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Exegetical Study of Psalm 137 and Its Application in the African Context

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ABSTRACT

Psalm 137 is recognized as one of the most emotionally profound and theologically complex texts in the Psalter. It has been a subject of significant debate due to its imprecatory tone and relevance in modern society. Many critics argue that the violent imprecatory expressions found in Psalm, especially in verses 7-9, are theologically incompatible with New Testament ethics. They base this belief on the ethical principles of non-retaliation and forgiveness, as taught by Jesus in Matthew 5:43-44, suggesting that such expressions have no place in modern Christian worship or theology. While compelling arguments have been made regarding the relevance of Psalm 137, there remains a noticeable gap in scholarly engagement with the psalm as a meaningful articulation of justice, memory, and spiritual resistance within contemporary African Christian contexts. This paper offers a critical exegetical and theological analysis of Psalm 137, examining its literary structure, historical context, and relevance within contemporary African Christian communities. The paper argues that this psalm presents a theologically coherent response to communal trauma, loss, and spiritual exile. Employing historical-critical and literary-exegetical approaches, the study situates the Psalm within the socio-political realities of the Babylonian exile and explores its rhetorical movement from silence and sorrow to memory and protest. It further engages scholarly perspectives on divine justice, lament, and imprecatory prayer, particularly through the works of Brueggemann, Zenger, Kraus, and Ahn. Finally, the paper explores how Psalm 137 legitimizes lament and appeals for justice in African liturgical and theological contexts marked by historical oppression and social injustice. It concludes that the Psalm's intense emotional expression is both theologically valid and spiritually necessary, as it exemplifies a faithful manner of entrusting profound suffering and longing for justice to God. The study contributes significantly to biblical and contextual theology through a comprehensive analysis of Psalm 137, situating it within the African Christian context, where it can serve as a model of faithful protest and spiritual resilience in the face of historical and ongoing injustices.

Keywords: *Psalm 137, Vengeance, Imprecatory Psalms, Divine justice, Biblical Lament.*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Book of Psalms is a timeless text expressing human emotions through poetry, praise, and prayer. Among the many chapters portraying profound themes such as worship, thanksgiving, trust, creation, wisdom, justice, and righteousness, Psalm 137 stands among the most haunting and controversial texts within the Psalter. The poetic beauty of the Psalm starkly contrasts with the violent imagery presented in its concluding lines, eliciting both sympathy and discomfort among readers. Often recited for its sorrowful beginning, "By the rivers of Babylon…," (v. 1, NIV) this Psalm also provokes theological tension with its call for vengeance, raising questions about the place of such imprecatory prayers within the context of contemporary Christian belief.

While many individuals agree that this text reflects the trauma associated with the Babylonian exile, there exists a divergence of opinions concerning its applicability within the context of the contemporary New Testament (NT) era. Critics argue against its theological legitimacy due to its imprecatory tone. Some scholars, such as Hermann Gunkel, [1] Alfons Deissler,[2] William P. Brown,[3] and others, argue that the Psalm's final verses are morally problematic and suggest omitting them entirely from liturgical consideration.

Much of the literature either isolates the concluding verse of the psalm on the basis that its stark language and emotive force continue to challenge modern theological interpretations, particularly in Christian contexts where forgiveness and grace are often emphasized over retribution. However, such avoidance often leads to a fragmented interpretation that diminishes the Psalm's theological coherence. Furthermore, scholars like Walter Brueggemann, [4] Erich Zenger, [5] Hans-Joachim Kraus, [6] John Ahn, [7] and others have made compelling theological defences of lament and protest in the Psalms, arguing that Psalm 137, far from being an outdated or inappropriate text, reflects a profound engagement with communal suffering and faithfulness. It models a form of lament that does not suppress pain but gives voice to it, entrusting even the most disturbing emotions to God. Despite the compelling argument in support of the psalm's applicability, there is still limited exploration of how Psalm 137 can be read as a faithful articulation of justice, memory, and spiritual resistance within contemporary African Christian communities.

Given this literature gap, this paper offers a critical exegetical and theological examination of Psalm 137, with particular attention to its literary structure, historical context, and theological implications for contemporary African Christian communities. This study begins with a close reading of Psalm 137, exploring its historical context and literary structure to shed light on its original meaning. Attention is given to the psalm's poetic form and rhetorical features, which reveal key theological themes such as communal trauma, covenantal memory, and divine justice. These themes are then discussed in relation to contemporary African Christian experiences, allowing for a reflection on how the psalm continues to resonate meaningfully with issues of justice, memory, and spiritual resistance todayThe paper culminates in a theological reflection that dialogues with both classical and contemporary scholarship while drawing out its relevance for African contexts of faith, suffering, and resistance. in all this, the paper aims to contribute to biblical and African theological discourse by offering a nuanced reading of Psalm 137 reclaiming it as a faithful and theologically rich expression of collective pain,

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[1] Hermann Gunkel, "Psalm 137: an interpretation," *The Biblical World* 22, no. 4 (1903): 290-293, 293.

[2] Erich Zenger, *A God of Vengeance? Understanding the Psalms of Divine Wrath*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 47-48.

[3] William P. Brown, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 448.

[4] Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984), 52

[5] Zenger, *A God of Vengeance?*, 48.

[6] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1989), 504.

[7] John Ahn, "Psalm 137: Complex Communal Laments," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 2 (2008): 267–289, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25610120.

spiritual resilience, and hope amid postcolonial memory and enduring injustice.

2.0 METHDOLOGY

This qualitative study adopted historical-critical and literary-exegetical approaches, both distinct yet complementary methods of interpreting biblical text to analyze the structure, context, and theological implications of Psalm 137. The study begins with a historical investigation of the Babylonian exile to situate the psalm within its socio-political context. It draws from biblical and scholarly sources to explore the painful displacement and humiliation experienced by the Judean exiles. Additionally, a literary analysis is conducted to examine the structure, poetic devices, and rhetorical flow of the psalm to uncover its themes of lament, memory, and protest. Furthermore, the paper engages with classical and contemporary biblical scholarship, including works by Brueggemann, Zenger, Kraus, and Ahn, to interpret the theological significance of the psalm's imprecatory language. Finally, it places the text within the framework of the contemporary African Christian communities, highlighting its relevance in relation to justice, shared suffering, and spiritual resilience.

