the judges were to be literally dashed to pieces from the cliff, it is folly to add that they are then to hear sweet words. But if these leaders who led the people astray were to be brought down by God from their high office and taught their sin and their dependence on God alone for the sweet tidings of pardon and right judgment (Ps. ii. 10-12), then we can see that the psalmist speaks in accord with many a word of God elsewhere (Job ix. 24, xii. 17 ; Isa. i. 26, xl. 23, Dan, ix. 12).

The choice of interpretations of Ps. cxii. 6, as in Ps. cxxxvii. 9, lies between the impossible literal and the clear metaphorical, just as it does in hundreds of places in the Old and New Testament.

The Hebrew word used in this verse means child, children; it may mean a very young child or one grown up. It does not specify the age, as any one familiar with Hebrew knows.* The children to be dashed to pieces in Babylon, as the children, the

*'Ollel in Hebrew, like *nepios* and *teknon* in Greek, does not specify the age but the relation.

Saviour says, were to be dashed to pieces in Jerusalem, are the progeny of the viper, those who choose their fathers' sins and are worse than their fathers. "Children" and "seed" are often used in the Old and New Testaments for those similar in mind and deed. For instance, the 37th Psalm tells us, "I have not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread." And Littlethought replies, I have, for I know many sons of good men who are beggars. And again, in Ps. xxxvii. 28, we are told "The seed of the wicked shall be cut off," and again Littlethought says, All experience is against this, for the Psalms, themselves assure us that it is the wicked who inherit this world and leave their abundance to their children. But the Psalm has no reference to "the children of the flesh" at all. The seed of the righteous are all who have the same spirit.* The seed of the wicked are all who are wicked. For the law that impressed itself deeply on all who sought God, and is over and over insisted upon by the very prophets of the captivity, is that "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin" (Dent. xxiv. 16; 1 Kings. xiv. 6; 2 Chron. xxv. 4; Jer. xxxi. 29, 30; Ezek. xviii. 1-32). When the Old or New Testament speaks of visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, we must always remember that no child was ever punished by God simply for his father's sin, but because he chose his father's sins rather than the grace of God and increased in the depravity of his father. This is the reiterated testimony of Old and New Testaments. When the Saviour says "that the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the world" would be required of that generation, it was because they consented to the works of their fathers, and would not turn to God.

In the destruction of Babylon related in the Old Testament, as well as in the New, all who sought God are warned to flee from her before she was dashed in pieces. All who chose Babylon, its pride and power, rather than God, were dashed to pieces with her. Just as Jerusalem's children, turning from Christ, were dashed to pieces with her, while those who turned to Christ escaped from her coming ruin.

What, then, does "Blessed shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy children by the cliff" mean? Since it was God who was to dash Babylon and her progeny to pieces, and this verse is part of a prayer to God, it means blessed shall every one be whom God shall use to destroy to the uttermost Babylon and her children

* Comp. Ps. xxii. 30, lxxix. 36, cii. 28, cv. 6, cxii. 2; Isa. vi. 13, xliv. 3-5; Rom. ix. 8; Gal. iii. 29, etc.

that chose and followed in her sins. She was the mountain-high corrupting power of the world, defiant of God and the oppressor of all who loved God and righteousness and holiness. In her was found the blood of the saints and the prophets, Rev. xvii. 6, xviii. 24.

While the author of Ps. cxxxvii is unknown, we know well the circle of lofty, faithful souls to which he belonged. Were Ezekiel or Daniel a poet, this Psalm might well have come from the pen of either, for they were in full accord with its words and spirit. But this is sure, that out of those few in captivity whose faith in and love for Jehovah and His words were victorious over every trial, this pure song of God's own words arose, and found its echo in the tenderest heart and holiest mind this world has ever known, as he wept over Jerusalem and pronounced her doom.

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