3.0 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The English words, "Psalm" and "Psalter," meaning "song," derived from the Greek words *Psalmoi* and *Psalterion*[8] respectively. *Psalmos*, is in turn translated *Mizmor* in Hebrew, denoting, "songs/hymns".[9] Thus, Psalms is a collection of songs or hymns and poems used traditionally in worship by the people of Israel and or Judah. To Declaisse, while other books of the Bible are God's words to humanity, he sees the Psalter as the words of humanity to God.[10] The Book of Psalms were collected and ordered as a book and placed within the canon of scripture in the second temple period (after 515 BCE).[11] Psalm falls within the third category of Jewish Tanakh called *Kethuvim* or "the Writings" and the "Wisdom Writings" in the Christian Old Testament. Gunkel classifies the Psalter's major genres as hymns (community and individual thanksgiving songs), laments (community and individual laments), and royal psalms, creation psalms, wisdom psalms, and enthronement psalms as minor genres.[12]

Longman identifies Psalm 137 as a corporate lament and suggests that Levitical musicians bemoaned their separation from the temple after the Babylonian exile in the sixth century BC (587).[13] Holladay has argued, "There is one Psalm that was clearly composed during the exile, Psalm 137."[14] Scholars like Childs, Kraus, Bruggemann, and Freedman support this position and have assigned the Psalm to the first generation of the exiles, indicating that the internal evidence points to a time in Babylon, shortly after Jerusalem's destruction.[15] However, Mays, Weiser, and Dahood argue for a postexilic context, claiming that the Psalmist returned to live in Jerusalem while it was still in ruins.[16] This paper favors Goldingay's position that "it is impossible to be clear whether the psalm belongs in the exile or afterwards, but it is easy to imagine it being used in either context."[17]

The internal evidence provides hints of some background information about the Psalm. The Psalm suggests a lament commemorating the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar II which led to the dislocation of Judeans to Babylon. Scriptural references

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[8] Nancy deClaisse-Walford, Rolf Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), Accessed 8 March 2024, URL: https://www.perlego.com/book/2015638/the-book-of-psalms-pdf, 21.

[9] deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 21.

[10] Nancy deClaisse-Walford, *Introduction to the Psalms: A Song from Ancient Israel*, reprint ed. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2012), accessed March 8, 2024, https://www.perlego.com/book/2042271/introduction-to-the-psalms-a-song-from-ancient-israel-pdf, 3.

[11] deClaisse-Walford, *Introduction to the Psalms*, 3.

[12] deClaisse-Walford, *Introduction to the Psalms*, 20.

[13] Tremper Longman, *Psalms*, reprint ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), "Context," accessed March 9, 2024, https://www.perlego.com/book/1470558/psalms-pdf.

[14] Ahn, "Psalm 137," 270.

[15] Ahn, "Psalm 137,"270.

[16] Ahn, "Psalm 137,"270.

[17] John Goldingay, *Psalms: Volume 3, Psalms 90–150*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 601.

such as 2 Kings 24:10–16 and 25:1–21, along with Jeremiah 52:1–34, provide the historical backdrop for the traumatic events the psalm laments, including the siege, destruction, and forced deportation under King Nebuchadnezzar II.. Psalm 137 is therefore how the Judeans reminisced how they were asked by their captors to sing the song of Zion in a foreign land.

4.0 LITERARY CONTEXT AND STRUCTURE OF PSALM 137

Psalm 137 belongs to the fifth division of the five books (Book I: Psalm 1-42, Book II: Psalm 42-72, Book III: Psalm 73-89, Book IV: Psalm 90-106, and Book V: Psalm 107-150) of the 150 Psalms in the Old Testament.[18] However, it seems difficult to incorporate the story of Psalm 137 into Book five of the Psalter.[19] This is because Psalm 137, being imprecatory, appears to be in contrast with the story of the Psalter in Book Five, which celebrates the return of the Babylonian exiles to Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the temple, and the continued existence of the Israelites as God's people.[20] It is sandwiched between Psalm 136, which parallels Psalm 135 as praise songs, and Psalm 138, a song of thanksgiving.[21] Psalms 135, 136, 137, and 138 were communally recited or offered as prayers in a liturgical setting, either during temple ceremonies or as individual supplications in the temple.[22] To Steffen Jenkins, Psalm 137 is not an interruption to its surroundings in the structure of Book V but supports the purpose of Book V which teaches Israel how to pray Psalm 137.[23] Psalm 137 begins with the setting of the lament (vv. 1-3), followed by the lament's main cause or central words (v 4). The Psalmist then swears an oath in response to the lament, demonstrating his commitment and faithfulness to Jerusalem (vv. 5-6). The final verses (vv. 7-9) are a call for vengeance against Babylon and Edom. This text presents a lineal structure (A – D), as has been outlined below:

4.1 The Lineal Structure of the Text

I. The setting of the lament. (vv. 1-3)
   Expression of grief and sorrow in exile (vv. 1-2)
   Request for song of Zion (v. 3)
II. A longing for Zion (v. 4)
III. Commitment to Jerusalem. (vv. 5-6)
   Refusal to forget Jerusalem. (v. 5)
   A pledge to preserve the memory of Jerusalem. (v. 6)
IV. A plea for Revenge. (vv. 7-9)
   Imprecation against Edom. (v. 7)
   Vengeance on Babylon. (vv. 8-9)

The paper studies the text closely with the background and structure presented above in the following section.

5.0 CLOSE READING OF PSALM 137

5.1 The Setting of the Lament (Psalm 137:1-3)

1. א
צִיּוֹן-אֶת, בָּזָכְרֵנוּ: בָּכִינוּ-גַם, יָשַׁבְנוּ שָׁם--בָּבֶל, נַהֲרוֹת עַל
2. ג
שָׁאֲלוּנוּ שָׁם-כִּי שִׁירוּ: שִׁמְחָה וְתוֹלָלֵינוּ--שִׁיר דִּבְרֵי, שׁוֹבֵינוּ.
צִיּוֹן מִשִּׁיר, לָנוּ

3. ד
נֵכָר אַדְמַת עַל--יְהוָה שִׁיר-אֶת, שִׁירֶנָּ אֵיךְ.

The historical setting for the psalm's words is provided in the first three verses (vv. 1-3).[24] The meaning of the opening phrase א עַל נַהֲרוֹת, בָּבֶל (By the rivers of Babylon) has been a subject of much debate among past commentators.[25] Using the preposition *al*, meaning "over," "upon," "on," suggests that the exilic community was near the river.[26] This indicates that the singers of this psalm were upon the Babylonian river land (v.1) and hung their harps on a willow tree (v.2) beside the rivers. One could also speculate that the phrase represents the cities in Babylon into which the Judean

[18] Isaac Boaheng and Emmanuel Twumasi-Ankrah, "Exegetical and Theological Analysis of Psalm 51: 1-12," *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review*, 7, no. 1 (2024): 504-517, 506.
[19] deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 123.
[20] deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 952.
[21] Ahn, "Psalm 137," 274.
[22] Ahn, "Psalm 137", 275.
[23] Steffen Jenkins, *Imprecations in the Psalms*, (Pickwick Publications, 2022), Structure of Section III: David Responds to Psalm 137 with Psalms 138–145.
[24] deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 953.
[25] Ahn, "Psalm 137," 278.
[26] deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 954.

captives were sent. That is, the noun "rivers" could be understood in a metaphorical or symbolic sense. On the other hand, Hermann Gunkel argues that the poet is not writing from within the Babylonian exile itself but is rather reminiscing about the distress experienced by the Jews during that period.[27]

According to Gunkel, the psalmist recalls the ordeal endured by the Jewish people at the hands of their tyrannical Babylonian captors, who had forcefully led them into a distant land.[28] His argument suggests that the writer of the psalm was not necessarily in Babylon or sitting by its rivers at the time of writing but was instead reflecting on the trauma of captivity from a later perspective. In line with Gunkel's perspective, Franz Delitzsch has asserted that the perfect verb forms in Psalm 137 suggest the psalmist recalls past experiences, and the vivid descriptions of rivers, willows, and weeping reflect a deeply embodied memory of exile.[29] Delitzsch notes that the banks of the rivers of Babylon served not only as literal places of captivity but also as symbolic spaces of solitude, grief, and spiritual reflection.[30] This suggests that the psalmist, though possibly writing retrospectively, speaks from a position of personal or communal familiarity with the trauma of displacement.

Hanging their harps upon the willows symbolizes the depth of their sorrow and despair, making it impossible for them to sing the joyful songs of Zion. [31] According to Goldingay, hanging up their lyres signifies a deliberate cessation of praise. From Goldingay's observation, this gesture not only reflects the emotional paralysis caused by displacement but also raises important theological questions about the relationship between worship and context. It suggests that authentic praise cannot be coerced in a setting of trauma, and that lament may be the only faithful response when a community is stripped of its home, dignity, and freedom. Ahn, in line with Goldingay, has observed that the gestures of the exiles express a profound sense of loss, not only of their homeland and temple but also of their liturgical roles and artistic identity.[32] Once instruments of temple worship, the lyres are rendered silent, embodying the grief and despair of a community stripped of purpose and dignity. [33] In this context, the willows, typically associated with beauty and rest, are transformed into symbols of mourning, echoing the sorrow of a people whose former vocation as temple musicians has been reduced to forced labor and exile. Westermann Kraus shares in Ahn's perspective that the silence and the hanging of lyres on the poplar trees once instruments of joyful praise symbolize the notion that even inanimate objects can participate in mourning.[34] This idea is consistent with the imagery in Lamentations 1:4, where the roads of Zion are described as mourning, highlighting how the environment itself reflects the depth of communal sorrow.[35]

The repetition of the Hebrew word שָׁם "there" (vv. 1 and 3) points a verbal finger and "emphasises the location of the Psalm's setting."[36] On the other hand, Plank sees the word "there" as a place of distance where the psalmist puts the exile in retrospect.[37] However, it could be argued in favor of the former that the word suggests the setting of the Psalm, where the exile sat and wept. On the other hand, Ahn notes that the use of the demonstrative adverb *"there"* is a deliberate choice by the psalmist to express the trauma of forced migration.[38] He suggests that the psalmist intentionally avoids naming *Babylon* directly, instead referring to it indirectly as "there," along with phrases like

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[27] Gunkel, "Psalm 137," 291.
[28] Gunkel, "Psalm 137," 291.
[29] C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalms*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 1101-1102.
[30] Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on Psalms*, 1101-1102.
[31] Steven Lawson, *Holman Old Testament Commentary: Psalms 76–150*, reprint ed. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), Psalm 137, accessed March 10, 2024. https://www.perlego.com/book/2694308/holman-old-testament-commentary-psalms-76150-pdf.
[32] Ahn, "Psalm 137," 280.
[33] Ahn, "Psalm 137," 280.
[34] Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 502.
[35] Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 502.
[36] deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 954.
[37] Karl A. Plank, "By the Waters of a Death Camp: An Intertextual Reading of Psalm 137," *Literature and Theology* 22, no. 2 (2008): 180-194, 182.
[38] Ahn, "Psalm 137," 278-279.

"captors" and "foreign land."[39] This rhetorical strategy, according to Ahn, may have been used to protect the emotional and spiritual significance of *Zion* by avoiding the mention of *Babylon*, the place of exile, in close association with it.[40]

In verse three, the Psalmist articulates why people have set aside their lyres and given up praise. Moreover, Longman and Lawson agree that the captors' intention in verse 3 was to mock the exiles by mocking their God.[41] It seems an insulting request since the songs of Zion worshipped God by praising Zion and not Babylon.[42] It was clear to both the captors and the captives that the issue was not music but faith.[43] The captives would not succumb to people's request to turn their cultic songs of praise into entertainment. The request was a constant reminder that they were not in Jerusalem but far away in a foreign land.[44] According to Hermann Gunkel, the song requested by these "barbarous captors" was among the hymns, such as Psalms 24:7 ff., 46, 48, and others, which were predominantly performed by the choir during sacred festivals held at the temple.[45] These hymns were characterized by their joyful and exultant nature, exclusively sung within the sanctuary of Yahweh.[46]

The psalmist's response, "How can we sing…?" (v.4), contains the central driving words of Psalm 137. The opening word אֵיךְ "How" is commonly used to introduce mourning in the Old Testament (Lam. 1:1; 2:1; 4:1; Hos. 11:8; 2 Sam. 1:25).[47] How can they sing joyful songs on unclean soil? Not when Zion is in ruins and they are in foreign captivity.[48] The Psalmists consider Babylon an inappropriate place to sing the sacred songs of Zion because they will fall on hard hearts and unresponsive ears.[49] On the other hand, Shannon and Gunkel have argued that the question reveals a naïve belief about the imagined localization of God, which contradicts the idea that Yahweh was the Lord of the whole earth.[50] Meanwhile, Goldingay has argued that "the impossibility of singing Yahweh's song on foreign soil does not stem from the conviction that Yahweh cannot be with them on foreign soil, as is indicated by the fact that they go on to pray to Yahweh in the latter part of the psalm. It may stem from the awareness that singing Yahweh's song involves singing about what Yahweh has been doing, and they know that Yahweh has abandoned them and is not acting on their behalf. So, they can pray but not sing in thanksgiving for what God has done for them and is doing for them."[51] Goldingay's argument suggests that the refusal to sing stems from a painful realization of God's inactivity, rather than a belief in His absence from Babylon. Although the exiles continue to acknowledge the presence of Yahweh, as demonstrated by their persistent prayers, they find themselves unable to express songs of thanksgiving or celebration. These songs testify to God's past acts of salvation, which now seem distant amidst current suffering and a sense of divine silence.

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[39] Ahn, "Psalm 137," 278-279.
[40] Ahn, "Psalm 137," 278-279.
[41] Longman, *Psalms*, "By the rivers of Babylon:" Lawson, *Psalms 76-150*, Psalm 137.
[42] Longman, *Psalms*, "By the rivers of Babylon."
[43] James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, reprint edition (Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2011), Accessed 9 March 2024, URL: https://www.perlego.com/book/3239341/psalms-interpretation-a-bible-commentary-for-teaching-and-preaching-pdf.
[44] deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms,* 955.
[45] Gunkel, "Psalm 137," 291.
[46] Gunkel, "Psalm 137," 292.
[47] Gunkel, "Psalm 137," 955.
[48] Lawson, *Psalms 76-150*, Psalm 137.
[49] John E. McFadyen, "The Messages of the Psalms: Psalm 137," *The Biblical World* 26, no. 2 (1905): 96-100, 98.
[50] Trevor Shannon, *Understanding the Psalms*, reprint edition (Austin Macauley Publishers, 2019), Accessed 9 March 2024, URL: https://www.perlego.com/book/2984066/understanding-the-psalms-a-spirituality-for-today-pdf.: Gunkel, "Psalm 137," 292.
[51] John Goldingay, *Psalms for Everyone, Part 2*, reprint edition (Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2014), accessed 9 March 2024, URL: https://www.perlego.com/book/2100476/psalms-for-everyone-part-2-psalms-7315-pdf.

5.2 Commitment to Jerusalem (Psalm 137:5-6)

5. יְמִינִי׃ תִּשְׁכַּח יְרוּשָׁלָ֫͏ִם אִם־אֶשְׁכָּחֵךְ

6. תִּדְבַּק־
עַל אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלָ֫͏ִם אַעֲלֶה אִם־לֹא אֶזְכְּרֵכִי אאִם־לֹ֫ לְחִכִּי / לְשׁוֹנִי

שִׂמְחָתִי׃ רֹאשׁ

According to DeClaisse and others, verses 5 and 6, which are characterized as "oaths," are the only portions of Psalm 137 sung by an individual voice.[52] They mention Psalms 108 and 123 as examples of how combining individual and community voices is typical in community lament psalms.[53] They observe אִם "if" clauses of vv. 5a and 6ab - יְרוּשָׁלָ֫͏ִם אִם־אֶשְׁכָּחֵךְ and אַעֲלֶה אִם־לֹא – "form an inclusion around their apodoses in vv. 5b and 6a – may my right hand forget and may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth."[54] This emphasizes the intensity and binding nature of the psalmist's commitment to Jerusalem, suggesting that even in exile, personal identity and loyalty are inextricably linked to the memory of Zion. Moreover, the literary and vocal shift from communal to individual lament indicates that personal remembrance and loyalty to Jerusalem are central to communal identity and essential to maintaining faith and hope amid displacement. It highlights how lament psalms skilfully combine individual piety and communal solidarity, especially in times of national trauma. To Lawson, the expression in verse 5b refers to his most outstanding ability and strength, which is likely the hand used in playing the harp.[55] Therefore, for the "right hand to forget its skill…" implies that playing the harp is meaningless and purposeless without Jerusalem, indicating that Jerusalem will be in perpetual remembrance. Kraus exhibits skepticism regarding an interpretation suggesting that the Psalmist's statements signify a refusal to sing a song concerning Zion.[56] He argues that the declarations and confessions, "I will never forget Jerusalem; the city of God I count among my greatest joys!" unequivocally serve as a celebration of Zion.[57]

Moreover, McFadyen presents a profoundly introspective viewpoint by juxtaposing the contemporary manifestation of national pride, frequently associated with wealth, resources, and economic advantages, against the psalmist's steadfast commitment to a devastated, destroyed Jerusalem – a city devoid of material allure yet esteemed as the spiritual and religious core of the community people.[58] He suggests that the Psalmist's vow, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem...", represents a form of spiritual patriotism grounded not in the city's physical beauty but in its holiness.[59] McFadyen further posits that such a form of patriotism is becoming increasingly scarce in contemporary society, wherein individuals may express allegiance to a place predominantly when it serves their personal interests materially.[60] Conversely, loyalty, as depicted by the psalmist, is rooted in memory, identity, and the foundational spiritual experience of a people.[61] MacFadyen's observation suggests that the faithful remembrance of one's spiritual and cultural roots, particularly during periods of personal prosperity, serves as a sign of integrity and authentic devotion.

Furthermore, Gunkel perceives the invocation of curses upon oneself, "May every unfaithful Jew be accursed! Yea, and I myself if I don't remember Zion!" as severe, revealing a depth of anguish and moral seriousness that transcends individual well-being.[62] Gunkel interprets verses 5-6 as an expression of Hebrew passion, where invoking curses is not merely a rhetorical device but a ritual demonstration of steadfast loyalty.[63] His perspective suggests that the Psalmist's refusal to sing or rejoice during exile is an act of mourning and resistance, a refusal to allow personal comfort to eclipse

[52] DeClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms,* 955.
[53] DeClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms,* 955.
[54] DeClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms,* 955.
[55] Lawson, *Psalms 76-150,* Psalm 137.
[56] Kraus, *Psalms 60–150,*503.
[57] Kraus, *Psalms 60–150,* 503.
[58] McFadyen, "The Messages of the Psalms," 99.
[59] McFadyen, "The Messages of the Psalms," 99.
[60] McFadyen, "The Messages of the Psalms," 99.
[61] McFadyen, "The Messages of the Psalms," 99.
[62] Gunkel, "Psalm 137," 292.
[63] Gunkel, "Psalm 137," 292.

national loss. This means that the Psalmist's assertion should be interpreted not merely as a lamentation but as a solemn, self-imposed vow a commitment that memory, identity, and worship are intrinsically connected to Zion, irrespective of external circumstances.

5.3 A Plea for Vengeance (Psalm 137:7-9)

׀ הִיְהֹוָ֨ זְכֹ֥ר בָּֽהּ׃ 7.
הַ֜יְס עַ֗ד עָ֫רוּ ׀ עָ֣רוּ הָ֭אֹמְרִים יְֽרוּשָׁלָ֥ם י֣וֹם אֵ֭ת אֱד֗וֹם לִבְנֵ֬י
בַּת־ 8.
לָ֗נוּ׃ שֶׁגָּמַ֥לְתְּ אֶת־גְּ֝מוּלֵ֗ךְ שֶׁיְשַׁלֶּם־לָ֑ךְ אַשְׁרֵ֥י הַשְּׁד֫וּדָ֥ה בָּבֶ֥ל

9. אַשְׁרֵ֣י ׀ שֶׁיֹּאחֵ֣ז וְנִפֵּ֥ץ אֶת־עֹ֝לָלַ֗יִךְ׃ אֶל־הַסָּֽלַע

Verses 7-9 typify complaints and contain thoughts of vengeance on the enemies of the Psalmist.[64] The verses are slightly shorter in length, and there is a noticeable shift toward simpler vocabulary, themes, and imagery focused on children and war.[65] The imprecation begins with a cry to the LORD to remember (the children of Edom) who assisted the Babylonians in ransacking the temple and destroying Jerusalem in 587.[66] It is an appeal to the LORD to vindicate Jerusalem by bringing destruction against the partners in its fall. In accordance with this perspective, Kraus posits that the inclusion of this curse against Edom holds considerable significance.[67] He asserts that the retribution against the treacherous Edomites represents a distinct theme of lamentation, invoking Yahweh to intervene on behalf of those who revel in destruction.[68] Goldingay identifies verse 7 as the only verse in the Psalm that directly addresses Yahweh, noting that, despite its focus on Edom, it appears disconnected from the main thrust of the psalm, which centers on Babylon.[69] He suggests that this verse may stand apart thematically, as it shifts the focus from the primary oppressor to a secondary actor in Jerusalem's downfall.[70]

Declaisse and others, in their comment on verses 8 and 9, see the word אַשְׁרֵי, which is mostly translated as "happy" and "blessed," to be rendered "content."[71] They observe that the term appears twenty-six times within the Psalter, where it is typically employed to introduce wisdom psalms.[72] However, they argue that in the context of this particular psalm, it functions atypically by introducing imprecatory language, thereby marking a shift in tone and purpose from instruction to invocation of judgment.[73]

According to Kraus, although the wish expressed in verse 9 is gruesome, two important considerations must be taken into account.[74] First, the statement should not be viewed as a unique expression of "ancient Judaism that knew how to hate and avenge," but rather as a reflection of the broader reality of ancient warfare, which was marked by extreme brutality.[75] Kraus supports this by referring to passages such as Hosea 10:14; 14:1; Nahum 3:10; and Isaiah 13:16. Second, the petition for vengeance is not merely a cry for personal revenge but an appeal to Yahweh's sovereign authority over history, as echoed in texts like Revelation 18:20.[76] This suggests that by situating the verse within the broader context of ancient Near Eastern warfare, Kraus emphasizes that such violent imagery was a common feature of the time and not unique to Jewish expression. Furthermore, by framing the verse as an appeal to divine justice rather than personal retaliation, Kraus presents the psalmist's outcry as a theological act, entrusting judgment to God's sovereign control over history, rather than taking vengeance into human hands.

Ahn regards verses 8–9 of Psalm 137 as containing some of the most distressing language in the Hebrew Bible.[77] He highlights the disturbing nature of the plea to kill innocent

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[64] Adele Berlin, "Psalms and the Literature of Exile: Psalms 137, 44, 69, and 78," in *The Book of Psalms* (Brill, 2005), 65-86, 3.
[65] Ahn, "Psalm 137," 285.
[66] DeClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 956.
[67] Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 503.
[68] Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 503.
[69] Goldingay, *Psalms: Volume 3, 601.*
[70] Goldingay, *Psalms: Volume 3, 601.*
[71] DeClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms,*956.
[72] DeClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms,* 956.
[73] DeClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 956.
[74] Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 504.
[75] Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 504.
[76] Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 504.
[77] Ahn, "Psalm 137," 286.

children, especially as it is framed within the beatitude formula: "Blessed is the one…"—specifically, "Happy shall they be who repay you for what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!"[78] While such a statement may seem unfathomable, Ahn argues that it becomes more comprehensible when viewed through the lens of the collective trauma experienced by the exiles.[79] The destruction of the temple, the devastation of the city, and the profound personal loss, particularly of children, provide the emotional and historical context that helps explain the Psalmist's cry for vengeance.[80]

Zenger's treatment of the text is particularly noteworthy, as he highlights that Psalm 137 is often classified as a "psalm of violence" and, for this reason, is frequently deemed inappropriate or even rejected by many within the Christian tradition.[81] This is despite the fact that the psalm's earlier verses have been embraced within Christian liturgical use and musical compositions.[82] Zenger draws on the work of Alfon Deissler, who offers a sensitive yet critical interpretation. Deissler acknowledges that the final verse may be understandable when viewed within the psychological and historical framework of its time marked by trauma, loss, and exile but insists that Christians should not adopt or endorse such a mentality.[83] He references Jesus' rebuke of the disciples in Luke 9:54–55, where they are forbidden from calling down fire upon their enemies, as a model of how Christian response to violence should differ.[84] Instead of cursing persecutors, Christians are called to pray for them. In this light, Deissler argues that verse 9 should be excluded from contemporary theological discourse within the Church.[85] He further maintains that such language finds no legitimate place in Christian worship or prayer, especially when contrasted with the call to divine justice and mercy found in Revelation 18:2-8.[86]

In contrast to Deissler's position, Zenger argues that omitting verses 8–9 would disrupt the literary structure of Psalm 137 and obscure a key element necessary for a theologically responsible interpretation of the psalm's perspective on violence.[87] He maintains that these verses should not be understood as a literal blessing upon child-murderers, but rather as a raw and passionate cry for justice from a powerless and traumatized people.[88] According to Zenger, the psalm does not reflect the voice of those capable of enacting violence; it is not the declaration of warriors or terrorists.[89] Instead, it represents the anguished plea of a community that has suffered profound humiliation and dispossession, striving to hold on to its historical and theological identity in the face of devastating loss.[90] Furthermore, Zenger interprets the psalm as an internal struggle a means of resisting the primal human desire for retaliation by entrusting judgment entirely to God.[91] The cry for vengeance, then, is not a call to action but a surrender of justice to divine authority. He emphasizes that the psalm's concluding appeal assumes a God whose justice is so comprehensive and trustworthy that even those offering the lament place themselves under its scrutiny.[92] In this way, the psalm becomes a theological act of protest and submission, articulating deep pain while affirming trust in God's ultimate justice.

6.0 THEOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS

6.1 Suffering and Lament

The Psalm reflects the experience of pain and suffering perpetuated by the exiles' oppressors and dictators. In verses 1-4, the Psalmists bemoan a period of pain and suffering in a foreign land. This period was characterized by emotional suppression in which the exiles' captors requested Zion's song when they were

[78] Ahn, "Psalm 137," 286.
[79] Ahn, "Psalm 137," 286.
[80] Ahn, "Psalm 137," 286.
[81] Zenger, *A God of Vengeance?*, 47.
[82] Zenger, *A God of Vengeance?*, 47.
[83] Zenger, *A God of Vengeance?*, 47-48
[84] Zenger, *A God of Vengeance?*, 48.
[85] Zenger, *A God of Vengeance?*, 48.
[86] Zenger, *A God of Vengeance?*, 48.
[87] Zenger, *A God of Vengeance?*, 48.
[88] Zenger, *A God of Vengeance?*, 48
[89] Zenger, *A God of Vengeance?*, 48
[90] Zenger, *A God of Vengeance?*, 48
[91] Zenger, *A God of Vengeance?*, 48
[92] Zenger, *A God of Vengeance?*, 48

supposed to mourn for their loss. In their tradition, a mourner is forbidden from engaging in acts of joy.[93] The exiles saw the request as having come at an unfortunate period, place, and people, making a favorable response unlikely. They believed that the integrity of YHWH would be trodden upon if they failed to recognize the sacredness of the LORD's song and turned to reduce it to a piece of mere entertaining music for an unholy audience. Theologically, the psalm addresses the tension between divine silence and human trauma, enabling communities to engage honestly with the absence of divine intervention while maintaining their faith. As Goldingay and Ahn suggest, the refusal to sing does not constitute a rejection of the presence of God; rather, it is an acknowledgment that praise must emanate authentically from experience. In this context, it arises from suffering that has not yet been redeemed.

6.2 Faithfulness and Commitment

The central portion of the psalm (vv. 5–6) presents a compelling theological assertion of covenantal fidelity and spiritual integrity**.** The Exiles pledged their loyalty to the city of Zion and Jerusalem. It was not a mere word without commitment. It entailed solemn promises and denunciations on themselves. The self-imposed curses articulated by the psalmist, "If I forget you, O Jerusalem…" serve as oaths of allegiance to Zion, thus symbolizing an unwavering commitment to the covenant community and the sacred remembrance of God's dwelling place. As articulated by McFadyen and Gunkel, this concept of spiritual patriotism is not anchored in national pride or political nostalgia; rather, it is fundamentally based on the recollection of divine presence and worship. Even though some Judeans were enjoying and living a comfortable life in Babylon and would not even return to Jerusalem when they had the chance, [94] others were, however, mindful of Jerusalem and affirmed their love for her by cursing their hands and tongue to prove their commitment to their vow never to forget Jerusalem. [95] To remember Jerusalem is to remember the covenant, the temple, and the Deity who once resided among His people. From a theological perspective, this commitment functions as a stabilizing force for displaced communities, safeguarding their identity and nurturing hope amidst cultural and spiritual upheaval.

6.3 Vengeance and Justice

Although difficult and often contested, the final verses (vv. 7–9) must be understood within the broader theological framework of the divine justice. As Kraus, Zenger, and Ahn argue, these imprecations are not personal vindictive cries but expressions of deep communal trauma and appeals to God's sovereign justice. The psalmist entrusts vengeance not to personal action but to God, acknowledging that ultimate justice lies with the divine. In their attempt to seek revenge against their enemies, they did not resort to military campaigns against their overlords. Instead, "They did something more dangerous. They prayed." [96] In their prayer, they sought justice and revenge on the perpetrators of their downfall. Zenger, in particular, emphasizes that this relinquishment of judgment constitutes an act of theological protest and submission. It allows the community to voice its pain and demand justice without succumbing to violence. Even though it has been observed that the spirit of the New Testament is lacking in this prayer,[97] with others suggesting that such imprecatory Psalms are "a remnant of past theological position rendered untenable in Christian theology and thus in need of revision or deletion,"[98] Bruggemann has, however, argued that,

> there is nothing out of bounds, nothing precluded or inappropriate. Everything properly belongs in this conversation of the heart. To withhold parts of life from that conversation is in fact, to withhold part of life from the sovereignty of God. Thus, these psalms make the important connection: everything must be brought to speech, and everything brought to

[93] Berlin, "Psalms and the Literature of Exile," 5.
[94] Goldingay, *Psalms for Everyone*, "Mindfulness, God's and Ours."
[95] Goldingay, *Psalms: Volume 3*, 607.
[96] John Goldingay, Psalms for Everyone, Part 2, (Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), psalm.
[97] Gunkel, "Psalm 137," 293.
[98] Brown, *Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, 448.

> speech must be addressed to God, who is the final reference for all life.[99]

Bruggemann's argument posits that even the most painful, disturbing, or morally complex emotions, such as anger, sorrow, and the inclination for retribution, rightfully have a place within the life of faith when they are sincerely directed towards God. Instead of censoring or sanitizing these authentic expressions, Brueggemann asserts that such discourse is not only permissible but also necessary. To withhold certain aspects of human experience, particularly profound woundedness, from prayer would constitute a denial of God's sovereignty over the entire human reality. Therefore, Psalm 137 does not violate theological propriety by expressing vengeance; instead, it exemplifies the act of entrusting even the darkest desires to God, rather than taking justice into one's own hands.

7.0 APPLICATION OF THE TEXT TO THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

7.1 Validating/Legitimizing the Language of Lament in African Worship and Theology

In many African Christian communities, expressions of deep sorrow, protest, or questioning God are often viewed with suspicion and perceived as signs of weak faith or spiritual immaturity. As a result, lament, particularly when it involves intense emotions such as grief, anger, or frustration, is largely absent from mainstream liturgical practice. For instance, this tendency can be seen in the emphasis on triumphant praise and prosperity theology in many Pentecostal and charismatic movements across Africa, where narratives of victory, blessing, and breakthrough dominate worship services, often leaving little space for communal or personal lament.[100] Furthermore, Hundzukani P. Khosa-Nkatini observes that in many African societies, men who openly weep while mourning their deceased spouses are often perceived as weak.[101] Among the Akans, for example, this sentiment is reflected in the adage *"barima nsu,"* meaning "a man does not cry," which reinforces cultural expectations of emotional toughness in men. Implying that if men are culturally expected not to cry or show grief, then public expressions of deep sorrow even in church are seen as a violation of social norms, not just spiritual weakness. This makes it harder for people (especially men) to practice biblical lament openly.

However, Psalm 137 challenges this perception by providing a biblically grounded model of faithful lament. The Psalm opens not with triumphant praise, but with weeping, silence, and a refusal to sing in a foreign land (vv. 1–4). This refusal is not a rejection of God's presence but an honest response to divine silence in the face of suffering. Similarly, Brueggemann contends that although the world may judge the use of these "psalms of darkness" as acts of unfaith and failure, for the trusting community, he suggests that when we pray, nothing should be left out, not our pain, anger, doubt, or frustration.[102] Everything we experience is essential to God and should be shared with Him.[103] If we exclude parts of our lives from our prayers, we are saying that those parts don't matter to God or that he isn't in charge of them. The psalms remind us that we can talk to God about everything because he is involved in every part of our lives.[104] Brueggemann's argument affirms that even the most anguished emotions are not outside the reach of divine attention and must be freely expressed.

For African communities burdened by poverty, historical trauma, injustice, or displacement, the absence of lament in worship can result in theological silence around real pain. This silence often leads to the internalization of suffering or the misinterpretation of it as divine punishment. Psalm 137 disrupts this silence by modelling a prayer language that is unfiltered, emotional, and deeply contextual. It legitimizes the voice

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[99] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 52.
[100] J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments Within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 133.
[101] Hundzukani P. Khosa-Nkatini, "Patriarchal Nature of Mourning from an African Perspective," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 78, no. 2 (2022): 1–7, accessed April 28, 2025, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i2.7753, 6.
[102] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 52.
[103] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 52.
[104] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 52.

of the afflicted, those who perceive themselves as abandoned or unheard, and permits them to express their anguish with integrity. Lament, therefore, serves as both a protest against unjust realities and a prophetic expression of hope, suggesting that God listens, remembers, and will take action. Consequently, Psalm 137 empowers African churches to reclaim lament not as a manifestation of spiritual defeat, but as an act of profound faith and theological resistance.

7.2 Incorporating Prayers for Justice without Resorting to Violence

According to J. Carl Laney imprecatory prayers may be defined as "an invocation of judgment, calamity, or curse uttered against one's enemies, or the enemies of God."[105] In many African Christian communities, such prayers, often drawn from the imprecatory psalms, are commonly used in worship to invoke God's vengeance against adversaries. These prayers are shaped by cultural worldviews, historical traumas such as colonial oppression, and persisting spiritual interpretations of suffering. Amenvenku and Boaheng have argued that, despite their change from traditional religion to Christianity, it appears Christianity has no significant impact on African Christians.[106] African Christians still hold an extreme worldview that spiritual forces could hinder their progress.[107] As a result of this, any appearance of sickness, disaster, or conflict among African Christians is hugely associated with invincible spiritual forces, thereby resorting to imprecatory psalms to seek vengeance.[108]

For instance, Psalm 35, which is regarded mainly by Western theologians as one of the "scariest" and least quoted texts due to its perceived calls for divine retribution, is commonly used among Yoruba Christians, who embrace it for "defense, victory, and protection" against perceived spiritual and social enemies.[109] Within the Neo-Prophetic strand of Ghanaian Christianity, hardships such as illness, infertility, or financial collapse are frequently attributed to spiritual opposition, with enemies perceived as ever-present forces, including witches, relatives, or spiritual entities believed to obstruct one's destiny. As noted by Amevenku and Boaheng, African Christians often "throng to prayer meetings with canes and ropes" to attack their enemies symbolically, invoking passages like Psalm 35:1–6 with the phrase "Holy Ghost… fire!" echoing through the crowd.[110] They contend that these practices, though emotionally intense and symbolically powerful, reflect a misguided theological approach and are inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus, particularly regarding love for enemies (cf. Matthew 5:44).[111] They argue that the dramatic and aggressive acts—such as praying with canes and ropes or shouting phrases like "Holy Ghost… fire!" are influenced more by African traditional religious beliefs and superstitions than by sound biblical exegesis.[112]

However, the argument of Adamo, Amevenku, and Boaheng (outlined above) which appears to aligns with the views of scholars like Gunkel, Deissler, and Brown in questioning the ethical legitimacy of imprecatory prayers, especially the final verses of Psalm 137 (vv. 7–9) is challenged by others such as Brueggemann, Zenger, Kraus, and Ahn, who affirm their theological value. According to Zenger, such songs particularly Psalm 137,

> is not the song of people who have the power to effect a violent change in their situation of suffering, nor is it the battle cry of terrorists. Instead, it is an attempt to cling to one's historical identity even when everything is against it. Still more, it is an attempt, in the face of the

[105] Laney cited in Frederick Mawusi Amevenku and Isaac Boaheng, "Use of Imprecatory Prayers in Contemporary African Christianity: A Critique," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 1, no. 2 (2015): 86–104**,** 89.
[106] Amevenku and Boaheng, "Use of Imprecatory Prayers," 90-91.
[107] Amevenku and Boaheng, "Use of Imprecatory Prayers," 91.
[108] Amevenku and Boaheng, "Use of Imprecatory Prayers," 91.
[109] David T. Adamo, "Reading Psalm 35 in Africa (Yoruba) Perspective," *Old Testament Essays* 32, no. 3 (2019): 936–955, 939.
[110] Amevenku and Boaheng, "Use of Imprecatory Prayers," 93.
[111] Amevenku and Boaheng, "Use of Imprecatory Prayers," 92.
[112] Amevenku and Boaheng, "Use of Imprecatory Prayers," 94-95.

> most profound humiliation and hopelessness, to suppress the primitive human lust for violence in one's own heart, by surrendering everything to God—a God whose word of judgement is presumed to be so universally just that even thos who pray the psalm submit themselves to it.[113]

Admittedly, Zenger's statement reveals a tension between theological intent and cultural expression in the use of imprecatory psalms among some African Christians. Zenger views imprecatory psalms as spiritual acts of surrender, where the oppressed relinquish personal vengeance and entrust justice entirely to God. In contrast, practices among some African Christians, such as the use of canes, ropes, or shouting phrases like "Holy Ghost fire!" often reflect a performative and symbolic confrontation with perceived enemies, shaped by traditional African beliefs in spiritual causality and power. However, African Christians are encouraged to retain the emotional honesty and deep longing for justice found in these prayers, while gradually moving away from externalized symbolic violence toward Zenger's model of spiritual surrender, praying against injustice without assuming the role of divine executor. in line with this thought J. A. Motyer, for instance, argues that imprecatory psalms are appeals to God "to remedy those injustices which neither we as individuals, nor the state, are competent to remedy." [114] This perspective reinforces the notion that imprecatory psalms are not mere outbursts of hatred or vengeance, but sincere cries of the oppressed those who are powerless to defend themselves seeking divine justice.

Although often labelled as "cursing psalms," "psalms of violence," "doom pronouncements," or "psalms of hate,"[115] these verses should be understood as authentic expressions of human anguish, brought before a just and sovereign God. From the argument above, it is the view of the present author that, in African societies marked by systemic injustice, political corruption, and cycles of violence, Psalm 137 offers a model of faithful protest that does not endorse retaliation. Instead, it channels pain and righteous anger into prayer, reminding the Church that while the cry for justice is valid, vengeance ultimately belongs to God.

7.0 CONCLUSION

This article critically examined Psalm 137 to reveal its theological, literary, and historical importance for contemporary African Christian communities. It demonstrated that Psalm 137 transcends a simple plea for revenge, serving instead as a deep theological expression of collective trauma, memory, and hope. Furthermore, the study asserts that in Africa, where communities face the ongoing effects of oppression, Psalm 137 offers a model of worship that acknowledges grief, confronts injustice, and places vengeance in God's hands, rather than humans. The study also argued that the psalm invites believers to honestly express their deepest emotions to God, affirming his sovereignty over all human experience. Future studies could explore how Psalm 137 informs interfaith dialogue on trauma, shapes liturgical practices in marginalized communities, or influences contemporary theological responses to collective memory and justice. Finally, Psalm 137 calls the church to embrace lament as a meaningful act of faith that articulates pain, remembers the sacred, and maintains hope in the God who listens

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[113] Zenger, *A God of Vengeance?*, 48

[114] J. A. Motyer, "Imprecatory Psalms," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2001), 554.

[115] Amevenku and Boaheng, "Use of Imprecatory Prayers," 89.

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